

Psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting

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SUMMARY

Early adolescent girls in a private school setting are in a vulnerable state on account of their gender, transitional developmental phase and a combined array of modern-day expectations and challenges. With many private schools expecting a 100% pass rate from their students, issues of competitiveness and achievement pressure may become prevalent. Research has shown that early adolescent girls are more susceptible to psychosocial problems than boys as well as girls of other ages, putting them more at risk of the effects of performance pressure, academic stress, depression and anxiety. Early adolescent girls' vulnerability due to the impact that puberty has on their self-esteem as well as the fact that they are easily influenced by the opinions of others, causing them to be highly sensitive to the approval of others, may be compounded by pressures of the private school.

The purpose and aim of this study was therefore to explore and describe the lived experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting so as to gain a deeper understanding of such experiences. In following this it was hoped that the study would offer the girls a 'voice' as well as create awareness of how they can be better supported in terms of their psychosocial development and well-being. The study was not viewed from one specific theoretical perspective but rather took into consideration various theories of development while undertaking the literature review, in order to gain a broader orientation of the subject at hand. The current literature with regard to the key concepts of the study formed part of the overview of the study.

A qualitative approach was followed so as to understand the unique, true meaning of the girls' experiences. A case study design allowed for a holistic, in-depth study of the social phenomenon at hand. The participants were ten early adolescent girls in Grade 7 in a private school in Northern Johannesburg who volunteered to take part in the study with the informed consent of their parents. The data obtained were viewed in line with an interpretive descriptive paradigm, which allowed the phenomenon to be studied through a 'subjective lens' while allowing for the formation of various realities. A deeper understanding of such realities in terms of the girls' interpretations of their lived experiences was obtained through the data collection methods of semi-structured in-depth interviews, collages, confidential letters, journal

entries, field notes and researcher reflective notes. In combination with the researcher's interpretation, this led to a richer, co-constructed, description of the girls' experiences. The interpretive description allowed for the emergence of thematic patterns which revealed the findings of the study.

The findings confirm that the girls are experiencing pressure to attain and maintain the high standard of the school. The findings further confirm that such pressures are increased by the early adolescent girls' vulnerable developmental phase which places them in need of greater positive support from teachers, peers and parents to maintain healthy psychosocial development. The findings show that perceived rejection from peers and teachers has a negative effect on the girls' self-concept. The findings further reveal that in considering the girls' well-being they should be given a voice and be respected in their authentic uniqueness.

Recommendations were made for the school to investigate the establishment of 'mindfulness workshops' to be run at the school, with the outcome that parents, teachers and students further develop skills in ways of supporting the girls' healthy psychosocial development.

KEY CONCEPTS

Early adolescent girls

Lived experience

Well-being

Private school

OPSOMMING

Vroeë-adolesente dogters in 'n privaatskool-opset bevind hulself in 'n kwesbare toestand as gevolg van hul geslagtelikheid, hul oorgangs-ontwikkelingsfase en 'n hele rits hedendaagse verwagtings en uitdagings. Siende dat baie privaatskole 'n 100%-slaagsyfer van hul leerders verwag, raak die druk om mee te ding en te presteer al hoe meer algemeen. Navorsing het getoon dat vroeë-adolesente dogters meer vatbaar is vir psigososiale probleme as seuns of as dogters van 'n ander ouderdom, met die gevolg dat hulle 'n groter risiko loop om te ly onder die gevolge van prestasiedruk, akademiese druk, depressie en angs. Vroeë-adolesente dogters se kwesbaarheid as gevolg van die impak van puberteit op hul selfagting en die feit dat hulle maklik deur ander se menings beïnvloed word (en dus hoogs sensitief is vir ander se goedkeuring), kan verder vererger word deur die eise van 'n privaatskool.

Die doel en oogmerke van hierdie studie was dus om die beleefde ervarings van vroeë-adolesente dogters in 'n privaatskool-opset te verken en te beskryf ten einde 'n beter begrip van sodanige ervarings te verkry. Daar is gehoop dat die studie vir die dogters 'n 'stem' sou bied en 'n bewustheid sou skep van hoe hulle beter met betrekking tot hul psigososiale ontwikkeling en welsyn ondersteun sou kan word. Die studie is nie vanuit net een spesifieke teoretiese perspektief onderneem nie, maar het in die literatuuroorsig verskillende ontwikkelingsteorieë oorweeg om so 'n ruimer insig in die betrokke vakgebied te verkry. Die huidige literatuur oor sleutelbegrippe in die studie is oorsigtelik bestudeer.

'n Kwalitatiewe benadering is gevolg om die unieke, ware betekenis van die dogters se ervarings te verstaan. 'n Gevallestudie-ontwerp het dit moontlik gemaak om 'n holistiese, diepgaande studie van die betrokke sosiale verskynsel te onderneem. Die deelnemers was tien vroeë-adolesente dogters in Graad 7 in 'n privaatskool in die noorde van Johannesburg wat vrywillig en met die ingeligte toestemming van hul ouers ingestem het om aan die studie deel te neem. Die data wat verkry is, is bestudeer in ooreenstemming met 'n interpretatiewe beskrywende paradigma wat toegelaat het dat die verskynsel deur 'n 'subjektiewe lens' bestudeer kon word, wat terselfdertyd ook die vorming van verskeie realiteite veroorloof het. 'n Dieper begrip van sulke realiteite gebaseer op die dogters se interpretasies van hul beleefde ervarings is verkry deur die gebruik van semigestruktureerde, diepgaande

onderhoude; collages; vertroulike briewe; joernaalinskrywings; veldnotas, en reflektiewe aantekeninge as data-invorderingsmetodes. Saam met die navorser se interpretasie het bogenoemde tot 'n ryker, ko-gekonstrueerde beskrywing van die dogters se ervarings gelei. Die interpretatiewe beskrywing het daarvoor voorsiening gemaak dat tematiese patrone na vore kon kom as bevinding van die studie.

Die studie het bevestig dat die dogters druk ervaar om die hoë standaard wat deur die skool gestel word te behaal en te handhaaf. Die bevindings bevestig verder dat sodanige druk verhoog word deur die kwesbare ontwikkelingsfase waarin die vroeë-adolescente dogter verkeer. Dit veroorsaak dat sy vir haar volgehoue en gesonde psigososiale ontwikkeling 'n behoefte het aan meer positiewe ondersteuning van onderwysers, haar portuurgroep en haar ouers. Die bevindings toon dat die persepsie van verwerping deur lede van die portuurgroep en onderwysers 'n negatiewe uitwerking het op die dogters se selfbeeld. Dit blyk ook uit die studie dat daar ter wille van die dogters se welsyn aan hulle 'n 'stem' gegee moet word en dat hul outentieke uniekheid gerespekteer moet word. Daar word aanbeveel dat die skool die aanbod van bewustheids- /'omgee'-seminare moet ondersoek wat daarop gerig sal wees om ouers, onderwysers en leerders te help om verdere vaardighede te ontwikkel ten opsigte van maniere waarop die dogters se gesonde psigososiale ontwikkeling bevorder kan word.

SLEUTELBEGRIPPE

Vroeë-adolescente dogters

Beleefde ervaring

Welsyn

Privaatskool

PERMISSION TO SUBMIT DISSERTATION

PERMISSION TO SUBMIT ARTICLE FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSES

I, supervisor of this study, declare that the dissertation written by Maria Campbell reflects the research conducted by her on the subject. I hereby grant permission that she may submit this dissertation for examination purposes and thereby confirm that it fulfills the requirements for the degree MA in Psychology.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end, positioned above the name Prof Cecilia Bower.

Prof Cecilia Bower

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, RATIONALE AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting so as to gain a deeper understanding of how they can be better supported in terms of their psychosocial well-being. As early adolescent girls are in a vulnerable state on account of their gender, the transitional developmental-phase in which they find themselves and a combined array of modern-day expectations and challenges, their continued healthy development and well-being require constant attention and understanding.

Many parents in South Africa are searching for an academic environment that will provide their children with the best possible opportunities to achieve well and flourish as human beings. Unsatisfactory matric results in the post-apartheid era have further increased the need for South African parents to offer their children the best opportunities (Greenberg, 2004, p. 19; Lewis & Motala, 2004, p. 31; Soudien, 2004, p. 89). Although various government schools strive for good results, the achievement expectations are generally lower, with pass rates of 30% and 40% considered acceptable in certain subjects (Motshekga, 2012, National Senior Certificate Examination, para. 9; Parent24, 2012, para. 3). Due to the situation prevailing in public education, private education is increasingly favoured as a potential guarantee that children will be properly equipped with the mathematical and scientific skills needed in modern society (Green, Machin, Murphy, & Zhu, 2010, pp. 1-9).

Having originated in the United States, private schools are considered high-performing educational institutions that show positive growth and progress and are characterised by a culture of high expectations (Centre for Public Education, 2005, Defining high-performance schools, para. 1 & 2). However, according to a Pew Global Attitudes Survey in 2011 (PR Web, 2011, para. 3), 70% of children attending high-performing American private schools feel burnt out due to pressure from parents to achieve, both academically and extramurally. Since private schools in South Africa also show positive growth and progress and have a culture of high expectations, they can likewise be classified as high-performing schools. The same pressure to achieve can therefore be assumed to exist. Many South African private

schools expect that their Grade 12 learners will deliver a 100% matric pass rate and an average pass rate of 98.15% was in fact achieved in 2011 (Magome, 2012, para. 3) and 98.2% in 2012 (Gernetzky, 2012, para.1). The high cost of private schooling possibly also contributes to the pressure that many children experience due to their parents' added expectation of a "pay-off" from their investment (Green et al., 2010, pp. 1-9). A possible parental need to be seen as perfect parents and to raise perfect, over-achieving children (Wiseman, 2006, pp. 23-35) has also been identified. Children attending private schools may therefore be confronted not only with their parents' varied expectations, but also with the high standards of the school. According to the researcher's observation – both as researcher and parent at a private school in Northern Johannesburg that boasts a 100% pass rate – these challenges increase competitiveness and achievement pressure among pupils who are "already pressured to achieve" (Weissbourd, 2011, p. 22).

Research has shown that whereas boys look at the "big picture" and see school as a "means to an end", girls are more "emotionally affected" by each school day, with "a lot of little things building up to increase their pressure" (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 5). Consequently, girls are more at risk of the effects of high performance schools as they are more prone to academic stress, depression and anxiety than are boys (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli, & Caprara, 1999, pp. 258-269; Hampel & Petermann, 2005, pp. 73-83; Hampel & Petermann, 2006, pp. 409-415; Ostrov, Offer, & Howard, 1989, pp. 394-398). Girls in Grade 7 (average age of 12 to 13 years), are perhaps even more seriously affected than girls of any other age group. They are in the transitional phase of development (Louw et al., 1998, pp. 384-385), between middle childhood (6-12 years) and early adolescence (11-14 years), which enhances their vulnerability and places them most at risk of being "stressed out in an age of pressure" (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 43).

Early adolescent girls attending private schools may perhaps be viewed as privileged due to the financial costs of attending such schools when compared to the one billion poverty-stricken and 121 million uneducated children worldwide (Global Issues, 2010, para. 11). However, according to Levine (2008, pp. 6-7), despite their privileged position, they are often overwhelmed by responsibility issues. Consequently, as explained by Levine (2008, pp. 6-12), early adolescent girls might experience powerlessness, unhappiness, disconnectedness and passivity behind a "vener of achievement and charm that embodies emptiness". In the process, their

mental health and well-being may well be jeopardised, as early adolescent girls may tend to be more susceptible to psychosocial problems than girls of other ages, due to their vulnerable position.

1.2. Rationale for the Study

The effects of the possible pressures of the private school setting on early adolescent girls may be compounded by the impact of puberty on their self-esteem (Alsaker, 1996, p. 249) and the burden of “expectations to excel” and to “be popular and look good” (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 6). According to research, the self-esteem of early adolescent girls drops between the ages of 11 and 16 (Biro, Striegel-Moore, & Franko cited in Kutob, Senf, Crago, & Shisslak, 2010, p. 241) due to their changing physical appearance.

The vulnerability of early adolescent girls increases due to their being easily influenced by the opinions of others. They seek outside information to form their self-identity at a time when their critical evaluation skills have not yet fully developed (Botta, 1999, pp. 22-41). In their search for social acceptance and an autonomous identity, early adolescent girls will react to the messages of others (Pipher, 1994, p. 22) and they may easily become dissatisfied with themselves (Hargreaves & Tiggerman, 2003, pp. 367-373). The self-esteem of girls between ages 11 and 12 sinks even lower if they perceive their parents to be critical and psychologically controlling, because they do not feel valued or approved of by their parents (Kernis, Brown, & Brody, 2000, pp. 225-252).

Since existing research on early adolescent girls in the private school setting has focused on international perspectives, the researcher was unable to establish in her literature review, how early adolescent girls in private schools in the South African context experience the private school setting. A gap exists in the available research in that the perspectives of early adolescent girls in private schools are often not voiced and many parents are unaware of their daughters’ perspectives and lived experiences, particularly in a South African context. There is a clear need for research that creates the space for these girls to be given a “voice” and express their true emotions with regard to their experiences (Kent, Evans, & Shirley, 2004, para. 1, 2, 3 & Inquisitive Courage, para.3). This knowledge may contribute to identifying guiding principles for how the girls may be supported in their on-going healthy development and well-being.

1.3. Research Goal and Research Question

Early adolescent girls in a private school setting may be at risk, due to their increased vulnerability in terms of their developmental stage and gender (Bandura et al., 1999, pp. 258-269; Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 43; Hampel & Petermann, 2005, pp. 73-83; Hampel & Petermann, 2006, pp. 409-415; Louw et al., 1998, pp. 384-385; Ostrov et al., 1989, pp. 394-398), as well as the pressures of the private school setting as suggested in 1.1. The goal of this study was therefore to gain an understanding of early adolescent girls' lived experiences of a private school setting, to allow for dialogue by means of the research methods selected, and ultimately to create awareness among parents and teachers of how the girls experience the school. This knowledge could be used to support and ensure the girls' on-going healthy development and well-being.

The following primary research question was formulated for the study:
How do early adolescent girls experience the private school setting?

This question may be unpacked into the following secondary research questions:

- What are the girls' lived experiences which they interpret as positive?
- What are the girls' lived experiences which they interpret as negative?

1.4. Theoretical Framework

The researcher assumed that the early adolescent private school girls included in the study were experiencing pressure in terms of performance expectations pertaining to their academic and extramural achievements. She further assumed that such pressure, in combination with the girls' vulnerable position due to their developmental phase, would have an impact on their self-esteem and identity formation.

Empirical procedures were used to study the phenomenon through the phenomenological method of enquiry (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006, p. 322) whereby the researcher aimed to "bracket" any "preconceived" ideas in an attempt to become fully aware of each participant's unique experience.

The researcher wished to remain open to the emerging findings of the study without allowing for a specific theoretical frame to direct her understanding of such findings. The researcher therefore chose to study various theories of development

during the literature review in hope of obtaining a broader orientation of the subject matter.

The theoretical considerations of this study were therefore deemed less relevant as a point of departure than those pertaining to the research methodology.

1.5. Research Methodology

1.5.1. Research paradigm

A qualitative approach, of which the primary focus is “an examination and inquiry into meaning” (Delpont, Fouché, & Schurink, 2011, p. 299), was chosen for this study, which endeavoured to understand the meanings ascribed by early adolescent girls to their experiences of a private school. Qualitative research is “naturalistic”, “holistic” and “inductive”, since it is a way of studying the phenomenon as it unfolds, without being manipulative or controlling (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 48). The researcher deliberately aimed to set aside her “preconceived notions and prejudices” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 322) of the phenomenon being studied in order to gain sight of its authentic state. She therefore aimed to explore and describe the phenomenon within its natural context, to see “through the eyes of the participants” (Maree, 2010, p. 51) and to examine the field as “interrelated wholes” (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 47) in an effort to obtain data that could prove ‘true’.

The research paradigm is the specific way of viewing the research (De Vos & Strydom, 2011, p. 41). It is a system of practice and thinking that defines the nature of the research enquiry “along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology, and methodology” – ontology being the nature of reality and what is known about it, epistemology being the relationship between what the researcher knows and what can be known, and the methodology being the way the researcher can study the phenomenon to be known (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 6).

The data obtained in this study were viewed in line with interpretive description (Hunt, 2009, pp. 1284-1292; McPherson & Thorne, 2006, pp. 1-11; Sandelowski, 2000, pp. 334-340; Sandelowski, 2002, pp. 104-115; Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O’Flynn-Magee, 2004, pp. 5-9), which was used to explore and describe in depth the early adolescent girls’ lived experiences of the private school setting.

Interpretive description allows for a meaningful investigation to “illuminate the phenomenon being studied” in a new way (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 9). It allows for the fact that reality is “complex, contextual, constructed and subjective”, and therefore

needs to be studied holistically. Interpretive description further considers the inseparableness of the researcher and the participant and their interactive influence on each other, which allows for the “encountering of multiple realities signified by the unique interpretation of each” (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 5). Interpretive description allows for in-depth interviewing, which may seek understanding of what meanings the participants have ascribed to a particular situation and may request the participants to describe their lived experience of such a situation. Hence the interpretive paradigm provided a more “subjective lens” (Maree, 2010, p. 32) through which the girls’ experiences of the school could be studied. A deeper understanding of the girls’ interpretations of their experiences, in combination with the researcher’s interpretation, led to a richer, often co-constructed, description of their lived experiences of the school. The interpretive description allowed for the emergence of thematic patterns while accounting for each girl’s individual variation and ‘subjective perceptions’.

1.5.2. Research design

A case study design, being an in-depth, contextual study of a “social phenomenon” such as a particular group of individuals (Babbie, 2010, p. 309), was used to study a group of early adolescent girls’ experiences of their private school. The researcher was able to focus on one organisation, the private school, and on one element within the school, the early adolescent girls in Grade 7, as the unit of analysis.

The researcher chose to use a case study design to gain a “holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Maree, 2010, p. 75), namely a group of early adolescent girls’ experiences of a private school. According to Maree (2010, p. 75), researchers use case study designs to answer “how” and “why” questions, while offering the possibility of giving the powerless, in this case children, a voice.

1.5.3. Participants

The population (early adolescent girls in Grade 7 in a private school in Northern Johannesburg) refers to all potential participants who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 133). It is the pool from which the sample is drawn (Babbie, 2010, p. 199). All the Grade 7 girls in the private school who volunteered to participate and who had obtained parental consent were

included in the first phase of the study, since they all met the inclusion criterion of being 12 to 13 years old (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006, p. 163; Creswell, 2009, p. 178). The sample therefore accurately portrays the total population from which it was selected (Babbie, 2010, p. 199). In the second phase, participants were selected for individual interviews through purposive sampling (Babbie, 2010, p. 193) based on their input in the first phase. The inclusion criteria were now their potential to provide rich information and contribute to in-depth understanding (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 164), as well as representation of an even blend of girls from the various sectors, being prefects, non-prefects, high achievers in academics and sport, and even those considered by the school to be 'rebellious'.

1.5.4. Data collection

1.5.4.1. Literature review

Before the data collection process started, a literature review was conducted. Literature was consulted from a "variety of resources" (Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 93) which included scholarly journals and books, websites, and academic dissertations. The focus was on themes such as early adolescent girls, well-being, lived experience and private schooling (Delpont et al., 2011, p. 303; De Vos & Strydom, 2011, p. 35). In order to identify appropriate resources, the following databases were utilised: EbscoHost; PsycLit; PsycNET; PsycINFO; ScienceDirect; Wiley Online Library; SAGE Journals Online; ProQuest Theses and Dissertations; Scholarly Journals; Catalogue-Ferdinand Postma Library, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus; the Academic Search Premier. A literature control (Mouton, 2001, pp. 108-109) or check was conducted on completion of the analysis of the data in support of the findings. For the purpose of this dissertation the literature control is referred to as a literature 'check'.

1.5.4.2. Phases of data collection

This study made use of "diverse sources" of evidence (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 287) to conduct an in-depth exploration of the experiences of the participants. Data collection was divided into two phases. In the **first phase**, all the girls who volunteered to participate were involved in a work session. The girls were given the opportunity to choose a particular medium for expressing their experiences in the private school. The three mediums to choose from were collages, writing a

confidential letter or keeping a journal for a period of ten school days. In the **second phase**, ten girls were chosen to take part in in-depth interviews so as to explore their experiences more deeply and gain a better understanding of such experiences.

1.5.4.3. Collages

A collage is described as an “arts-informed” method of representation (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 103). Participants were requested to make a collage of their experiences of the private school at home, using their own materials, and to explain the collage on the back in writing. The collage was used merely to collect data from the participants and not as a therapeutic technique.

1.5.4.4. Confidential letters

Creswell (2009, p. 180) describes a confidential letter as a “private document” given as “written evidence” of the participant’s experiences. Participants were requested to write a confidential letter, at home, of their experiences of the private school.

1.5.4.5. Journal entries

A journal is a confidential, personal daily account of one’s experiences (Creswell, 2009, p. 180; Strydom & Delpont, 2011, pp. 377-378). The participants were requested to record their experiences of the private school in the form of daily journal entries for a period of ten school days.

1.5.4.6. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

Ten early adolescent girls in Grade 7 were selected from the initial fifteen to participate in semi-structured, in-depth interviews (Greeff, 2011, p. 348; Creswell, 2009, p. 181) (Appendix A). These interviews were aimed at further crystallising the data obtained in the first phase of the study. The process of crystallisation is a qualitative research method that “probes for a deeper understanding of a phenomenon” by describing the various perspectives that all reflect the unique reality and identity of the participants (Maree, 2010, pp. 38, 40, 81). The collage, letters and journal entries from the first phase of data collection were used during the interviews in the second phase of data collection. The interviews were conducted as a continuation process to gain deeper insight into the experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting (Greeff, 2011, p. 351). The interviews were conducted

in a private room at the school where only the researcher and individual participant were present. By setting her “preconceived” ideas aside (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 322), the researcher allowed the participants the opportunity to share their unique experiences freely (Maree, 2010, p. 59).

1.5.4.7. Field notes and researcher reflective notes

Field notes and researcher reflective notes were used as an additional source of evidence to ensure “researcher reflexivity” (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 154). Field notes in the form of participant observations described participants’ non-verbal expression as well as verbal connotations (Maree, 2010, p. 92; Mouton, 2001, pp. 104-105; Strydom, 2011a, p. 329-330) and provided a record of what the researcher experienced while with the participants (Fouché & Schurink, 2011, p. 316).

Researcher reflective notes were a written account of what the researcher had heard, seen, thought and experienced in the field (Strydom, 2011a, p. 335-336).

1.5.5. Data analysis

The data received during the first phase of data collection were included in a continuation process during the in-depth interview. All data collected through the collages, confidential letters, journals, interviews, observation notes and self-reflective notes were analysed and interpreted according to Creswell’s application of Tesch’s method (Creswell, 2009, pp. 183-194). This process included writing up and then typing the observational and self-reflective notes directly after each interview; visually analysing the collages and reading the participants’ written explanations, journals and letters; making notes of and comparing the participants’ interpretations with the researcher’s interpretations; developing categories; transcribing data from the interviews; executing multiple readings of data; developing categories from raw data; coding and describing the meaning of categories; testing and interpreting categories with associated categories; deriving a thematic construction from the categories; and reviewing and correlating findings against literature.

1.6. Trustworthiness of the Study

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290), trustworthiness (validity) in qualitative research aims to show that the findings are true and worth paying attention to.

Lincoln and Guba measure trustworthiness according to the five main criteria of

credibility, transferability, dependability, conformability and authenticity. The researcher ensured trustworthiness of the data by making use of such criteria during all dealings with the participants and with regard to all the information gathered from them.

1.6.1. Credibility

The credibility of the study shows that there is confidence in the truth or authenticity (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011, p. 419) of the findings, so it is parallel to internal validity in quantitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). Credibility ensures that the phenomenon has been accurately identified and described.

In this study, credibility was ensured through the crystallisation of the data (Maree, 2010, pp. 38, 40, 81). The crystallisation of data adds to the trustworthiness of the research findings as the reader is able to see the same patterns emerge repeatedly from the data that the researcher describes (Maree, 2010, p. 81). By using several forms of data collection, findings could be compared with one another as the themes began to develop (Maree, 2010, pp. 38, 40, 81). Prolonged engagement through the collages, confidential letters, journal entries, interviews and extensive debriefings by supervisors (allowing for the perspective of someone other than the researcher) all added to the credibility of the study.

1.6.2. Transferability

The transferability of the study signifies that the findings have application in other contexts. It can therefore be described as parallel to external validity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). It is a process of “examining” the “relationship” of the findings to other current research findings in this field (Babbie, 2010, p. 175). In using “real, rich, deep data” (Blaxter et al., 2006, p. 65), the transferability of the findings was aided.

In this study, transferability was ensured through the dense descriptions of data, the purposive selection of the participants in order to maximise the range of information and the avoidance of biased sources (Babbie, 2010, pp. 260-261).

1.6.3. Dependability

The dependability of the study can be described as being parallel to reliability and consistency in quantitative studies, and it is likewise concerned with the stability of the

data over time. Dependability asks whether the research process is “logical, well documented and audited” (Schurink et al., 2011, p. 420) and suggests that similar “data would be collected each time in repeated observations of the same phenomenon” (Babbie, 2010, p. 150). Nevertheless, replication is not possible in qualitative research as results are context-specific. This means that the researcher will need to record any changes or shifts in how the inquiry was conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290) and the way in which the phenomenon is explained needs to be “congruent with reality” (Maree, 2010, p. 37).

The dependability of this study was ensured through the use of diverse sources of data that had been collected phase-wise from a sufficient number of participants and that were analysed both intra- and inter-comparatively. The data collected through the collages, letters and journals constituted the point of departure in the interviews. The interviews then followed a ‘funnel structure’ to get to the research questions until no more new data were found (Maree, 2010, p. 5).

1.6.4. Conformability

The conformability of the study refers to the objectivity or neutrality of the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290), it involves the ability to show that the data, interpretations and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the researcher and that they are not simply figments of the researcher’s imagination. Therefore, conformability requires that it must be possible to trace all findings to their source and the logic used to assemble the interpretation in structurally coherent and corroborating wholes must be both explicit and implicit in the narrative of study. Conformability ensures trustworthiness of the data by showing that “the findings of the study can be confirmed by another” as explained by Schurink et al. (2011, p. 421), who terms this construct “confirmability”.

Neutrality was adhered to as the findings of the present study were shaped by the participants’ perspectives and not through research bias – in fact, the researcher steered close to the very words used by the participants. Conformability was enhanced through the audiotaping of the interviews, which were later transcribed to ensure accurate reflections of the participants’ views. The data was compared to research both locally and abroad, in an attempt to further establish conformability.

1.6.5. Authenticity

The authenticity of the study runs in line with the credibility of the study as both criteria are aimed at confidence in the “truth value” of the findings (Schurink et al., 2011, p. 419). Authenticity is parallel to internal validity in quantitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290) as it states that the data and findings in qualitative research are real.

The principle of authenticity was applied in terms of the goal of study being to give the early adolescent girls a voice, to empower them with the intention of individual growth and to create social change by creating awareness among their parents and teachers of the support needed for their continued well-being. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the participants (Appendix E) and they were encouraged to voice their authentic opinions and views of their experiences of the private school. The authenticity of the study was enhanced through the aspects of anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, as participants were encouraged to be honest in expressing their views and experiences. The audiotaping of the data (Creswell, 2009, p. 183) also met the criterion of authenticity. The audit trail of the raw data collected during the study, as well as the record of the data analysis, are available on request as full assurance of the authenticity of the research.

1.7. Impact of the Study

The expected impact of the study lies in creating awareness among parents and private school teachers based on the knowledge acquired from the study. It is hoped that the findings will improve the support needed for early adolescent girls to ensure their on-going healthy development and well-being within the private school setting. The findings of the study (Mouton, 2001, p. 113) will be presented in written format to the parents of the Grade 7 girls and to the principal on behalf of the teachers.

1.8. Ethical Considerations

In embarking on the research study, the researcher’s proposal for the study was approved by the North-West University. The study therefore adhered to the code of ethics as stipulated by the North-West University.

The study was grounded in the fundamental ethical principles of protecting participants from harm, both physical and psychological; allowing for voluntary participation; obtaining informed consent; respecting confidentiality, and granting the

right to self-determination (Babbie, 2007, pp. 64-71; Strydom, 2011b, p. 128). The researcher respected the fact that the girls were under-age and are viewed as a “vulnerable” group (Mouton, 2001, p. 245; Strydom, 2011b, p. 115) and therefore first obtained informed consent from the parents and principal (Appendices C & D) on behalf of the girls. The girls were then asked to give assent to confirm that they would actually participate (Appendix E).

1.9. Definitions of Key Concepts

1.9.1. Early adolescent girls

The adolescent period of development ranges from 11 to 21 years of age which is divided into early adolescence (11-14 years of age), middle adolescence (14-18 years of age) and late adolescence (18-21 years of age) (Louw et al., 1998, p. 385). As early adolescent girls are in the early ‘transitional’ phase of adolescence, they may be considered as being in a vulnerable state due to “a complex interplay of physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes” which they are faced with (Burns, 2010, pp. 50-56).

1.9.2. Lived experience

A person’s lived experience refers to his/her subjective experience, the context of that experience (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 1) and the meaning he/she ascribes to the experience. Denzin (1989, p. 28) argues that, in understanding a person’s lived experience we are able to connect the “internal with the social”, with the intention of understanding his/her “subjectivity from within”. A phenomenological study focuses on the “first person view” (Smith, 2011, What is phenomenology? para. 2) as it is believed that only those who have actually experienced a phenomenon can communicate it to the outside world. Therefore it is vital to gain an understanding of the phenomenon from “those who lived it” (Mapp, 2008, pp. 308-311).

1.9.3. Well-being

As explained by Levine (2006, pp. 38-59), a person’s general health and happiness is an “inside-job” affected by external factors that involve having our basic needs for love, support, acceptance, safety and security met. Although affluence and material wealth may also enhance a person’s well-being, it is not considered an essential aspect of the healthy “sense” the individual needs to have of her “self” in order to

experience well-being (Levine, 2006, p. 64). As researched by Taylor (2002, p. xv), unconditional love and acceptance is as vital an aspect of well-being as having “a sense of competence and mastery over one’s world”.

1.9.4. Private schools

The Merriam Webster Dictionary describes a private school (2012, Definition of private school, para. 1), as a school supported by a private organisation or private individuals rather than by the government. Private schools may also be termed independent schools, but for the purpose of this study they are referred to as private schools.

1.10. Outline of Dissertation

Chapter 1: Introduction, Rationale and Overview of the study

Chapter 2: Literature Study

Chapter 3: Empirical Investigation

Chapter 4: Reflection on the study

1.11. Conclusion

An introduction and overview of the study was provided in this Chapter. The rationale and problem formulation validated the choice of the topic and led to the design of the research question and the research goals. The foundational assumptions of the study were explained in terms of the paradigm and research methodology of the study. The impact and ethical implications of the study were subsequently discussed and the key concepts of the study defined. A literature study will be presented in Chapter 2 which follows.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE STUDY

2.1. Orientation

An introduction and overview of the study was provided in the previous chapter. This chapter focuses on gaining a deeper understanding of current literature that relates to early adolescent girls within a private school setting. Through the study of current literature, a foundational ground is set to further explore early adolescent girls' psychosocial lived experiences of a private school in the empirical investigation that follows. The literature study covers the early adolescent girls' developmental stage, their vulnerability on account of their gender, and their general well-being throughout their transitional phase. The well-being of the early adolescent girls within the private school setting in particular is examined next, so as to gain an understanding of the modern-day expectations and challenges that they face and enhance their healthy psychosocial development and wellbeing. The concepts of lived experience and interpretive descriptive paradigm are then discussed as aspects of the methodology that sets the ground for the exploration of the girls' experience; they serve as the lenses through which the girls' experiences will be viewed in the course of the empirical investigation to follow. This chapter concludes with a summary of those aspects encountered in the literature that are in favour of early adolescent girls' well-being in terms of their psychosocial development within the private school setting.

2.2. The Psychosocial Development of Early Adolescent Girls in a Private School Setting

2.2.1. Introduction

Besides being exposed to a myriad of changes, early adolescent girls are also challenged to meet the expectations of modern-day society. Since early adolescent girls are in constant interaction with their social environment, consideration must be given to their psychosocial well-being as an influential factor in their identity formation process, which forms part of the developmental stage in which they find themselves. For the purpose of this study, the private school was studied as the social setting of the developing early adolescent girl so as to gain a better

understanding of how these girls can be better supported in this setting in particular, and in their continued healthy development and well-being in general.

2.2.2. Psychosocial developmental outline of early adolescent girls

2.2.2.1. Overview

Early adolescent girls can be categorised as females ranging between the ages of 11 and 14 who are entering puberty, an emotional time characterised by great change and a search for their identity (Burns, 2010, p. 58). G Stanley Hall, who was considered the father of the psychology of adolescence, termed the adolescent phase as a time of “storm-and-stress” as he recognised that adolescents experience alternating extremes in their psychological and behavioural states (Louw et al., 1998, p. 386). However, Bandura (1964, p. 230) found that this “storm-and-stress” time is influenced by the cultural and social circumstances in which the adolescent finds him/herself. Early adolescence is thus marked not only by “dramatic hormonal changes” (Everett, Worthington, & Worthington, 2011a, p. 47), but also by changes in how they negotiate their social environment, thereby emphasising the psychosocial aspect of their development.

As early adolescent girls are in the early or beginning phase of adolescence, they may be considered as being in a transitional and more vulnerable phase “marked by a complex interplay of physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes to which they must adapt” (Burns, 2010, pp. 50-56). Pinsky and Young (2010, p. 186) explain that the adolescent’s challenges are further increased because the prefrontal cortex – the part of the brain involved in empathy, impulse restraint and rational thinking – “is shut down for remodelling between the ages of twelve and twenty”, with adolescents responding strongly to the amygdala, the part of the brain that drives responses such as fear and aggression. To complicate matters, the narcissistic traits of humans “surge again during adolescence, making all teens and preteens vulnerable as they develop the neurological wiring of rational, empathetic adults” (Pinsky & Young, 2010, p. 187). The self-gratifying impulses of the amygdala need to be frustrated during adolescence just as they were during the early years to ensure the adolescent develops appropriate self-control and autonomy. However, traumatic experiences may disrupt this development and result in an “awry” wiring of the prefrontal cortex of the adolescent’s brain, leading to a form of “secondary narcissism” (Pinsky & Young, 2010, p. 188). As early

adolescents are vulnerable to narcissism and in an egocentric state, their self-consciousness – largely due to their physical changes – compounds their vulnerability as they become overly concerned about their appearance and behaviour, thinking that others are constantly watching them. Public criticism and ridicule may therefore have a devastating effect on them (Vukich & Vandegriff, 2007, pp. 1-14).

As explained by Elkind's theories (in Louw et al., 1998, p. 419, Pinsky & Young, 2010, p. 191), adolescent egocentrism manifests according to the "imaginary audience" and the "personal fable" theories. In terms of the imaginary audience theory, Elkind (in Louw et al., 1998, p. 419) suggests that adolescents are unable to distinguish between their own perceptions and those of others, living their lives as though they were on "a grand stage in front of an attentive audience" (Pinsky & Young, 2010, p. 191). The personal fable theory suggests that adolescents tell themselves stories that are in reality not true, as they see themselves as invulnerable and totally "unique and special" (Pinsky & Young, 2010, p. 191). Both theories propose that the adolescent thinks that certain things happen only to him/her and that everybody else views things the same way he/she does. In line with these theories and due to the physical changes of adolescents, they often experience feelings of social "awkwardness and comparison", which lead to feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness (Burns, 2010, p. 50). This may give rise to feelings of inferiority and low self-worth (Dobson, 2010a, p. 25), making the girls more insecure as they begin to feel they are being "dissected" by others' constant criticism and scrutinising (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 141).

According to Pipher (1994, p. 19), early adolescent girls tend to lose themselves in a social and developmental "Bermuda Triangle". Studies have shown how early adolescent girls' school marks often plummet due to their transitional adjustment (Mazarella & Pecora, 2007, p. 6; Munson, 2010, p. 7). Their social environment changes to include more friendships as they explore the world outside the safety of the family, bringing with it more exposure to peer pressure and other social pressures (Burns, 2010, p. 51). Included in these new social pressures are social networking, relationships with the opposite gender, parental pressure and the pressure to keep up good grades, all of which may aggravate the already volatile emotional state of the adolescent (Burns, 2010, p. 53). Levine (2008, p. 12) proposes that adolescence as a whole is a time of self-discovery and therefore a

supportive environment is a primary need. The psychosocial development of early adolescent girls will now be viewed from various theoretical perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of what forms the background for their need for such a supportive environment.

2.2.2.2. *Development theory perspectives*

The psychosocial development of the early adolescent girl can be viewed in line with Freud's psychosocial, psychosexual and psychodynamic stages, Erikson's psychosocial development stages and Piaget's mental development stages (Everett et al., 2011a, p. 47). According to Freud's psychosexual stages of development, the early adolescent girl is in a stage where she will ideally begin to identify with her mother and the gender role she shares with her (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2003, p. 76). The idea of self-concept and identity was originally introduced by Freud through his theory on children identifying with their parents, and Erikson built on this by exploring identity across the life span.

Erikson (in Corey, 2005, p. 63) argues that the early adolescent is entering the phase of identity formation, and if the adolescent is unsuccessful during this phase, an identity crisis may result. Erikson explains identity in terms of "states" ranging from "synthesis", in which the individual has a sense of purpose and stability, to "confusion", in which the individual has a sense of uncertainty and hopelessness (Yarhouse & High, 2011, p. 355). Erikson also explains identity in terms of ego, personal and social "levels" – all of which play a role in the early adolescent girls' psychosocial development. The "ego identity level" refers to the core beliefs she holds about herself, the "personal identity level" refers to her distinguishable personal characteristics which can easily be perceived by others, and the "social identity level" refers to factors relating to group belonging (Yarhouse & High, 2011, p. 355).

Erikson furthermore divides the individual's life span into "stages". From a developmental theory perspective, the early adolescent girl is entering a stage of forming a separate identity away from her family of origin in becoming a member of the wider society (Louw et al., 1998, p. 53). Her development is determined by the interaction of her mind, body and cultural influences. In this stage, the girl may successfully develop her identity or enter a state of "social role confusion" (Louw et al., 1998, p. 53). Marcia built on Erikson's identity theories and proposes four

“identity statuses” being “diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and achievement, characterised by varying levels of exploration and commitment” (Yarhouse & High, 2011, p. 355). The Ego-Identity Scale designed to measure the ego development in adolescents was developed based on the work of both Erikson and Marcia. Adolescence is a period of “identity crisis, exploration and formation” therefore investigation into ego identity development is an important consideration as studies have revealed “correlations between adolescent identity status and self-esteem, coping skills and general psychological adjustments” (Yarhouse & High, 2011, p. 355).

According to Piaget’s cognitive development theory, “reasoning and behaviour are related to cognitive complexity, which increases with age” (Newmeyer & Newmeyer, 2011, pp. 351-352). Early adolescent girls are in Piaget’s formal operational stage of development, hence they are in a cognitively developed stage that enables them to accept their physical changes, develop a gender role identity and become socially more responsible, more independent and self-accepting as they develop their own identity (Louw et al., 1998, p. 80). However, as explained by Piaget, the early adolescent girl is also still in a stage of egocentrism (Garhart Mooney, 2000, p. 69). The egocentric stage not only leads the early adolescent girl to focus on herself in her identity formation, but simultaneously places her in a vulnerable state as she is painfully conscious of her physical, emotional and social changes. The latter manifest in such behaviours as explained by Elkind’s “personal fable” and “imaginary audience” theories (Louw et al., 1998, p. 419, Pinsky & Young, 2010, p. 191).

Piaget also focused on stages in moral reasoning, judgement and development. According to such stages, the moral thinking of early adolescent girls undergoes changes as they start to think for themselves. Their moral judgements become based less on obedience of the rules and more on the motives and the underlying act (Milacci, 2011, p. 353). Although Kohlberg built on Piaget’s work by developing a solid account of the development of moral judgements, he does not show a strong link to moral behaviour, therefore the issue of social environment needs to be taken into consideration (Milacci, 2011, p. 353). Developmental psychology has shown that just as there are grounds for Freud’s theory, namely that past childhood issues influence future adulthood, other life situations such as family, school, social stressors and coping mechanisms play just as important a role in the

individual's behaviour and development (Everett et al., 2011a, p. 48).

Developmental psychology therefore shows the importance of Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1964, p. 230) because social influence includes the effect of social issues on early adolescent girls in terms of conformity, social comparison, norms and obedience to the rules of those in authority (Everett et al., 2011b, p. 49).

2.2.2.3. Systemic and field theory perspectives

The eco-systemic theory sheds light on a holistic array of challenges, as in this approach the early adolescent girl is not viewed in isolation but in relation to the various systems of which she is a part (Becvar & Becvar, 2006, pp. 65, 72). The development of the early adolescent girl can be explained systemically further through Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory, which explains her development in terms of the "interactional layers" of her biological maturation, her family environment, her community environment and the cultural-societal context in which she finds herself (Paquette & Ryan, 2001, para. 1-7). A change or conflict in one of these layers will have a ripple effect on the rest and therefore, to understand early adolescent girls, it is necessary to consider the interactional state between all such layers (Paquette & Ryan, 2001, para. 1-7). This recursive nature of the "reciprocal causality" aspect (Becvar & Becvar, 2006, p. 65) of systemic theory shows that the behaviour of the early adolescent girl is an outcome of the interaction between herself, her environment and the behaviour she chooses, as is confirmed by Bandura's social learning theory (Meyer et al., 2003, p. 292).

Systemic theories can be strengthened by the field theory of Kurt Lewin (in Wheeler, 2001, p. 58), which explains each "individualistic model" or theory of development – such as Freud's development of psychosexual maturation, Erikson's theory on social development, Piaget's cognitive theory on development and even Bandura's social learning theory – as being one aspect of a greater whole. Therefore, when viewing the development of the individual, the various environmental conditions (including the interaction and integration of the various internal and external fields as a whole) should be considered (Wheeler, 2001, p. 58). According to Lewin's field theory, biological, psychological and social dimensions need to be viewed as an "integrated whole" of which the individual is a part (McConville, 2001, p. 30). Lewin termed this integrated whole the individual's

“life space”, since it represents a map of the developing person’s phenomenological field (in McConville, 2001, p. 30).

2.2.2.4. Gestalt theory perspective

From a Gestalt theory perspective, the experiences of early adolescent girls within a private school setting can be viewed holistically, as part of various interconnected, ever-changing fields (Bowman, 2005, pp. 9-10; Yontef, 1993, p. 370). Gestalt theory views the individual as relating to her different fields in a phenomenological way and according to her own reality – thus, her individual perception and the “personal meaning” that she gives to her world as she experiences it (Meyer et al., 2003, p. 328-329) and as it “moulds” her (Bowman, 2005, p. 12). The Gestalt perspective suggests that, as the young girl seeks her autonomous identity during the early adolescent phase, (Louw et al., 1998, p. 426), she begins “dis-embedding from her family field” in order to form her “new adolescent self” (Wheeler, 2001, p. 54). So begins her gradual entrance into society as she develops toward adulthood.

According to Lewin’s field theory as cited in McConville (2001, p. 31), the adolescent has the task of extending her “life space”, increasing the differentiation of such space and then changing its organisation so as to integrate the new aspects of her internal and external fields into her newly formed life space (McConville, 2001, p. 41). Perls (in Clarkson, 1989, p. 77) explains the process of maturation as a move away from “environmental support towards self-support”. However, the environment first needs to be supportive enough for the self to draw sufficient strength from to get to the point where it can withdraw and eventually support itself. Early adolescent girls therefore have the task of continuing to grow and develop their ability to self-support while at the same time developing new healthy personal boundaries.

2.2.2.5. Attachment theory, the complexity theory and healthy personal boundaries

With any new developmental phase of growth come confusion and a re-establishment of boundaries (Clarkson, 1989, p. 76). The establishment of new boundaries occurs in line with early adolescent girls’ growth and psychosocial well-being. Healthy personal boundaries are related to the child having formed a secure attachment with the primary caregiver (Cloud & Townsend, 1992, p. 78; Delisle,

2011, pp. 57-58). As explained by Bowlby's attachment theory, attachment "characterises us from the cradle to the grave" (Cloud & Townsend, 1992, p. 78; Delisle, 2011, p. 57; Gatla Reader, 2009, p. 37) and is the foundation for developing a sense of security (Taylor, 2011, p. 59). Sibcy (2011a, p. 50) also explains that the attachment theory provides "a powerful integrative framework for how socio-emotional development, neurobiology and spirituality interact", and shows how early relationship experiences influence the psychosocial development of early adolescent girls.

In developing a secure attachment to parents, an allowance is made for the "integration of systems" (Siegel, 2011, p. 105), whether in the form of the girl's mind, body and brain, in the form of the girl as part of a family, or in the form of the girl as part of a group of friends or peers. Integrated systems may be termed complex systems which, according to the complexity theory, have the potential to be flexible, adaptive, coherent, energised and stable. These features of a complex system enable the system to interact healthily with its environment, thereby enabling the early adolescent to react more resiliently to the effects, influences and pressures of her modern-day society. According to Siegel (2011, p. 106), coherence is the ability to be connected, open, harmonious, engaged, receptive, insightful, compassionate and empathetic to both self and others. These features and characteristics therefore constitute the well-being of individuals. On the other hand, an individual who is not "integrated" and is rigid or chaotic, works against his/her own well-being (Siegel, 2011, p. 107).

The attachment theory proposes that the development of a secure attachment with her primary caregiver (or lack of it) will determine whether the early adolescent girl is able to "explore" herself and others as she strives for her healthy autonomous development (Sibcy, 2011a, p. 51). It is also argued that in developing a secure attachment with her primary caregiver, the girl will have developed a sense of parent availability and accessibility, as well as a "sense of emotional and physical regulation", which will now play a role in the early adolescent's continued development (Sibcy, 2011a, p. 51). A secure attachment with the parent will enable the early adolescent girl to stick to her morals and values and not be swayed by peer pressure; thus she will be able to stand up for her authentic self (Siegel, 2011, p. 101). This secure or insecure attachment is stored in the procedural memory of the child (Gatla Reader, 2009, p. 37), particularly in the implicit or subconscious

memory. It will therefore drive the behaviour of the individual (Siegel, 2011, p. 85), highlighting the foundational and long-term effect of such attachment on the well-being of the early adolescent.

Cloud and Townsend (1992, p. 94) contend that it is parents' responsibility to develop healthy personal boundaries in their children by age three years in order to ensure a solid foundation for later developmental years. If the parents are unable to establish healthy boundaries in their children, "attachment pathologies" may result (Delisle, 2011, p. 56) and contribute to an "incapacity to make stable interdependent connections" (Delisle, 2011, p. 49) during early adolescence. The more hostility and confusion and the less love, understanding and support the adolescent receives during this period, the greater the conflict that he/she experiences (Bandura, 1964, p. 230). An insecure attachment and the development of unhealthy personal boundaries will affect the homeostasis (Meyer et al., 2003, p. 476) of the individual. Homeostasis focuses on the individual's self-regulatory process as he/she tries to regain a feeling of equilibrium, whether emotionally, psychologically, cognitively or spiritually (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998, p. 544), in the on-going process of growth and well-being. According to Siegel (2011, p. 107), well-being is a sense of happiness that comes from connectivity and mental equilibrium; it allows for integration through acceptance and has the ability to make sense of one's life. Therefore – if the early adolescent girl is unable to get her needs met and tries to push them aside, her self-regulatory process (which strives for her health and well-being) will force her to express her needs possibly in an inappropriate way. This may cause further rejection from others and be harmful to her general well-being. According to Antonovsky's salutogenic model and theory (1996, p. 15), the individual's health and well-being is reliant on his/her having a sense of coherence, learned resourcefulness, hardiness, potency, internal locus of control and self-efficacy. As Antonovsky's theory suggests, the meaning that the individual gives to his/her life determines whether issues will violate his/her equilibrium.

Jordaan and Jordaan (1998, p. 545) also maintain that individuals differ in the speed and intensity at which they react to incoming stimuli and during adolescence this "emotional lability" increases due to the physical and hormonal changes taking place in the body. This will cause the early adolescent girl to be in a more sensitive state due to the disturbance in the homeostasis of her autonomic nervous system. The early adolescent girl needs to re-organise her personal boundaries as part of

her healthy development. However, if she has not formed a secure attachment, has not mastered the ability to integrate psychosocial matters and to say 'No' to what is not good for her (e.g. reject being treated abusively), and has not learnt to distinguish herself as a separate individual, her task of individuation and identity formation will only become that much more difficult as she enters this transitional period and is confronted with new challenges.

2.2.2.6. *Synthesis*

The early adolescent girl is entering a period of great change that results from a complex interplay of physical, psychological, cognitive and social dimensions (Burns, 2010, pp. 50-56; McConville, 2001, pp. 30-31). Bronfenbrenner's theory (Paquette & Ryan, 2001, para. 1-7) explains that change and conflict in one area affect all the others, thereby affecting the girl's psychosocial development and well-being. According to Siegel (2011, p. 107), the key to well-being is integration through mindfulness during this period of change: integration of implicit and explicit memories; integration of mind and body; integration of systems, and mindfulness by being receptive to and aware of one's self and others.

2.2.3. Early adolescent girls in a private school setting

2.2.3.1. *Introduction: Private schools*

Private schools can be described as schools that receive no money from the government as the education of the students is privately funded by the parents of the pupils attending these schools (KMS, 2010, p. 10). Private schools are run by an executive board of members that includes the headmaster (Gabbitas, 2008, p. 3). According to Du Toit (2004, p. 1), private schools in South Africa are a result of political factors and the number of private schools specifically increased during the post-apartheid era due to a range of socio-economic factors, including a substantial growth in student numbers and "demographic diversification". Private schools may also be termed independent schools (Du Toit, 2004, p. 1), but for the purpose of this study they are referred to as private schools.

Although each private school has its own unique character and approach (Goldman, 2010, p. 4), they all share six core characteristics: self-governance; self-support; self-defined curriculum; self-selection of students; self-selection of faculty; small size (Goldman, 2010, p. 4). Although private schools in South Africa are more

costly than public schools – some up to ten times the cost – they usually offer exceptionally high standards of education. Such schools are attended predominantly by children from middle to higher income families, have an excellent reputation, present internationally recognised exams, and therefore offer an “excellent acceptance rate” for further education, both locally and worldwide (ExpatArrivals, 2012, para. 2). This criterion makes private schooling a favourable choice for South Africans. A core component of most private schools’ educational ethos is to provide pupils with a spiritual foundation to complement their academic and physical accomplishments. Hence they focus on a more holistic education that includes the development of morals and values, ensures a disciplined environment, and often has a strict code of conduct (KMS, 2010, p. 13).

In general, private school systems worldwide boast better infrastructure, “state-of-the-art” facilities and a larger selection of extra-curricular activities (ExpatArrivals, 2012, para. 5). Private schools also offer smaller class size, between 15 to 25 students per teacher, ensuring better control over the students as well as the ability to offer them a more personal level of attention, which parents prefer for their children (KMS, 2010, pp. 8, 9). According to Cohen-Sandler (2005, p. 233), students feel “more connected because there is more personal contact among students, faculty and administration” when schools as well as classes are smaller.

The high standard of education can be seen in an international study by Palacios (2012, p. 2) that shows the basic math proficiency of 8th grade students to be 85% at private schools compared to 72% at public or government schools. The same study revealed proficiency of reading skills among 8th grade students to be 90% at private schools compared to 75% at public schools. Proficiency of writing skills of 8th graders was found to be 96% at private schools compared to 87% at public schools in the same study (Palacios, 2012, p. 2). Although various government schools in South Africa strive for good results, the fact that 30% and 40% were considered acceptable pass rates in government schools for certain subjects in 2011 (Parent24, 2012, para. 3) and 2012 (Motshekga, 2012, National Senior Certificate Examination, para. 9), confirms that the standard of education is significantly higher at private schools – in fact, many expected a 100% matric pass rate and the average private school achieved a 98.15% in 2011 (Magome, 2012, para. 3) and 98.2% in 2012 (Gernetzky, 2012, para.1).

The researcher has endeavoured to view the literature pertaining to early adolescent girls within the private school setting in terms of the influence that various aspects of the private school environment may have on the psychosocial development and well-being of these girls. One of the aspects offered by many private schools and particularly by the private school under study is that of holistic education.

2.2.3.2. *The effect of holistic education on early adolescent girls in a private school setting*

Holistic education is an educational philosophy based on the idea that students find their identity and meaning of life by connecting with their surrounding community and the natural world, and that they are educated to live a life of excellence based on good values and morals. Rudge (2008, p. ii), views holistic education as an integration of humanistic education with spirituality, which incorporates the principles of “spirituality, wholeness and interconnectedness, along with principles of freedom, autonomy, and democracy”. A holistic education focuses on educating students in terms of academic, extramural, personal and social responsibilities as well as spiritually, which includes cognitive, physical, social, emotional and spiritual facets of the personality.

Research shows that the school plays a role not only in teaching the relevant curriculum material, but also in educating children’s characters and teaching them how to be honest, respectful and responsible (Lord, 2001, p. 50-51). Outreach is an important aspect of holistic education as well as private school education and it can be seen as a positive attribute to the early adolescent girl’s well-being. Studies have shown that gratitude in early adolescent girls is related to social, emotional and physical benefits. By encouraging them to create meaningful experiences for others, the general well-being of these girls is also greatly enhanced (Froh, Yurkewicz, & Kashdan, 2008, pp. 1-18).

A holistic educational environment is also accepting of the diversity of cultures commonly found in private schools. As explained by Siegel (2011, p. 108), it is important for communities to promote a deep respect for people’s differences, and this process begins with “reflection”. Siegel (2011, p. 108) argues that reflection should be enforced as the fourth “R” in general education in schools, the established three “R’s” being reading, writing and arithmetic. Responsibility is also

proposed as the necessary fourth “R” (Lord, 2001, pp. 50-51). In fact, both responsibility and reflection are necessary for the development of solid morals and values in students, and research on early adolescent girls shows that moral and student identities are the strongest predictors of their achievement (Roeser, Galloway, Casey-Cannon, Watson, Keller, & Tan, 2008, pp. 115-152).

Another positive aspect of holistic education is the potential to develop the students’ autonomy within a democratic environment. This can be attained through smaller class sizes in private schools, which allow the children to get more personal attention from teachers – an aspect strongly favoured by parents as it improves learning and is in support of the students’ autonomy (KMS, 2010, p. 8).

According to Malema (2004, pp. 59-60), black girls at private schools have higher occupational aspirations for themselves than do their counterparts at government schools. In terms of this line of reasoning, socio-economic factors play a role in determining which girls are privileged to attend private schools and benefit from holistic education, thereby influencing the early adolescent girl’s occupational aspirations. Research shows that adolescents who have limited educational and occupational aspirations will leave school at an early age and their attitude towards risky sexual behaviour will be negatively affected (Louw et al., 1998, p. 407). Since the girls from private schools have higher occupational aspirations, they may be expected to have a lower risk of unsafe sexual behaviour.

Included in this holistic array is a respect for others and therefore a general feeling of physical safety. Most private schools have a zero tolerance to violence, weapons, abuse, bullying, drugs, racism or any form of intimidation (Academy Prospectus, 2012, p. 8). The holistic education offered in private schools can therefore be seen as beneficial to the psychosocial development and well-being of early adolescent girls.

2.2.3.3. *The effect of academic and extramural activities on early adolescent girls in a private school setting*

The academic standard in private schools is generally higher than at government schools (Gernetzky, 2012, para. 1; Magome, 2012, para. 3; Parent24, 2012, para. 3), and this can be seen to have a positive influence on preparing students for future university and working opportunities (Green et al., 2010, pp. 1-9). Early adolescent girls in the private school setting may however feel forced to keep

up with this high standard, and this may hamper rather than encourage their success.

The academic success of early adolescent girls may be greater if the girls can identify with the task rather than feel forced, as research shows that identification promotes a higher likelihood for task completion in children (Assor, Vansteenkiste, & Kaplan, 2009, pp. 482-497). Research also shows that enforcing expectations to achieve desired results and behaviours through conditional regard has a negative effect on the identity formation of adolescents, which leads to the development of negative emotional and coping strategies (Assor & Tal, 2011, p. 249; Knafo & Assor, 2007, pp. 232-245; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010, pp. 74-99). Girls are more prone to academic stress than are boys, and this may lead to depression and anxiety-related disorders (Bandura et al., 1999, pp. 258-269; Hampel & Petermann, 2005, 73-83; Hampel & Petermann, 2006, pp. 409-415; Ostrov et al., 1989, pp. 394-398; Petersen, Sarigiani, & Kennedy, 1991, p. 247), particularly if the girls feel disconnected, fearful and stressed during their journey from childhood to adolescence (McMillan, 2011, p. i). Achievement pressures in the form of “expectations to excel” (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 6) compound the vulnerability and experienced pressures of early adolescent girls due to the concomitant impact that puberty has on their self-esteem (Alsaker, 1996, pp. 249-258). Studies by Mazarella and Pecora (2007, p. 6) and Munson (2010, p. 7) have shown how the IQ and math and science marks of early adolescent girls plummet due to their transitional adjustment – which may put the girls under even more pressure to keep up with the expectation to meet the high standard. This may increase the existing pressure to excel and aggravate feelings of inferiority and low self-worth (Dobson, 2010a, p. 25), thereby disturbing the girls’ autonomous and psychosocial development.

The standard of extramural activities, particularly sport, is generally high at private schools as such schools take sport seriously and compete in top leagues that offer students the opportunity to develop their talents and skills for possible future careers. External coaches are often hired to guide the students in the various sporting activities with the aim of enhancing their skills to the highest level and simultaneously developing their abilities for team work, friendship and life skills in dealing with success and failure (Education UK, 2005, pp. 1-4; ExpatArrivals, 2012, para. 5). In line with Freud’s view, sporting activities are considered a positive aspect of the early adolescent girls’ well-being in the private school, as the girls do

not only learn the necessary sporting and life skills, they are also able to release their “sexual energy” (in Corey, 2005, p. 63) in socially acceptable ways such as engaging in arts and sports and forming friendships. Besides, the girls develop the skills needed to work in groups and continue in the development of their morals and values through sporting activities.

Unfortunately, keeping up with the high standard of sport in the private school setting may be difficult for early adolescent girls who, due to their vulnerable, hypersensitive, self-conscious state, may feel that they are being “dissected” (Dobson, 2010a, p. 25) by the scrutiny of others on account of the changes in their physical appearance (Biro et al. in Kutob et al., 2010, p. 241). The early adolescent girl may be described as changing from “a confident child who’s been climbing trees into a doubting teenager” who thinks only she feels the way she does (Steinheim, as cited in Fonda, 2011, p. 70). Physical sport may become a problem if early adolescent girls have a high level of “social physique anxiety”. Due to their changing bodies and low self-esteem, the girls may shy away from physical involvement in school sport activities (Crocker, Sabistan, Kowalski, McDonough, & Kowalski, 2006, pp. 185-200; Niven, Fawkner, Knowles, Henretty, & Stephenson, 2009, pp. 299-305; Sabistan, Munroe-Chandler, & Crocker, 2005, pp. 68-85).

The sporting environment in private schools may also become a pressurised situation for early adolescent girls, as the youth sports that once were fun are now often about fulfilling the frustrated dreams of parents (Taylor, 2011, p. xv). The stress associated with such pressure may be an aspect of private schooling that develops due to high standards and competitiveness between parents themselves and even between the various private schools. This “western cultural paradigm of ideological individualism”, as explained by Wheeler (2011, p. 11), is a prioritisation of one’s individual needs, with the relational context seen as secondary to individual achievements. Taylor (2011, p. 61) suggests that there is an “overinvestment by parents in their children’s lives” as parents’ self-esteem becomes enmeshed in the performance of their children, and how parents feel about themselves becomes dependent on whether their children meet their expectations. When children fail to perform, parents withdraw and express their disappointment, frustration and even anger towards them, which emphasises the unfair and crushing burden of responsibility these parents place on their children (Taylor, 2011, p. 82). Such parents are often referred to as “helicopter parents, Velcro parents, Little League

fathers and stage mothers” and the danger of their “overinvestment” in their children increases the vulnerability of early adolescent girls in the private school setting who may already be responding to cultural messages for extreme achievement (Taylor, 2011, p. 61).

“Positive pushing” (Taylor, 2002, p. xxxvi) is suggested as perhaps a more balanced way for parents to approach motivating their children in our modern “results-driven society” (Taylor, 2011, p. 84) and instil a sense of long-term competence, as opposed to a short-term need to excel. Competency, which can be developed in early adolescent girls by parents flexibly allowing their daughters to re-organise their personal boundaries as they grow, is a vital requirement for the well-being and healthy development of adolescents. The more early adolescents learn to trust in their own abilities and take responsibility for themselves, the more they will experience feelings of competency (Wheeler, 2011, pp. 21-22). If an imbalance in responsibility occurs, the early adolescent girl may begin to ‘embody emptiness’ (Levine, 2008, pp. 3, 5, 8) as she disconnects more from her “sense of self” (Levine, 2008, p. 12). Therefore if parents are “results driven”, the girls’ self-esteem will be affected negatively because they perceive their parents to be psychologically controlling and critical – they do not feel valued or approved of by their parents (Kernis et al., 2000, pp. 225-252).

Following the effects of children perceiving their parents to be “results driven”, it has been shown that parental psychological control through conditional regard for achieving desired results and behaviours may have a negative effect on the identity formation of adolescents and lead to negative emotional and coping strategies (Assor & Tal, 2011, p. 249; Knafo & Assor, 2007, pp. 232-245; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010, pp. 74-99). Conditional regard has been shown to have adverse emotional and academic consequences, which may lead to anxiety and depression among adolescents (Luby, Belden, Sullivan, Hayen, McCadney, & Spitznagel, 2009, pp. 1156-1166). Conditional parenting styles contribute to values and behaviours being forced on their children, causing “excessive contingent self-esteem” and steering early adolescent girls to behave in a jealous, aggressive manner to obtain social goals (Kollat, 2007, p. iii). Conditional regard by their parents may be perceived by the girls as parental rejection, in which case their state of self-consciousness will be increased (Louw et al., 1998, p. 420). Early adolescent girls who have learnt to express themselves in an aggressive manner may

re-impact the health of their family, showing the existence of the recursive feedback loops within the family system (Becvar & Becvar, 2006, p. 66). Thus the competitive sport environment that is sometimes hailed by parents at the school may have a negative impact on the family environment.

As every individual needs to receive confirmation for his/her existence as a unique human being (Hycner & Jacobs, 1995, p. 24), pressure from others to achieve excellent results may leave early adolescent girls feeling inadequate and under pressure to try harder, as they are not good enough as they are (Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004, pp. 47-87; Cicchetti & Cohen, 2006, p. 832; Kollat, 2007, iii; Luby et al., 2009, pp. 1156-1166). This “recursive loop of shame” as described by Resnick (2009, p. 152) can be linked to their “perceived imperfections”, and due to the girls’ “starving for recognition” they may become obsessed with perfection, which consumes normalcy and leads to abnormal issues such as dysfunctional body images and eating disorders (Ghosh, 2007, para. 5). In striving for unhealthy perfectionism, the early adolescent girl may develop a rigid, inflexible mind-set with a fear of failure, making her less able to cope with this increasing pressure and setting in motion a negative cycle of fear and anxiety (Ben-Shahar, 2009, p. 122). Unhealthy perfectionism and extreme self-criticism, constant worry over mistakes, self-doubt and excessive valuing of parental expectations (Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate in Young, Clopton & Bleckley, 2004, pp. 273-283) may be a driving factor in the early adolescent girl’s need for recognition, thereby hampering her psychosocial development and well-being.

2.2.3.4. *The effect of teachers on early adolescent girls in the private school setting*

Due to the smaller class sizes, teachers in a private school are able to give early adolescent girls more one-on-one attention than is the case at government schools (KMS, 2010, pp. 8, 9). Teachers can take on the role of a mentor for early adolescent girls by being someone outside the family who is able to act as a good role model for the girls and provide a safe place for them to discuss problems (Smalley & Smalley, 2005, pp. 206-214). This is highly beneficial for early adolescent girls who, on account of their developmental stage, rely on a personal connection with their teachers in order to thrive in school, particularly if they have a negative self-concept and feel disconnected (Cloud & Townsend, 1992, pp. 83-84;

Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 132). The more negative the girls' self-concept, the more sensitive they will be to their teachers' moods and tones. They will constantly listen and watch for their approval, much in the same way they seek it from their peers, as they are very sensitive to feeling "known and accepted" (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 137). According to Cohen-Sandler (2005, p. 139), adolescent girls' learning functions of attending, comprehending and problem solving are dramatically affected by the level of their interpersonal functioning and needs, as research shows a relationship between social acceptance and cognitive abilities. McConville (2001, pp. 37-38), maintains that early adolescent girls are more likely to demonstrate academic and intellectual competence when they feel liked by their teachers and will suddenly become "learning disabled" when they sense a break in emotional support. This does not affect older adolescents who are developmentally more able to differentiate between these areas of their lives and better able to maintain independence between the fact that they need the teacher to teach them and not to necessarily like them. The way in which early adolescent girls perceive that their teachers relate to them is heightened by their gender. Studies show that whereas boys look at the "big picture", seeing school as a "means to an end", girls are more "emotionally affected" by each school day, with "a lot of little things building up to increase their pressure" (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 5).

In today's age, too much focus is placed on test scores, leaving little energy for teachers to devote to healthy messages, with the result that teachers may often send out the wrong messages to students (Taylor, 2011, p. xv). Research shows that teachers' negative feedback and lack of nurturance is a consistent negative predictor of poor academic performance and social behaviour, while teachers with high expectations of early adolescents are shown to be a consistent positive predictor of the students' healthy goals and interests (Wentzel, 2002, pp. 287-301). This positive attitude impacts on the girls' identity formation and therefore their psychosocial development and well-being.

2.2.3.5. *The effect of peers on early adolescent girls in the private school setting*

Research involving early adolescent girls shows that peer identities predict their well-being (Roeser et al., 2008, pp. 115-152). This emphasises the importance for early adolescent girls within the private school setting to be able to identify with their

peer group. Adjustments during early adolescence are encumbered by the negative impressions children receive from peers and friends (Gauzze, Bukowski, Aquan-Assee & Sippola, 1996, pp. 2201-2216). The peer group or “student culture” is often “toxic” as it may give children an array of “unhealthy messages” (Taylor, 2011, p. xv) such as the need to grow up too soon, the importance of affluence, and an emphasis on physical appearance and popularity that may even involve cyber-bullying. Although the private school setting may have a stricter control over physical violence and bullying due to its ethos and more easily controlled smaller class sizes, verbal aggression among peers, which is commonly practised by girls, often cannot as easily be controlled by schools as girls simply deny having had an intention to be hurtful.

Research has also shown that a third of girls surveyed in America admitted to having been afraid to go to school at some point in their lives due to “mean girls” (DiMarco, 2008, p. 23). DiMarco (2008, p. 23) states that verbal aggression is often instigated by “mean girls” of whom there are two types, the first being the “Really Mean Girl” who operates under a set of values totally different to the rest of the world. She is on a “power trip” with her sole purpose and goal being to inflict pain on others. The second type of “mean girl” as explained by DiMarco (2008, p. 24), is just a “nice girl gone bad” who is a “little self-obsessed”, feels she has been wronged and sees something her victim did as a direct attack on herself, therefore feeling her aggressive actions may be justified.

However – whatever the reason and whatever the type of girl – verbal attacks are damaging to the self-concept of the girl on the receiving end as she may feel bullied, ridiculed and not worthy of acceptance. According to Vukich and Vanegriff (2007, p. 3), girls may have a greater fear of ridicule of their changing appearance, which may increase their self-conscious state. The fear of ridicule may be eased if the girl experiences her environment as trusting, since the more trustworthy the environment, the more the girl feels treated as trustworthy herself. She learns to confidently trust in herself, thereby persevering in her healthy growth and development (Erikson in Corey, 2005, p. 62). Just as it is important for the early adolescent girl to feel safe in her environment and draw strength from it, she also needs her environment to show that it accepts her and has faith in her potential and abilities. Thus she can build on her inner strength and allow her authentic abilities to grow and develop (Corey, 2005, p. 62). The development of the early adolescent

girl's healthy self-concept relies on her ability to become more autonomous and competent and on her being able to relate healthily "intra-personally" with her "self", as well as "interpersonally with others" (Levine, 2006, p. 8). The latter includes her peers as part of a much-needed supportive environment.

Depending on whether early adolescent girls feel accepted or rejected by their peers, they will either feel like they belong to the group or they may develop a group identity crisis. They may either feel accepted and can identify with the group, or they feel alienated (Neuman & Neuman, 2011, p. 371) due to a lack of connectedness with peers. Social isolation due to rejection from peers may place early adolescent girls at risk for disorders. Research has shown that the lived experience of those who feel as though they do not belong takes the shape of "isolated belonging" as theirs becomes a generalised way of not belonging, which becomes their "primary mode of interpersonal relationships" (Clegg, 2006, pp. 53-81). Early adolescent girls who have a low self-esteem and feel inadequate and isolated may try to increase their sense of self-worth through risky sexual behaviour (Louw et al., 1998, p. 407). They may also adopt other risky behaviour such as drinking alcohol and smoking, in an attempt to fit in with and be accepted by peers. In their search for social acceptance and an autonomous identity, early adolescent girls will react to the messages of others (Pipher, 1994, p. 22), including their peers, and they may easily become dissatisfied with themselves (Hargreaves & Tiggerman, 2003, pp. 367-373).

Rejection by peers may have a negative impact on early adolescent girls as research shows those who are treated with conditional regard will experience issues of low self-worth, impulsivity, shame and guilt. Such children are left feeling disconfirmed and not good enough (Assor et al., 2004, pp. 47-87; Cicchetti & Cohen, 2006, p. 832; Kollat, 2007, iii; Luby et al., 2009, pp. 1156-1166). Early adolescent girls who feel disconfirmed by their peers may become trapped in a negative pattern of behaviour, as they may spiral out of control towards disorders that are detrimental to their healthy psychosocial development and well-being. In this case, the self-esteem of early adolescent girls (which is already in vulnerable state) will be affected as research shows that the self-esteem of early adolescent girls lowers between the ages of 11 and 16 years (Biro et al. in Kutob et al., 2010, p. 241) due to their changing physical appearance. As stated in Meyer et al. (2003, p. 337), the early adolescent girl is in the process of developing her self-esteem.

However, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs it is not possible to meet the need for healthy self-esteem unless the girl's earlier needs for safety, security and love have been fulfilled. Maslow (in Meyer et al., 2003, p. 341) emphasises that the most stable and therefore healthiest basis of self-esteem is deserved respect from others, which includes the respect of peers. As the self-esteem of the early adolescent girl is influenced by the way she feels about herself, her emotional state will be affected.

Research clearly shows that the way early adolescent girls feel emotionally may place them at risk for experimenting with early sexual behaviour (O'Sullivan & Hearn, 2008, pp. 168-179). Emotional stress and depression have been identified as factors that lead early adolescent girls to alcohol abuse, which then leads to risky sexual behaviours (Davila, 2008, pp. 26-31; Hipwell, Chung, Stepp, Durand, & Keenan, 2012, pp. 118-128; Steinberg & Davila, 2008, pp. 350-362). Depression is also linked to smoking and other addictive behaviours in 11-14 year-old girls (Chung, White, Hipwell, Stepp, & Loebser, 2010, pp. 647-650). Low self-esteem is linked to low academic performance, social isolation, anxiety, depression, stomach aches, fatigue, headache, bullying and self-destructive behaviours (Brown, Birch, & Kancherta in Kutob, 2010, p. 241; Gibson, 2009, para. 1). These findings show that the negative influence from peers may have a negative impact on the psychosocial development and well-being of early adolescent girls in the private school setting.

2.2.3.6. *The effect of family and relatives on early adolescent girls in the private school setting*

Early adolescent girls in the private school setting will be just as affected by the influence of their family on their psychosocial development as girls in other contexts. Research has shown that adolescents who have a good attachment to parents show high strength in their self-perceived strength and well-being, therefore a good attachment to parents may be seen as a "foundational critical variable associated with the psychological well-being of adolescents" (Raja, McGee, & Stanton, 1992, pp. 471-485). According to Burns (2010, pp. 95-110), developing good communication skills is a necessary part of a healthy family. Early adolescent girls who have not learnt healthy communication skills and who internalise their feelings may rely on sexual activity to boost their self-esteem or gain the approval of others, while those who externalise might engage in early sexual activity in the context of

rebellious, rule breaking and risky behaviour (Starr, Davila, Stroud, Li, Yoneda, Hershenberg, & Miller, 2012, pp. 403-420). This may cause girls to experiment with negative ways of self-expression including substance abuse, which has been found to speed up the onset of puberty and increase the likelihood of the girls becoming “heavy users” during early to middle adolescence (Tanner-Smith, 2010, p. 1412). These research results confirm the importance of healthy family connections in support of early adolescent girls’ well-being, positive social interactions and healthy interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers in their school environment – all of which constitute a large part of their social environment during adolescence.

The adolescence period is often characterised by rebellious, moody, disinterested and risking behaviour on the part of the child as she goes from having mastered childhood tasks to suddenly feeling the need to please others. During this process parents often lose touch with their children as, in an attempt to control them, they actually push their adolescent children further away (Pipher, 1994, p. 22; Visser, 2004, p. ii). Support received from family plays a major role in how stressful the adolescent phase will be. Although the early adolescent girl experiences biological fluctuations in terms of her hormones and physical changes, research shows that her experience of this phase is more negatively affected by adverse social factors (Brooks-Gunn & Warren, 1989, pp. 40-55), *inter alia* the negative impressions children receive from family (Gauzze et al., 1996, pp. 2201-2216).

According to Silverberg and Steinberg (1990, pp. 658-666) the development and well-being of early adolescents are negatively affected by parents who have a weak orientation towards work, which again highlights the psychosocial aspect. Positive parental or caregiver support affects the development of healthy relationship skills in children and promotes the child’s well-being and academic performance (Albright, Weissbert, & Dusenbury, 2011, p. 1). A study on the lived experiences of aggression and violence among girls found that poor relationship skills can lead girls to feel marginalised, which causes aggressive behaviour, a lack of academic success and negative perception of the self (Adamshick, 2010, pp. 541-555; Moretti, Holland, & McCay, 2001, pp. 109-126). A very stressful chaotic family field that includes divorce, abuse, lack of involvement of parents and poor communication, adds to the early adolescent’s already vulnerable state, making her more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour (Davila, Stroud, Starr, Miller, Yoneda, & Hershenberg, 2009, pp. 909-924; Louw et al., 1998, p. 407) as

opposed to a girl with a more loving, connected family (Steinberg & Davila, 2008, pp. 350-362). Early adolescent girls are affected negatively by change in terms of a high number of moves either in respect of home or school (Brown & Orthner, 1990, pp. 366-381), which emphasises their need for stability during this sensitive period. As early adolescent girls enter puberty, they may even experience a “hormonal clash” with their mothers if the latter simultaneously go through menopause, causing a “train wreck” and disconnection between the two generations (Dobson, 2010b, p. 203). Mothers therefore need to be sensitive to their daughters’ biological changes. Fathers also play a vital role in the early adolescent girl’s healthy development, as the caring affirmation from her father develops the girl’s self-worth, particularly during the awkwardness of adolescence. Despite her changing physical appearance, she needs to know from her father during this time that she is still loved and “lovely”. This will affect her future relationship with herself and with the opposite gender (Dobson, 2010b, pp. 19-20, 60).

The aforementioned literature confirms the powerful role the family may play in the psychosocial development and well-being of early adolescent girls in the private school setting.

2.2.3.7. *The effect of cultural and social facets on early adolescent girls in the private school setting*

Cultural and societal influences will affect the development of early adolescent girls in the private school setting, particularly as these girls hail from a more affluent society in which the lives of rich and famous celebrities will appeal to them. Pinsky and Young (2010, p. 92) suggest that fame allows people to “act out in ways that are exciting, dramatic and rebellious”, which is very appealing “to the impressionable teen seeking a model for establishing autonomy and selfhood” with the result that “such a dysfunctional strategy can have perverse appeal”. Such aspects of societal influence can be very appealing to the early adolescent girl who is plagued with feelings of inferiority that attack her self-worth like a “volcanic force” (Dobson, 2010a, p. 25). According to Dobson (2010a, p. 25), girls in early adolescence ask of their environment: “Who am I? Who needs me? Who cares about me? Will I be accepted? Will people laugh at me? Will I be able to compete with others? Do I have a place in this world? Does anybody love me?”

This uncertainty, fear of rejection and need for acceptance is complicated by the “mixed messages and cultural expectations” she receives from society, namely: “be beautiful but beauty is only skin deep; be sexy but not sexual; be honest but don’t hurt others’ feelings; be independent but be nice; be smart but not too smart as to threaten boys”, and this confusion leads to a diminished, fragmented loss of self (Fonda, 2011, p. 43; Pipher, 1994, pp. 35-36). The mixed messages that early adolescent girls receive, downgrade their abilities and intuitive wisdom, often causing them to feel fearful and anxious about their future (Oaklander, 2007, p. 298). Cultural expectations can often cause children to feel not confirmed or acknowledged for who they are, while simultaneously feeling like they don’t belong. Children learn from their culture what is acceptable and what not, and they learn to adjust themselves to the demands of this culture. Early adolescent girls may become angry as they feel forced to assume the responsibilities of their new role in society, while simultaneously struggling with mixed cultural messages in relation to their bodies and independence (McMillan, 2011, p. i). These girls will also experience a powerful perturbation (Meyer et al., 2003, p. 477) and increased vulnerability in the case of culturally accepted divorce. Even though divorce is considered to be very traumatic for children at any age, it is truly devastating for the adolescent (Dobson, 2010b, p. 202).

Western cultures expect girls to be more sensitive to the opinions and feelings of others than boys. The early adolescent girl’s entry into new social environments (which requires a greater protection of the self), as well as the fact that her identity formation is taking place and may lead to feelings of uniqueness and invulnerability, all work together to increase her state of egocentrism (Louw et al., 1998, p. 420). Adolescent girls are therefore sensitive to media messages that portray the outer image of females as more important than their inner character (Naigle, 2004, p. 16). As the critical evaluation skills of these girls have not developed fully yet (Rosenblum & Lewis, 1999, pp. 50-64), they will model media characters to achieve similar outcomes in search of strong social connections (Granello, 1997, pp. 24-54). The media often present an “array of self-gratifying options” for adolescents in terms of “drugs, alcohol, antisocial behaviour, sex and dangerous acting out”, as demonstrated by celebrities who are idolised by adolescents, which makes it difficult for adolescents to not be influenced by such “parasocial relationships” (Pinsky, 2010, p. 188). Due to their vulnerability, whereby their self-worth relies on the

context of their relationships (Cohen-Sandler, 2006, p. 6), the girls are easily influenced by those they look up to (including celebrities) and in general will be highly sensitive to the opinions of other (Botta, 1999, pp. 22-41), particularly in relation to themselves. Early adolescent girls within the private school setting are not immune to such media influences and these may have a negative impact on their vulnerable state.

Although most private schools strictly prohibit the use of physical violence, the early adolescent girl's thoughts towards being physically aggressive might be changing due to increased cultural acceptance of such violence. By presenting violence in situations such as female prisons and mud wrestling as sensational, the media are virtually encouraging a popular aggressive female cultural role. Recent research shows how the "social informs the personal and the personal transforms the social" (Brown & Tappan, 2008, p. 56), causing a vicious cycle. Research on the phenomenology of "girls fighting like guys" (Brown & Tappan, 2008, p. 48) and gender identity illustrates the complex yet clear interrelationship between social gender identity and personal gender identity. Gender identity as learnt from society can therefore be linked to aggressive behaviour in the form of bullying in schools. As humans we all have the innate ability to show empathy towards ourselves as well as towards others. However, it is our specific experiences as we develop that determine whether or not such potential is allowed to become a vital part of one's self and well-being (Baron & Byrne, 2004, p. 410).

According to Taylor (2011, p. xv), the affluent culture to which students at private schools are exposed is frequently toxic, including issues such as peer pressure and cyber-bullying, with emphasis on attractive physical appearance and popularity. Research has shown Internet usage and instant messaging as being associated with social anxiety and loneliness in school with a negative effect on the well-being of adolescents (Gross, Juvonen, & Gable, 2002, pp. 75-90). Various socio-political aspects and issues in South Africa (e.g. crime) can be compounding stressors in the form of experienced trauma and pressure that can affect the healthy personal boundary formation of children (Cloud & Townsend, 1992, p. 104). Siegel (2011, pp. 86-87) argues that through cultural influence the brain is "harnessed to allow the mind to create itself". Siegel explains further that if a baby born 40 000 years ago had been frozen and were brought back to life in the present age, he/she "would be at equal potential to use iPods" than would a baby born today. The

culture of which early adolescent girls within the private school setting are a part plays a highly influential role in their development as a whole, thereby impacting on the girls' identity formation, psychosocial development and all-round lived experience of the private school.

2.2.3.8. *Synthesis: The well-being of early adolescent girls in a private school setting*

In summary, the well-being of early adolescent girls can be described as their general health and happiness, which involves an integration of their emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual health (Sibcy, 2011b, p. 54). According to Levine (2006, pp. 38-59), a person's general health and happiness is an "inside job" affected by external factors relating to having our basic needs for love, support, acceptance, safety and security met. Taylor (2002, p. xv) contends that unconditional love and acceptance is as vital an aspect of well-being as having a "sense of competence and mastery" over one's "world". Although affluence and material wealth may also be factors that enhance a person's well-being when compared to being poverty-stricken, they are not considered essential aspects of the healthy "sense" the individual needs to have of her "self" in order to experience well-being (Levine, 2006, p. 64).

The modern-day pressure to excel and meet the expectations placed on them in a private school setting may cause early adolescent girls to become "overwhelmed and exhausted" in their pursuit of perfection (Cohen-Sandler, 2006, p. 4). Unhealthy perfectionism causes extreme self-criticism with constant worry over mistakes, self-doubt and excessive valuing of parental expectations (Frost et al., 1990, pp. 449-468). Unhealthy perfectionism has also been linked to parental psychological control, eating disorders, depression and low self-esteem (Ben-Shahar, 2009, p. 139; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyten, Duriez, & Goossens, 2005, pp. 487-498; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Smit, Lowet, & Goossens, 2007, pp. 239-249; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, Luyten, Duriez, & Goossens, 2008, p. 473; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Vandereycken, Luyten, Sierens, & Goossens, 2008, pp. 144-152).

As early adolescent girls are in the process of shaping their autonomous identity, the private school setting may work in support of the girls' well-being, provided that an autonomy-supportive approach is followed. In fact, research clearly

highlights the negative effects of conditional regard on the child's self-worth and autonomy (Assor et al., 2009, pp. 482-497; Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009, pp. 255-270; Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997, pp. 135-167; Kamins & Dweck in Assor et al., 2004, pp. 47-87; Luby et al., 2009, 1156-1166; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Ryan, & Deci, 2009, pp. 1119-1142). Both positive and negative conditional regard that play a role in socialising have adverse emotional and academic consequences, therefore an attitude of support for autonomy is preferred (Roth et al., 2009, pp. 1119-1142). Harter (1991) and Wilson (1991) (in Grolnick & Beiswenger, 2006, pp. 230-237) state that when an autonomy-supportive approach towards children is adopted, the latter have higher self-esteem and lower symptoms of depression and anxiety (as cited in Grolnick & Beiswenger, 2006, pp. 230-237).

An autonomy-supportive approach involves respectfully acknowledging the child's beliefs and feelings whilst adhering to fair limit setting, without the use of forceful behaviour or language (Grolnick et al., 1997, pp. 135-161). In this way there is a conditional regard towards the morals, values and behaviours the child may choose, but also an unconditional love for the individual. Taylor (2011, p. 60) believes that parents can love their children in the wrong way by praising them "unceasingly", "unrealistically" and incongruently and rewarding them in terms of their achievements and accomplishments, which he terms "outcome love". This may lead children to experience feelings of sadness, worthlessness, anger, guilt, shame and internal pressure to succeed. Although such praise may lead to academic and athletic success, the child's inner world is governed by turmoil and angst as he/she develops a conflicted view of the world due to the "unpredictable, inconsistent", conditional love he/she receives from parents. It has been shown that parents who support the pre-adolescent child's autonomy and are encouraging without being overly controlling, help promote the adolescent's effective emotional regulation (Roth et al., 2009, pp. 1119-1142), which is clearly in the best interests and for the well-being of the early adolescent girl.

Since early adolescent girls in a private school setting are in a vulnerable state due to their gender, transitional developmental phase and a combined array of modern-day expectations and challenges, their continued healthy development and well-being needs to remain a matter in need of on-going attention and understanding. The girls need to be given a "voice" so as to express their true emotions with regard to their experiences. This will enable them to experience

themselves as “creative, courageous and connected people” and will contribute to their well-being and healthy development (Kent, Evans, & Shirley, 2004, para. 1, 2 & 3, Inquisitive Courage, para. 3).

In terms of Siegel’s “Triangle of Well-being”, the “three spheres” of mind, brain and relationship are “integrated” (Sibcy, 2011b, p. 54), and the mind is “an embodied process that regulates the flow of energy and information” to the brain and the body as a whole. Relationships are the way that “energy and information are shared and regulated between persons through the process of connection and communication”. According to Wheeler (2011, p. 13), “relational commitments and experiences are inseparable from individual welfare and health” with current research showing that healthy relationships improve immune response, reduce stress, improve cognitive power, increase emotional stability, and promote health and well-being. Therefore another requirement for the well-being of early adolescent girls lies in their having healthy, supportive relationships. Siegel (2011, p. 107) contends that the ability for integration which stems from a secure attachment, is “at the heart of mindfulness”, being aware of one’s self and others, which in turn is at the heart of well-being.

The factors discussed above enhance the psychosocial well-being of early adolescent girls in the private school setting, thereby working towards their healthy development and against the worldwide “epidemic of inferiority” and low self-worth among girls and women (Dobson, 2010a, pp. 24-30).

2.3. Examining the Lived Experiences of Early Adolescent Girls in a Private School Setting

The lived experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting were examined in this study to gain a deeper understanding of such experiences and create awareness of how the girls can be better supported in their continued psychosocial growth, development and well-being. Lived experience refers to the individual’s “subjective experience and the context of that experience” (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 1). According to Denzin (1989, p. 28), in understanding a person’s lived experience we are able to “connect the internal with the social”, with the intention of understanding the person’s “subjectivity from within”. Attempting to achieve a glimpse into someone’s lived experience is both a rigorous (based on systematic observation) and imaginative (based on expressive insights) process

(Charlton, 2008, p. 28). The concept of lived experience is linked to phenomenology, which is the study of phenomena in our lived experiences (Macann, 1993, pp. 1, 56). A phenomenological study focuses on the “first person view” (Smith, 2011, para. 2), as it is believed that only those who have actually experienced a phenomenon can communicate it to the outside world; therefore it is vital to gain an understanding of the phenomenon from “those who lived it” (Mapp, 2008, pp. 308-311). One’s lived experience can be summed up as one’s world as one experiences it (Woldt & Toman, 2005, p. 71, 78-79), the experience “as one lives it” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 63). The methodology of this study, in other words the way the researcher attempted to study the phenomenon (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 6), was aligned with interpretive description (Hunt, 2009, pp. 1284-1292; McPherson & Thorne, 2006, pp. 1-11; Sandelowski, 2000, pp. 334-340; Sandelowski, 2002, pp. 104-115; Thorne, Reimer Kirkham, & O’Flynn-Magee, 2004, 5-9). This technique was used to explore and describe in depth the early adolescent girls’ lived experiences in the private school setting. Interpretive description allows for a meaningful investigation and “illuminates the phenomenon being studied in a new way” (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 9). It allows for the fact that reality is “complex, contextual, constructed and subjective”, and therefore needs to be studied holistically. Interpretive description further considers the inseparableness of the researcher and the participant, and their interactive influence on each other, which allows for the “encountering of multiple realities signified by the unique interpretation of each” (Thorne et al., 2004, p. 5). Interpretive description allows for in-depth interviewing, which seeks to understand the meanings the participants have ascribed to a particular situation and requests the participants to describe their lived experience of such a situation. Hence the interpretive paradigm provided a more “subjective lens” (Maree, 2010, p. 32) through which the girls’ experiences of the private school could be studied. A deeper understanding of the girls’ interpretations of their experiences, in combination with the researcher’s interpretation, led to a richer, often co-constructed, description of their lived experiences of the school. The interpretive description allowed for the emergence of thematic patterns, while also accounting for each girl’s individual variation and “subjective perceptions”.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the literature study that was performed to explore the psychosocial development of early adolescent girls from various theoretical perspectives. The well-being of early adolescent girls in terms of their psychosocial development within the private school setting was subsequently discussed. A synthesis was drawn regarding the well-being of early adolescent girls in a private school setting. Next, the ground for the empirical investigation was set in the form of the concept of lived experience and the interpretive descriptive paradigm. These two constituted the methodological lenses through which the early adolescent girls' experience of the private school was viewed in the course of the empirical investigation (more details in the chapter to follow). The empirical investigation, including the procedure followed and the findings of the study will be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

3.1. Introduction and Orientation of the Investigation

3.1.1. The context

The overall aim of the study was to explore early adolescent girls' psychosocial experiences of the private school setting in order to give the girls a voice whilst simultaneously creating awareness among parents and teachers of how the girls may better be supported in their continued healthy development and well-being during this vulnerable stage. The setting for the empirical study was a private Christian co-ed school that focuses on holistic education whereby an array of areas is covered in an effort to educate and prepare the girls fully for their future adulthood – particularly in terms of university and working opportunities.

The private school opened its doors in 1997 to 298 pupils. Since then it has grown to include a pre-primary school, a primary school and a high school accommodating a total of 1800 pupils. Although each school has its own headmaster, the three schools fall under the umbrella of one and all are situated on the same premises. The school has always had a strong Christian ethos and aims to assist pupils in achieving all-round excellence. The school boasts a 100% matric pass rate since its inception. The resources of the school include highly educated and experienced teachers, two fully equipped computer laboratories, four science laboratories, two fully equipped music centres, two libraries, two swimming pools, eight tennis and netball courts, four rugby fields, two hockey fields and three cricket fields. The school therefore offers a variety of sports, arts and extramural activities, with children also being exposed to charity work, community service projects, the International Maths and Science Olympiad, local as well as overseas educational outings and tours, to name but a few.

There are five classes per grade with approximately 24 children per class, ranging from Grade 000 to Grade 12. The participants in this study – being volunteers from the Grade 7 girls' group – are part of the primary school which has approximately 840 pupils of which 60 are the Grade 7 girls.

3.1.2. The participants

Early adolescent girls in Grade 7 at the private school were sought to participate in the study. In terms of the parents' relationship with the headmaster and the school, in line with the headmaster's decision and in keeping with the ethical considerations of the study (Chapter 1.8) regarding respect for the participant's vulnerability and autonomy and making an effort to do no harm, it was agreed that the initial contact with the parents needed to be through the headmaster. Accordingly, the research information and request for participation in the study was drawn up by the headmaster in writing and issued to each parent on behalf of the girls. Responses were received from only 15 out of the total of 60 girls in Grade 7 who had initially volunteered to participate in the study. At a later stage, after communication with the parents of some non-volunteers, the researcher became aware that there had been a fear of participation among some parents and girls. The researcher is of the opinion that a possible miscommunication may have been avoided if the researcher had been given the opportunity to address the parents in an initial group discussion in person. Table 1 contains some details about the participants.

Table 1: Participants

Participant code	Participant's age	Participant's race	Participant's home situation	Participant's school status	First Phase: Medium used	Follow-up advice given:
PA1	13	White	Supportive family, slightly overprotective, no pressure to excel Parents – married	Non-prefect, top academic, top art, not sporty, not very popular Very obedient	Collage	✓
PA2	13	White	Overprotective family, slight pressure to excel Parents – divorced	Non-prefect, medium academic, very sporty, popular group Medium obedience	Collage	✓
PA3	13	White	Supportive yet unavailable family, no pressure to excel Parents – divorced	Non-prefect, poor academic, very sporty Possible rebel	Letter	✓
PA4	13	Asian	Supportive family, pressure to excel Parents – married	Prefect, very obedient, medium academics, Very obedient	Letter	✓
PA5	13	White	Supportive family, slightly overprotective, pressure to excel Parents – married	Prefect, very obedient, medium to poor academic, very sporty Very obedient	Journal	-

PA6	13	White	Supportive family, no pressure to excel At times unavailable parents – divorced	Non-prefect, medium to high academic, arts and drama Very obedient	Letter	✓
PA7	13	White	Supportive family, pressure to excel Parents – married	Prefect, medium academic, very sporty Very obedient	Letter	✓
PA8	13	Asian	Supportive family, pressure to excel, over-critical at times Parents – married	Prefect, medium academic, very good at drama Slightly rebellious	Journal	✓
PA9	13	White	Supportive family, pressure to excel At times absent parents Parents – married	Non-prefect, medium academic, very sporty Very obedient	Journal	✓
PA10	13	White	Unsupportive family, no pressure to excel Unavailable parents – married	Non-prefect, poor academic, no school sport, no extramural activities Rebel	Letter	✓
*	13	White	Supportive family, no pressure to excel Parents – married	Non-prefect, medium academic, arty Very obedient	Collage	-
	13	Black	Supportive family, no pressure to excel At times unavailable parents – married	Non-prefect, medium academic, involved in a lot of sport and arts, but doesn't excel Very obedient	Collage	-
	13	White	Supportive family, pressure to excel Parents – married	Prefect, high academic, excels in sport Very obedient	Collage	-
	13	White	Supportive family, no pressure to excel Parents – married	Non-prefect, tries to do well at academics and sport but doesn't excel Very obedient	Journal	-
	13	Asian	Quite supportive family, pressure to excel At times unavailable parents – married	Non-prefect, medium to high academic, involved in many art and music extramural activities Very obedient	Journal	-

* Participants 11 through 15 were not coded by number as they remain anonymous.

3.1.3. The data collection process

For Phase One of the data collection, a work session was set up for the 15 girls who had volunteered and obtained their parents' permission to take part in the study. The work session was conducted by the head of the Life Orientation department at the school, who was appointed by the headmaster to assist the researcher. The headmaster felt that during this first phase of data collection and with respect for the girls' vulnerable state, they should be in contact with the teacher, as an existing

relationship was in place. The teacher was instructed verbally by the researcher and the written request (Appendix B) was then given to her to pass on to the girls. The researcher's request to the girls was to express their experiences of the school through their medium of choice, either in the form of a collage, confidential letter or journal entries over a period of ten school days. The teacher instructed the girls verbally and then wrote the researcher's instructions on the blackboard, after which the girls copied them into their work books. The girls were given two weeks to complete the task. This was to make allowance for work pressures and to allocate sufficient time for those who had chosen to do the journal entries, which had to cover a period of ten school days.

Each task was chosen by five volunteers, which provided a total of five collages (c1-5), five letters (L1-5) and five journals (j1-5). The participants handed their completed task back to the assisting teacher by the set date in a confidential sealed envelope that was collected by the researcher. As the researcher had to communicate through the teacher and did not verbally give the instruction to the girls herself, it was felt that this may have had an impact on the girls' understanding of the instruction. The researcher felt it would have been much better if she had been given the opportunity to instruct the girls herself, as on receiving the data back from the volunteers, it was clear that a few girls had misunderstood the request. This was particularly evident in the journal entries received, specifically with one participant who treated the journal as an everyday recording of home life issues with no reference to her lived experiences of the school.

For Phase Two of the data collection, the researcher selected ten girls from the initial 15 to take part in in-depth interviews aimed at gaining rich information and a deeper understanding of the girls' lived experiences of the school. The selection process was done by the researcher after an initial preliminary analysis of the data collected in Phase One. She based her choice of participants on the richness of the data, but took care not to allow possible themes or categories to influence the selection process at this point. The researcher also endeavoured to include a representative and even blend of girls from the various sectors, being prefects, non-prefects, high and low achievers in academics, high and low achievers in sport, and even those considered by the school to be 'rebellious'.

While interviewing the participants, the researcher experienced extreme time pressure. She was warned by the assisting teacher about the heavy work load and

constant activities to which the girls are exposed. The assisting teacher agreed to allow the researcher the first two periods of three mornings a week for the interviews as these were assembly periods and thus would not impose on the girls study time and cause them to miss out on work. These periods would give the researcher at least one hour with each participant. However, due to unforeseen issues at the school, the researcher was given extremely late notice to interview the first girl and in the rush did not have any means with her to audiotape the interview. She had to make handwritten notes of this particular interview and kept them for record purposes and to maintain the trustworthiness of the study (Chapter 1.6) as well as the credibility and authenticity of the data. The first two weeks of interviewing then proceeded well after this initial problem. However, during the last week of data collection a set day for interviewing was lost due to the death and funeral of a fellow pupil. The interview therefore had to be postponed to the following week. The assisting teacher then suggested that the researcher may wish to remain at the school for two entire days during which the children would be doing set work in their own time. Classes would anyway be interrupted while the year's school photos were taken and interviewing the children would not cause them to miss out on set lessons. This arrangement unfortunately proved not a great success due to the constant interruptions from the intercom.

At the end of the data collection period, and as a continuation of the interview process, the researcher phoned the ten participants and requested them to write a short paragraph on the advice (Appendix J) they would give other girls in their position on how to cope with the main issue discussed during their one-on-one interviews. The girls were told to seal their written advice in a confidential envelope and hand it to the assisting teacher the following day for collection by the researcher. Advice notes were received from nine of the ten participants as Participant 5 had forgotten to do the task due to preparations for an overseas trip.

3.1.4. Data analysis

The researcher analysed the collages (Appendix F), letters (Appendix G), journal entries (Appendix H), in-depth interviews (Appendix I), advice to peers (Appendix J), as well as field notes (Appendix K) that contained the researcher's observations and self-reflective notes. This analysis of multiple types of data allowed the themes and categories to crystallise into clear findings.

The data were analysed through multiple readings, followed by the development of categories and themes from the raw data. All data were studied per type across participants. Categories were coded in accordance with a description of the meaning of each category. This process of categorisation and thematic allocation of the data were repeated as the researcher re-analysed the data several times. Each time she became more familiar with the data and used the opportunity to retest her interpretations. As the patterns reappeared, some data that were not as frequent in terms of the girls' lived experiences fell away. In the process of crystallisation the remaining data settled into the categories and themes as shown in the findings. The findings were finally reviewed against the available literature dealing with these themes and categories.

In this next section, the results and findings of the empirical study will be presented thematically and categorically. Categories will follow main themes with each category having an explanation, a paraphrase of findings, quotations from the data to illustrate such findings, followed by a literature check and discussion. Each theme will also end with a literature check and discussion. Quotations are coded in terms of the data type and number for Phase One (e.g. c3 is the third collage; L4-3 indicates the number of the letter and the line location; j2-6 indicates the number of the journal and the day). For the interviews in Phase Two, the participant number and text location within the transcript constitute the code (e.g. 2-16) and advice given in the follow-up note is coded as the participant number + adv (e.g. 2adv).

3.2. Results and Findings of the Study

3.2.1. Overview

In exploring the early adolescent girls' psychosocial lived experiences of the private school setting, the researcher analysed the data in accordance with the two secondary research questions of the study. The first concerned those experiences that the girls interpreted as positive and the second those experiences that the girls interpreted as negative. Since the researcher's interpretive lens featured here, it must be admitted that analysis of the same data through a different lens could possibly have resulted in the emergence of different thematic and categorical components. Despite the assumptions concerning the challenges that the private school setting holds for the healthy psychosocial development of the early adolescent girl, it was never the intention of the researcher to focus solely on the

negative experiences of these girls. It was argued that positive experiences may be a solid starting base from which to increase the support needed by the early adolescent girl in a private school environment so as to ensure her continued healthy development and well-being.

In analysing the data, the researcher concluded that the positive experiences concerned a single theme and had fewer categories of distinction than the negative experiences. This did not seem to indicate that the girls had fewer positive experiences, but rather that the negative experiences contained more themes and categories and were more unique in terms of their complexity and diversity.

3.2.2. Positive psychosocial lived experiences (theme)

3.2.2.1. Category 1: Holistic education

Holistic education can be described as a broad focus on developing the girls' gifts and talents in areas of academics, spirituality and issues of morality and responsibility.

(a) Findings

The participants appreciate the various aspects of the holistic education that they receive from the school and which they feel assist them in their all-round transition into adulthood:

... it helps you develop your talents because it helps you to go for your dreams and helps you to be what you want to be and nothing is holding you back [4-77].

The participants realise that they are given the opportunity to learn to respect themselves and others, as well as to respect and accept the diverse cultures of fellow schoolmates:

I quite enjoy the cultural differences, I enjoy learning about what they believe and think [2-121]; I wouldn't want to be in a school with all the same culture [7-26].

They report that in receiving knowledge and developing good values and morals they learn the importance of truth and honour:

... you do get a lot of knowledge and they encourage you to be truthful [4-3]; It teaches you good values and morals and it has a very good name and the standard is high [6-41].

They enjoy taking part in charity and outreach work aimed at serving the surrounding community:

... it makes us feel good about ourselves that we are helping people and stuff like that. So I feel good about myself when I do charity [4-56]; ... it made me feel good to know that I was helping people [5-4].

The girls value the fact that they are given the opportunity to excel and develop their gifts and talents:

... what I like about this school is if you do something really well [6-22], ... the best thing about this school is the academics, ... it isn't average, it's excellent and you can excel [c5]; ... my parents chose my school because they wanted the best education for me [j5].

They feel that the school prepares them well for university and future adult opportunities:

... help you to get a passion in drama and art and maybe in the future at university you can choose arts or drama to study further [8-43]; ... do well and go to university and have a good job [1-30].

They also enjoy the strong Christian ethos and feeling of communion at the school:

... what we do at school during assemblies and devotions keeps reinforcing my Christianity. It keeps me focused, strong and guides me and I feel I can then draw strength from Jesus to develop my talents. It gives me direction [5-37]; I'm a strong Christian, it keeps me strong [8-7].

(b) Literature check and discussion

Research shows that the school plays a role not only in teaching the relevant curriculum material, but also in developing the students' characters as confirmed by Lord (2001, pp. 50-51) (2.2.3.2). This fact is experienced by the girls in the private school. Outreach activities, which are included in the undertakings of this private school, are considered a positive attribute to the early adolescent girl's well-being. Studies have shown that in early adolescent girls, gratitude is related to social, emotional and physical benefits. Creating meaningful experiences for others enhances the girls' own well-being, as indicated by Froh et al. (2008, pp. 1-18) (2.2.3.2). According to Malema (2004, pp. 59-60), girls at private schools have higher occupational aspirations for themselves than those in government schools. According to Freud's view as cited in Corey (2005, p. 63), early adolescent girls are

able to release their “sexual energy” through socially acceptable activities such as engaging in arts and sport and forming friendships. As shown by research and confirmed in 2.2.3.2., moral and student identities are the strongest predictors of achievement in early adolescent girls (Roeser et al., 2008, pp. 115-152), and these may be seen as factors that are purposefully developed in the girls through the holistic education offered at the private school.

3.2.2.2. Category 2: Supportive family

Support from parents and siblings in the form of emotional availability, a safe place of comfort, as well as firm guidance and balanced responsibilities constitutes this category.

(a) Findings

The participants report that they feel supported by their family, if their family is available to offer guidance and be understanding:

... my mom was really understanding about it and she had also gone through something similar in school so she could help me and give me advice [6-9]; He (brother) gives me a lot of support and teaches me quite a lot [7-27]; ... like they are always there to help me decide [4-45]).

They also find support in a non-judgemental attitude:

... he says, ‘OK, I’ll help you through it, and he’ll give me a lecture about it, but he doesn’t say it in a mean way. With my mom, she instantly goes into this rage and she instantly tells me, ‘No, this is wrong’ and I’m not supposed to do this [2-136]; ... she encourages me to talk every day and get it all off my chest, she helps a lot [5-22].

(b) Literature check and discussion

“Mindful parenting” focuses on the foundational role of parents. It attempts to develop parental abilities for emotional awareness and self-regulation as well as to increase parents’ compassion and non-judgmental acceptance of their children (Duncan et al., 2009, pp. 255-270). Studies have shown that adolescents who have a good attachment to their parents perceive themselves as strong. A good attachment to parents can be seen as a foundationally critical variable associated with the psychological well-being of adolescents as propounded by Raja et al. (1992, pp. 471-485) (2.2.3.6), and it is equally needed for good interpersonal relationships with friends and peers.

As stated by Burns (2010, pp. 96-110) (2.2.3.6), adolescents thrive in a family environment that is stable, affectionate, warm and encouraging, and communication is viewed as key to a successful family. Levine (2006, p. 132) describes warmth as being characteristic of “involvement, understanding, acceptance and love that parents communicate”. These statements are in line with the participants’ interpretations of a supportive family. According to Pipher (1994, p. 83), however, research shows that the best way to ensure that adolescents become “independent, socially responsible and confident” is for parents to be “strict but loving”. It is also the opinion of the researcher that in order for adolescents to feel ‘supported’, the ‘strictness’ of parents needs to come with a fairness and respect for the opinions and feelings of their children (cf. the remark by [2-136] above). This is particularly true for the early adolescent girl who has recently entered the process of identity formation and therefore has an increasing need for her autonomy to be respected. In fact, research shows that “children from authoritative families have more balanced attitudes about achievement, better social skills, higher grades, lower rates of substance abuse and less depression than children from either permissive or authoritarian households” (Levine, 2006, p. 132).

3.2.2.3. Category 3: Supportive friends

Supportive friends can be described as peers to whom the girls feel close, who are not a part of their family. Such friends share feelings of connection, care, trust and respect for each other.

(a) Findings

The participants feel supported by their friends when they are able to be truthful and honest, and experience a feeling of connection:

I can trust them with all my heart and they are extremely loyal [L4-23];

I have a really close friend and she knows everything about me [9-5];

I like to stay in touch [c1]; ... we get to chat even after school [c4].

They stand up for each other:

They are always beside me and they have my back [L4-23],

offer each other emotional support and guidance during difficult times:

... my best friend is supportive of what I like and don't like [2-62];

I have someone to support me and listen to me and help me [9-5];

They give me great advice when I need it [L4-26],

and have fun together:

... where you can go and have fun and enjoy your friends' company [L2-31];

... my friends and I have fun [7-39].

(b) Literature check and discussion

Early adolescent girls begin to pull away from family during this period of identity formation and for a time it may seem that their friendship groups have a greater effect on their emotional state than do their families. As argued by Roeser et al. (2008, pp. 115-152) (2.2.3.5), identification with one's peers predict the well-being of early adolescent girls. Research also shows that mutual, stable friendship in early adolescence offers the girls "companionship, conflict, help/aid, security and closeness" (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994, pp. 471-484). According to Cohen-Sandler (2005, p. 231), "girls in transition are often frantic to form new friendships". On account of their self-conscious state and possible insecurities of puberty, they may feel preoccupied with being unaccepted. When adolescent girls were prompted about the one thing they would wish for that would improve their school environment, replies such as "nicer friends", "empathic friends", "friendlier people" and "fewer cliques" were given (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 232). These findings are in line with the study participants' experiences of supportive friends.

3.2.2.4. Category 4: Supportive teachers

Supportive teachers offer guidance and clear instructions for girls to understand the work being taught. They are firm but fair in their dealings with the girls and offer emotional consolation in times of need.

(a) Findings

The participants feel supported by teachers who take time to be patient in explaining work that they may find difficult to understand:

... she is a good teacher and she actually explains and helps you if you don't understand [10-29];

... they always try and help you [4-1];

... there are good teachers [L5-1].

Positive input from teachers in the form of emotional support during personal difficulties is appreciated by the girls:

Teachers sometimes help you if you (sic) going through something difficult and even if you are being bullied [9-24];

... if I forget to sign my homework diary she'll just write there 'Oh sweetie I know you've had it rough' or whatever '... just try sign your homework diary' or if I need to bring my phone I can leave it with her and umm she's just always there and I can talk to her and I know that my stuff that I say to her is safe [2-77];

... they encourage you and they understand you [4-2];

... there is this really kind teacher she is like my other mother so I can talk to her and she supports me and she helps me to be myself [5-34].

(b) Literature check and discussion

Support received from teachers can be seen as an important factor that contributes to the well-being of early adolescent girls within the private school setting. As confirmed in 2.2.3.4., positive relationship with her teacher contributes to the success of the adolescent girl's learning functions (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 137). In addition, private schools offer smaller class sizes, which have been shown to support student achievements positively (Mosteller, 1999, p. 122), allowing teachers more time to support the girls in a patient manner. Teachers with high expectations for early adolescent girls enable the girls to set healthy goals for themselves, as illustrated in 2.2.3.4 (Wentzel, 2002, pp. 287-301). However, the findings of this study show that the teacher's attitude needs to be supportive and encouraging.

3.2.2.5. Discussion: The participants' positive psychosocial lived experiences of the private school

The participants' positive lived experiences of the private school focus on their social interactions within the school environment. These interactions support the girls' authenticity, which in turn supports their healthy development and well-being. Great support from their environment is required by early adolescent girls during this time of fear and uncertainty when their need for support and understanding is increased. Levine (2008, p. 12) (2.2.2.1) explains adolescence as being a time of self-discovery, adolescents need strong support as they enter the phase of "identity formation" (Erikson in Corey, 2005, p. 63). Through positive experiences the girls may feel supported and be less inclined to experience adolescence as an extremely stressful period (Louw et al., 1998, p. 386). The more love, understanding and support they receive, the less susceptible they may be to experiences of hostility and confusion. The positive experiences were identified and

ordered as categories in terms of frequency of mentioning by the participants, such categories being family, friends and teachers. It was of course not possible to categorise the support received from family, friends and teachers into one category of general support, as each area supplies the girl with a varying type of support, thus meeting her diverse needs for healthy development and well-being. For example, in the support received from her family, particularly during the awkwardness of adolescence with her changing physical appearance, the early adolescent girl needs to know that she is still “lovely”, as this will affect her future relationship with herself and those of the opposite gender (Dobson, 2010b, pp. 19-20, 60) (2.2.3.6).

3.2.3. Negative psychosocial lived experiences

3.2.3.1. Theme 1: Conditional regard from peers

3.2.3.1.1. Category 1: Peer pressure to be cool

The peer pressure to be cool can be explained as the pressure that peers place on each other to be seen as cool. ‘Cool’ is the term given to the standard of behaviour and attire set by peers in order to be seen as superior and acceptable, as opposed to being seen as inferior and unacceptable.

(a) Findings

The participants’ lived experience of being cool is to be superior and wealthy:

... popularity is an act of superiority [L3-37];

... they start thinking they own everyone and they feel that they are better than everyone [4-8];

... they think they have so much power over my life [6adv];

... cool kids come from extremely rich families [1-46];

I have a new friend and she visits me at my house, I live in a complex and it’s small then she goes to visit this one who lives in this like mansion, then she says to me, ‘You don’t have this or you don’t have that’ [3-46].

They have older boyfriends:

some of the girls date like 5 to 6 years older than them just because it’s cool [2-103];

... but it all confuses me that the girls do this, like one minute they like this guy and the next minute they like that guy, they just keep dating guys going in and out of relationships, it’s so weird and I just think it’s stupid, all to look cool [8-10]).

It is about wearing clothes that are considered cool – in the hope of fitting in and in fear of being ridiculed:

I go out and buy the shoes ‘she has made fashionable’, I feel like her victim, but I do it because I want to look right, the way everyone else does, I don’t want to be left out or laughed at [1-6],

and changing yourself to fit in with the ‘cool’ girls:

... try to be friends with people that you can’t be yourself with [8adv];

... make friends with the wrong crowd, popularity [3adv].

The obedient, well-disciplined girls, who strive for the excellence that the school expects, feel the cool girls set a bad example for the rest of their peers:

Behaviour-wise most of us set a good example but you do get people which gets (sic) people out of hand because they think they can act like that too [4-80];

... she’s doing (sic) bad leadership and yet she is being more rewarded for it [5-18].

In an attempt to be accepted by the ‘cool, in group’, the girls often fall into the trap of being false and going against their morals and values just so as to fit in and not to be rejected or isolated:

It makes me think and go against my own morals [2-128]

Then they expect you to choose sides and I don’t so, then they fight with me [8-11];

If you try and stick to your values and morals people will find a way to make sure you don’t [L1-6].

(b) Literature check and discussion

As explained by Cohen-Sandler (2005, p. 6), early adolescents are not only burdened with the pressure to excel, but they are also expected to “be popular and look good”. This pressure seems to create a need in the girls to be seen as cool among their peers, although they are embarrassingly aware of their inability to be authentic at the same time. With the majority of girls attending the school coming from more affluent families, the aspect of wealth is seen as an important part of being cool. However, as indicated in 2.2.3.5., the affluent culture to which students of private schools are exposed is frequently toxic, comprising of peer pressure and cyber-bullying, while placing too much emphasis on girls’ physical appearance and popularity status (Taylor, 2011, p. xv). The effects of cyber-bullying and peer

pressure on the well-being of adolescents is seen in the work of Gross et al. (2002, pp. 75-90) (2.2.3.5). Early adolescent girls may behave inauthentically and take part in risky behaviour such as drinking alcohol and smoking in order to fit in, and thus succumb to peer pressure (Louw et al., 1998, p. 407). Thus the peers become the victims of the cool girls as they move further away from their authentic selves and feel trapped in a world of pressure, falseness and fear.

3.2.3.1.2. Category 2: Peer bullying

Bullying is the way in which the cool girls make publicly known the distinction between being cool or uncool, being superior or inferior, being seen as important or unimportant. The standard, power and confidence that 'coolness' exudes are enforced through peer bullying.

(a) Findings

According to the participants, early adolescent girls at the private school bully their peers by means of mocking and judging:

*... there is this like really fat girl and everyone makes fun of her [8-19];
... the popular kids' response, '...because you're FAT and UGLY' [13];
...and then they will say in front of everyone, 'Oh you never get invited to any parties', so it's like let everyone know that you are not cool and they shouldn't like you [9-3],*

which makes other girls fear being subjected to the same ridicule:

*... worry about being judged [9-21];
I'm afraid that if I get fat I'll be teased [8-19].*

The sports field is not exempt from bullying. In terms of school sports, the girls will mock their peers within their own team:

*I stopped because of the competitiveness amongst the girls in the teams [1-1];
... she tried to beat me and because I was faster and in front of her she pulled me down under the water [5-30].*

They will also mock other teams in a bragging sense that they are in the superior team:

*the A and B teams treat us like we're a piece of dirt [L4-54];
they are always running us down and throwing it in our face that they are better than us [7-11].*

There are girls who bully by spreading false, vicious rumours:

... we had a fight and then she made up this rumour that I had sex and it wasn't even true [6-1];

... she was definitely one of those who started spreading rumours about me [2-98]

These rumours have devastating long-term effects on the innocent party's reputation:

But what she didn't realise is that gossip spreads like wild fire and burns like the pain of standing in one. But how I found out was the worst, "Did you hear? I heard from X that you had sex with someone" [L3-9];

... and it was horrible and disgusting rumours that I can't even bring myself to repeat [2-98].

Bullying among early adolescent girls can be described as doing whatever it takes to remain cool:

... those cool people lie and backstab as long as they stay on top [c2].

The girls also experience being bullied by boys. This is done by derogatory name calling and grabbing the girls:

...but the boys would go up to like girl X and girl Y and call them sluts and stuff but they (sic) not [10-17];

... he just like, 'slut' as a joke and it's not a joke I'm not a slut and he'll often try and hold me here when he hugs me and his hands will go quite low, I've hit him twice [2-113].

The boys also bully them by making false promises of love and commitment:

If a girl gets a boyfriend they say to her 'If you send me this picture and that picture and I'll love you forever' and it really doesn't work like that and a lot of the girls fall for that trap [2-109];

...send them videos of them doing horrific things and it's gotten around, I think the whole of Grade 8 knows about it [2-111].

(b) Literature check and discussion

Bullying in the form of critical judgements from peers has a detrimental effect on the emotional well-being of early adolescent girls. This is due to the girls' vulnerable state, their self-worth being dependent on the "context of their relationships" (Cohen-Sandler, 2006, p. 6) (2.2.3.7) and the fact that they are easily influenced by the opinions of others (Botta, 1999, pp. 22-41) (2.2.3.7). It has emerged that, at times, some of the girls in the 'cool' group bully and physically fight with each other in a

power struggle. Modern culture may be influencing girls in becoming more aggressive, as illustrated in 2.2.3.7 (Brown & Tappan, 2008, pp. 47-59). Although the private school has a strict behaviour code that does not tolerate aggressive behaviour, verbal aggression is often not as easily controlled by schools. Although the insolent girls can deny their insults or express that what they said was not intended to be hurtful, the girl on the receiving end's sense of self-worth and self-confidence is damaged. As demonstrated in 2.2.3.7, although humans have the innate ability to show empathy towards themselves and others, the life events experienced will determine whether such potential is allowed to develop or not (Baron & Byrne, 2004, p. 410). In addition, as reported in 2.2.3.6, adjustments during early adolescence are made more difficult by the negative impressions children receive from friends (Gauzze et al., 1996, pp. 2201-2216).

3.2.3.2. Theme 2: Conditional regard from teachers

3.2.3.2.1. Category 1: Degrading treatment of girls by teachers

The girls feel that some teachers are treating them in a degrading way in front of others. *Degrading* refers to any way that is perceived as not being respectful of the girl. Degrading treatment leads to feelings of inferiority, embarrassment and even humiliation, causing the adolescent girl to feel self-conscious in front of her peers.

(a) Findings

The participants experience some of the teachers as treating them in a degrading manner if the teachers do not deem their behaviour or performance appropriate:

I got suspended for something I didn't do and instantly all the teachers started to treat me differently [L3-13];

...the teacher thought I was messing around and not doing my homework and she walked into this other class I was in and screamed at me in front of the other teacher and whole class. It was so embarrassing! I felt really pathetic [1-39];

I just think to myself, How can you say that to someone? Don't you think before you speak? I just wish sometimes these teachers can be in the kids' shoes to see how it feels to be embarrassed, degraded, shouted at and put down all the time. To be under so much pressure [5-38].

Those girls who misbehaved and are treated this way feel demotivated and bullied by the teachers. They feel that they are not given a second chance. Once they get a

bad name among the teachers, they are treated accordingly which makes some girls rebel more:

Mistakes are made, and never forgotten [c2];

I don't want to be bad anymore or get into trouble, but then I feel anything we do will get us into trouble anyway because they never give us a chance and just think bad of us all the time anyway [10-49];

...most teachers discriminate against children who have gotten in trouble, which then makes them feel like they have to cause trouble. Teachers also seem to bully [2adv].

The girls feel degraded through the enforcing of rules which they consider silly:

... prefects and cool kids break the rules and don't wear caps and if we wear our caps they make fun of us, but if we don't the teachers shout at us [1-37];

... the younger ones get away with it [10-27];

... but they are making us wear caps like babies. It's embarrassing and degrading [1-35].

(b) Literature check and discussion

Degrading treatment from teachers may have a detrimental effect on the early adolescent girl's well-being. As confirmed in 2.2.3.4, many teenagers are highly sensitive to their teachers' moods and tones, with their approval being as important as peer approval (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 37). They are very sensitive about feeling 'known and accepted'. Therefore, as illustrated in 2.2.3.4, the early adolescent girl's intellectual competence is highly reliant on whether she feels approved of by her teacher (McConville, 2001, p. 37). In summation, research shows that teachers' negative feedback or lack of nurturance is consistently negatively correlated with academic performance and acceptable social behaviour (Wentzel, 2002, pp. 287-301) (2.2.3.4).

3.2.3.2.2. Category 2: Favouritism towards specific girls and sports

Teachers treat specific girls and sports more favourably than others, thus the girls feel that this is unfair and that they are not treated as equal.

(a) Findings

The participants experience some teachers as showing favouritism towards specific girls in specific sports teams:

... the worst is favouritism [2adv];

... there's a lot of favouritism there and a lot of the A and B children, I don't think they (sic) very good, I think it's just favouritism [2-29]; Netball is a good example. The A team has been the same girls for the past 2 or 3 years. They rarely decide to put different girls in and see how they play [L4-49].

Girls who are particularly good at favourite sports, for example netball, are seen to receive special treatment from teachers:

This year the A and B team girls were extremely boastful and extremely spoilt. They were given 'tog' bags and jackets with their names on. They had special socks and a fancy netball outfit. The C team girls weren't given anything [L4-50];

... no other teams will get jackets, it's just the A and B [2-28].

A sport such as netball is treated as more important than for example softball and cultural extramural activities such as art and drama:

... but then the girls in the softball teams don't get anything [3-27]; ... and it's with rugby also, rugby will get recognised and not drama [2-32]; ... this school like recognises sport and stuff more. It would be nice if they recognised drama more, 'cause that's what I'm good at and then I (sic) feel they recognise me more [8-28].

However, the girls feel that school sports are limited and outside school sports is not recognised:

I play basketball out of school but at school like our main sport is netball and I just don't like it [4-20];

... but they don't recognize out of school sports [10-19].

Girls who are prefects are often seen as being the objects of favouritism and as receiving special treatment from teachers:

... the prefects and (sic) head girl get special treatment [L1-34]; ... but then the prefects, especially our head girl, always has messy hair and breaks the rules and she gets away with it. It's so unfair! [1-40].

Favouritism is also shown to individual girls:

I'm quite naughty and no one believed it when they made me a prefect [8-13].

Favouritism by teachers towards sport teams, individual girls, prefects and even a particular sport causes the girls to become demotivated. They feel that they are

not good enough or as important as others, which makes some simply want to quit:

... these girls do whatever they want and think they can just get what they want and they do get what they want [6-13];

... like this girl also got all the attention and Mrs C makes me feel not good enough [5-28];

... if I'm not good enough then why should I be trying [10-22];

... the way they have treated us, I'm going to quit. I don't want to play anymore [7-14].

(b) Literature check and discussion

In the initial literature study the researcher did not come across favouritism from teachers as a possible issue of concern in the early adolescent girls' psychosocial development. This unique finding raises the possibility of a particular contextual effect inherent in the private school. The favouritism as experienced by the girls may be a perception due to their need for achievement and recognition, and when they do not receive the latter, they ascribe it to favouritism. Furthermore, teachers may be focused only on achievement and on the excellence for which the school ethos calls, and thus treat those who fit into the mould more favourably than those who do not.

According to Burnett and Demnar (1996, pp. 121-129) the closeness of girls' relationship with their teachers has more of an impact on their self-esteem than it does in the case of boys. If girls consider their teacher to favour other girls over themselves, it seems to follow that this will have an effect on their self-esteem. Since early adolescent girls' "emotional experiences are a complex interaction of pubertal and societal influences" (Louw et al., 1998, p. 434), this increases their vulnerability and sensitivity to the opinions of significant others. According to a study at the University of Minnesota and as explained by Cohen-Sandler (2005, p. 237), it is in the best interest of students if teachers promote a spirit of cooperation rather than competition among students. Students feel more connected when they are treated as valued members of the school community, and teachers can make this happen when they consistently acknowledge all students – not only the high-achieving ones – as personal favourites (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 233).

3.2.3.2.3. *Category 3: Inconsistent teaching*

There is an inconsistency in teaching and in the enforcing of rules and regulations, as different teachers behave in extreme opposites to one another with regard to the support offered during teaching and the enforcing of discipline.

(a) Findings

The participants experience some teachers as being overly strict and there is a sense of an over-use of punishment to enforce rules:

... our tips programme started and they clearly explained to us how they can't just take points off for nothing, for example for talking is only minus 2 but some teachers minus 5 or even 10 points [L5-67];

... the teachers punish the whole class even though they know it's not the rest of us [7-17].

In contrast, other teachers are seen as being overly relaxed and nonchalant with regard to rules and regulations:

... it's like the teachers don't even care. Before and after the market day people were sitting on their phones in front of the teachers! And they didn't get caught, there are some people who bring their phones every single day and never get caught – it's soooo unfair [j3-7];

... teachers could be more fair and also more strict with bullying [6-43].

Some teachers are seen as being very patient in explaining misunderstood work:

... she actually explains and helps you if you don't understand [10-29],

while others are intolerant of work done incorrectly:

I think she thought I was going to bring the class standard down and maybe her reputation as a good teacher [1-39].

(b) Literature check and discussion

In the initial literature study the researcher did not come across inconsistent teaching and discipline as a possible issue of concern in the early adolescent girls' psychosocial development. This may imply that the girls at this particular private school may be more sensitive to inconsistent teaching due to the school's ethos which focuses on excellence in all areas. The girls feel pressured to meet the standard for obedience and perhaps perceive any inconsistency in terms of teachers' enforcement of such a standard as unfair. Perhaps the girls at schools with a higher tolerance for disobedience do not experience the same pressure as the girls in the

current study, and therefore they do not experience inconsistent teaching as an issue of concern.

A study performed on 1 451 early adolescents found that, when the students perceived a decline in the school climate in terms of teacher support, peer support, student autonomy and clarity and consistency in school rules and regulations, the result was a decline in the early adolescent students' psychological and behavioural adjustment (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007, pp. 194-213). As explained by Cohen-Sandler (2005, p. 137), adolescent girls want their teachers to respect them, listen to them and protect them from humiliation. If the teacher does not meet this need, it may result in a fault in the "student-teacher connection", which may cause the girl to feel unfairly treated as she may view her teacher's behaviour through the "distorted lens of her super-sensitivity" (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 137). Both a University of Minnesota study and Cohen-Sandler (2005, p. 239) recommend that in order to foster students' connectedness to schools, teachers should be attentive to their students. The contradictory nature of teachers' opposite extreme behaviours may cause early adolescent girls much distress on account of their developmental stage and cause them to feel disconnected from and unsupported by teachers. According to Kramer, Kahlbaugh and Goldstone (in Louw et al., 1998, p. 418), adolescents are characterised as "absolute thinkers", which causes them to view contradictions as incorrect or undesirable, as indeed shown by the girls' perceptions of the inconsistent teaching.

3.2.3.3. Theme 3: Pressure to meet the private school standard

3.2.3.3.1. Category 1: High academic standard

The academic expectation in terms of academic performance and work load is set at a high standard in the private school.

(a) Findings

The participants experience the standard set for academic performance as very high with a high work load expectation:

... the standard is very high at our school and the work load is a lot [1-30];

... the amount we have to study for cycle tests is really ridiculous [6-19];

... you've always got this cycle test to study for, this homework and like they don't spread it out, it's like for tomorrow [10-28].

The girls experience a constant pressure to attain and maintain such a standard:

*... and the work pressure also puts pressure on my friendships [5-22];
The bad part is fighting with your friends and other people or even the little things like scoring a low mark in a test [L2-34];
Well yes, but I have also got these other two friends who do really well academically so I try be as good as them, so I can feel good enough [6-31].*

(b) Literature check and discussion

The findings are in line with current literature, which highlights early adolescent girls' vulnerability, and the impact that puberty has on their self-esteem (Alsaker, 1996, pp. 249-258) (2.2.3.3), as compounded by the "pressure to excel" (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 6). Due to their self-conscious state, the participants may feel too insecure to ask teachers for assistance when they do not understand the work. They fear being ridiculed and humiliated, and believe everyone in the class to be analysing them and waiting for them to "mess up" (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 145). This factor adds to the pressure to excel academically that the girls may experience, as failure to gain clarity and eliminate misunderstandings may inhibit their academic success. Good performance is more certain if the girls don't feel forced to meet achievement expectations but can personally identify with the need to achieve, as it has been shown that task completion in children is promoted by the identification process (Assor et al., 2009, pp. 482-497). The findings are in line with research showing that conditional regard of early adolescent girls to achieve desired results, compounded by their fear of humiliation, may impact negatively on the girls' identity formation, leading to negative emotional and coping strategies as illustrated in 2.2.3.3. (Assor & Tal, 2011, p. 249; Knafo & Assor, 2007, pp. 232-245; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010, pp. 74-99). Additionally, as demonstrated in 2.2.3.3, girls are more prone to academic pressure and depression than boys (Petersen et al., 1991, p. 247) particularly if they feel disconnected and fearful during their stressful journey from childhood to adolescence (McMillan, 2011, p. 3041).

3.2.3.3.2. Category 2: High sport standard

As the standard is set at a high level on the sports field, girls need to attain and maintain such standard by getting into sports teams and maintaining their positions.

(a) Findings

The participants experience the sports field as highly competitive within the school context:

... *inter-team competitiveness* [7-14];

... *they each compete against each other* [1-19];

I know I deserve colours, I know I deserve to be in the team [3-14];

The A and B treat us like we were a piece of dirt and they were always bragging about how good netball players they were [L4-54].

The girls feel pressured to meet the competitive standard. When they are unable to comply, they feel that they are 'not good enough' and want to quit:

It irritates me, it makes me feel more pressured because I think all the kids are competing against me because their moms want them to and I feel panicky [1-43];

... *someone is always better than you so you don't get a chance to develop yourself in that position. Most of the people just do it for colours so like they just want to look cool and important. So that makes me just back out and not try because I feel I'm not good enough and I can't do it so I just want to quit* [9-13];

... *makes me want to quit and stop playing tennis as I don't feel good enough* [5-i-29];

... *it makes me feel like, well, then I'm not good enough for the school* [10-22].

Those who don't quit and who do get into the team experience pressure to keep up and achieve awards and colours for being the best player:

I'm so busy. People don't notice it but I'm at school 'til five at times [j5-2];

Well it's like if I don't do well in something then I don't feel good about myself because I try to do things very well and win and if I can't I just don't like being in second place [6-29];

I put more pressure on myself to do well in sports because that's what I do well, so I try (sic) be the best to stand out [9-11];

... *do it for colours* [8adv].

The high standard in sport is set by the school and reinforced by the parents and teachers:

The parents are like ridiculous! Some are normal and nice but most of them are so competitive with each other and their kids, they are always at the school [1-42];

... *and Mrs C said, 'Don't worry, you'll beat her next time'* [5-28].

(b) Literature check and discussion

The sporting standard emerges as highly competitive within this private school setting. One possible explanation (as stated by Duncan in O'Neil, 2008, p. 18) could be that "this competitive combative culture might be heard as an echo of the national culture of competition in education", since the competitive sport environment has been identified by participants as actually contributing to the rise of bullying among teenage girls. As borne out by 2.2.3.3, the competitive environment may be made worse if parents' self-esteem is reliant on their children's achievements and they therefore overinvest in their children's lives, showing disappointment towards their children when they do not meet their expectations. The children are then burdened with the responsibility of pleasing their parents which compounds their vulnerability to cultural messages of extreme achievement (Taylor, 2011, pp. 61, 82), being an added risk for the vulnerable early adolescent girl who finds herself on the private school's sport field. The youth sports that once used to be fun could now be a means of fulfilling the frustrated dreams of parents. The findings confirm the argument posed in 2.2.3.3, as "positive pushing" (Taylor, 2002, p. xxxvi), is seen as a more balanced way for parents to approach motivating their children in our modern "results-driven society" (Taylor, 2011, p. 84), in order to instil a sense of long-term competence as opposed to a short-term need to excel. In terms of the early adolescent girl's self-esteem, findings confirm current literature which shows that if she perceives her parents to be psychologically controlling and critical she may not feel approved of by them (Kernis et al., 2000, pp. 225-252) (1.2; 2.2.3.3). In addition, as demonstrated in 2.2.3.3, parental use of psychological control and conditional regard for achieving desired results and behaviours may have a negative effect on the identity formation of adolescents (Assor & Tal, 2011, p. 249; Knafo & Assor, 2007, pp. 232-245; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010, pp. 74-99). As found in the work of Kollat (2007:iii) (2.2.3.3), conditional parenting styles contribute to children using negative behaviours to achieve social goals, which may well explain the extreme competition among team players which has emerged at the private school under study.

3.2.3.3.3. *Category 3: High standard of conduct*

The private school sets a very high standard of conduct in terms of acceptable behaviour and attire. This includes the level of obedience, discipline and general

impression given by children who are seen as representing the image of excellence which the school portrays.

(a) Findings

The participants experience a pressure to attain the standard set for conduct in terms of obedience, discipline, appearance and self-control:

... we know we have to [4-16];

... or I'll get into trouble at school and things won't end up well [2-65];

There is too much pressure at the school to always follow all the rules, be obedient and stay in control [5-40];

... you feel most of the time you can't be yourself because you (sic) always worrying to follow all the rules [9-23].

The achievement of becoming a prefect in order to be a good example to the rest has emerged as an important goal for the girls. This makes them feel good about themselves as they are able to be seen as a good example of the excellence that the school expects:

Well I would have felt I wasn't like good enough to be a prefect [5-9];

... it's really good to be a prefect it makes you feel important and like you can be an ambassador for your school [4-19];

... I lost my chance of becoming a prefect [3-22].

(b) Literature check and discussion

As explained by Cohen-Sandler (2005, p. 233), adolescents do not cope well with extremely strict rules as they feel more respected when they are able to manage themselves rather than to be micromanaged. She further mentions research showing that adolescents feel more connected to a school with a moderate rather than a strict, harsh or zero tolerance discipline policy. A high expectation to stay in control and adhere to too many strict rules may increase the possibility for the early adolescent girl to fall into the trap of a need for perfect performance. This may then put her at risk of becoming a "workaholic" when she is only rewarded for her achievements and not for her personal qualities (as explained by Erikson in Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999, p. 12). The early adolescent girl needs realistic goals for achievement, with less focus on competition and more on cooperation and kindness (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999, p. 11). Whilst schools reward perfect behaviour, a pursuit of excellence through the enforcement of a high code of conduct is beneficial, as long as it does not cause a 'pursuit of perfection'. Research clearly

shows the detrimental and harmful effect of a perfectionist attitude on one's self-concept (Adderholdt & Goldberg, 1999, pp. 16, 31). Taylor (2002, p. 175) explains that when children relate their achievement to being loved, they develop a terrifying fear of failure lest they are no longer loved and accepted. Further research reports that students' self-esteem is the single most important predictor of their sense of belonging, which in turn is shaped by the expectations placed on them and the disciplinary climate (Ma, 2003, pp. 340-349).

Studies have shown that adolescent girls are under extreme pressure to achieve all the deadlines and expectations placed on them, despite the fact that many of them feel they do not have "enough hours in the day" (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 49). The girls feel overwhelmed as they attempt to conform to the requirement to excel in everything (Cohen-Sandler, 2005, p. 51), and making an additional demand for a high standard of conduct will add to their pressure to perform. Research shows that to facilitate secure passage through the adolescent transition, parents should sustain a climate of control and commitment balanced by respect for the adolescent's increased capacity for self-regulation (Baumrind, 1987, pp. 93-125). The same can therefore be said of school rules and conduct expectations enforced by their teachers, who may also be viewed as playing a role in the girls' socialisation process. With conduct expectations being considered in line with performance expectations, the girls may not learn the vital lesson of developing empathy for self and others. Being so intensely preoccupied with their own outer appearance and performance can (ironically) cause the development of conduct disorders, as girls may develop a meanness of spirit due to their fierce competition with each other (Levine, 2006, p. 85). The findings illustrate the stance taken in 2.2.3.3., as it is shown that early adolescent girls who feel unable to meet the acceptable standard may not feel good enough (Assor et al., 2004, pp. 47-87; Cicchetti & Cohen, 2006, p. 832; Kollat, 2007, p. iii; Luby et al., 2009, pp. 1156-1166).

3.2.3.4. **Theme 4: Self-concept**

3.2.3.4.1. *Category 1: Low self-esteem*

Low self-esteem is related to the girls' self-worth as they doubt their worth and value. They perceive themselves as not good enough or not important enough, and therefore do not esteem themselves highly.

(a) Findings

The participants' negative perception of the way in which they are treated by their peers and teachers (referred to as part of the theme of conditional regard), impacts on their self-worth, as they doubt themselves and think they are not good enough or important enough:

I have low self-esteem [7adv];

Emotionally? Muddled, I feel muddled [j5-3];

This is a place where your opinion is not important unless it's the same as everyone else's [2c];

I feel stupid [10-45];

I think that they (sic) better than me now and it makes me feel bad about myself [3-16];

I doubt myself and I compare myself to really skinny girls and feel so fat [9-4];

It makes me feel not very good about myself, I don't feel like I'm worth a lot [10-53];

... then I feel like nobody because my friends have rejected me [5-21];

... they put people down [L2-7];

...(they) do or say anything without consequences and tear down people's self-esteem to boost theirs [6adv].

(b) Literature check and discussion

The findings confirm statements in 2.2.3.3 with regard to the early adolescent girl's self-esteem which lowers due to her vulnerable state, comprising of low self-confidence and high self-consciousness (Steinhem in Fonda, 2011, p. 70). As studies have shown (2.2.3.3), early adolescent girls' academic level may drop due to their difficult transitional adjustment (Mazarella & Pecora, 2007, p. 6 & Munson, 2010, p. 7). As further demonstrated in 2.2.3.3, this may lead to feelings of inferiority and low self-worth, making the girls more insecure, as they believe themselves to be under the constant scrutiny of others (Dobson, 2010a, p. 25). The conditional regard of others may further increase these feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem, which

has an impact on the girls during their phase of identity formation (Levine, 2008, p. 12; Erikson in Corey, 2005, p. 63). These findings confirm the literature (1.2; 2.2.3.5), in that the self-esteem of early adolescent girls lowers due to their physical changes (Biro et al. in Kutob et al., 2010, p. 241). As further discussed in 2.2.3.5, early adolescents have a great fear of ridicule due to their physical changes (Vukich & Vandegriff, 2007, p. 3) and thus bullying in the form of ridicule and criticism from peers, teachers and parents may increase their self-conscious state. Low self-esteem is linked to low academic performance, social isolation, anxiety, depression, stomach aches, fatigue, headache, bullying and self-destructive behaviours as confirmed in Chapter 2 (2.2.3.5) by the work of Brown et al. (in Kutob, 2010, p. 241) and Gibson (2009, para. 1).

3.2.3.4.2. *Category 2: Self-consciousness*

Self-consciousness is related to the fact that the girls feel highly sensitive with regard to their overall outer appearance and general performance, which makes them very sensitive to the opinions of others.

(a) Findings

The participants feel very sensitive with regard to their outer appearance and performance and the opinions of others making them vulnerable to peer pressure with an increased fear of being judged:

I fell into the trap because I was self-conscious because I needed that extra reassurance [2-185];

... and I think I must do this and I must do that, so that people don't look at me like I'm some strange person [9-24];

I like to look my best [c1];

Then they just care about their looks and guys [4-29];

... this year you don't even hear me talk because I'm scared someone judges me [3-40];

The criticism makes me think I don't want to do it! I don't want to change for P.E, I don't want to do netball [9-25].

This causes the girls to be false:

... so I feel a bit self-conscious and unsure of myself with them sometimes, and I act a bit false and have to put on an act [8-32].

(b) Literature check and discussion

Girls are more self-conscious than boys due to Western cultures expecting girls to be more sensitive to the opinions and feelings of others. However this sensitivity also makes them highly vulnerable to parental rejection, which in turn increases self-consciousness (Louw et al., 1998, p. 420). As illustrated in 2.2.3.3, early adolescent girls are already in a self-conscious state largely due to changes in their physical appearance, which causes them to fear ridicule (Biro et al. in Kutob et al., 2010, p. 241 & Vukich & Vandegriff, 2007, p. 3). Therefore, ridicule from peers, teachers and parents may worsen their self-conscious state. As explained by Levine (2006, p. 85), the affluent culture to which girls at a private school are generally exposed focuses on appearance – thus keeping the already insecure adolescent in a self-conscious state with regard to her clothes, skin, hair and body. The high standard of sport at this private school may cause participation in physical sport to become a problem. The self-conscious early adolescent girl, who has high “social physique anxiety”, becomes less physically involved in school sporting activity due to her changing body and low self-esteem, as pointed out in 2.2.3.3 (Crocker et al., 2006, pp. 185-200; Niven et al., 2009, pp. 299-305 & Sabistan et al., 2005, pp. 1-18). Social physique anxiety is also linked to eating disorders in girls (Thompson & Chad, 2002, pp. 183-189).

3.2.3.4.3. *Category 3: Low self-confidence*

Low self-confidence refers to the girls' lack of confidence and trust in themselves and their abilities.

(a) Findings

The participants lose trust in themselves and lack self-confidence due to the fact that they start doubting their self-worth:

So I doubt myself, I don't have confidence in myself because I think there is something wrong with me [1-8];

I don't feel good enough which then makes me feel I can't trust myself [9-14].

The more incompetent the girls are made to feel by the teachers who baby them, the less self-confident they feel and the less they feel able to take responsibility for themselves:

... because a couple of teachers didn't think I was responsible [2-72];

Like if you don't trust me I don't trust myself and I can't build confidence in myself, so I don't learn to take responsibility for myself now that I'm becoming a teenager which is the thing we need to learn now, I think it is so stupid! [1-33]; I just felt no one trusts me and for a while I just gave up [2-172].

The girls experience time pressure on account of a heavy work load. They feel incompetent and experience low self-confidence when parents overstep their boundaries in an effort to assist:

I don't have time to do silly things like make my bed in the morning or keep my room clean so I end up feeling more frustrated and incompetent 'cause I can't even take responsibility for little things that a grade 1 can do [1-34]; ... it makes me feel like I'm not able to do things on my own like the other day I was doing a project and I just asked for a little bit of help but she tried to take over then I thought well it's my project but just do what you want then. She's a good mom I know she's just trying to help but it's my space [2-148].

However some girls find themselves on the other end of the scale and either experience minimal support from their family or too much pressure due to performance expectations. In this situation they have to take on too much responsibility, which also affects their level of self-confidence, as they lose trust in their own abilities:

... with the added unnecessary pressure to perform in a certain way I feel like the responsibility is too much [1-34];

Like when we got suspended I just had to find help myself no one in my family tried to help me. And they always think I'm going to do something bad and don't trust me [10-51];

... so I end up feeling more frustrated and incompetent 'cause I can't even take responsibility for little things [1-34].

(b) Literature check and discussion

The conditional regard the girls are exposed to from teachers and peers may contribute to their experience of low self-worth, which causes them to become more self-conscious and therefore have less confidence in their authentic selves. Self-confidence grows out of a trusting environment (Erikson in Corey, 2005, p. 63) (2.2.3.5), therefore as the individual is treated as trustworthy she becomes able to confidently trust herself and her environment. Just as it is important for the individual to feel safe in her environment and draw strength from it, she also needs her

environment to show acceptance of her and show faith in her potential and abilities. This helps her to build on her inner strength and allows her authentic abilities to grow and develop. Parents and teachers need to give the girls age-appropriate responsibilities so that they can master the tasks involved and feel competent. The development of a healthy self-confidence relies on the girls' ability to become more autonomous and competent, as well as to relate healthily with others – both intra-personally and interpersonally (Levine, 2006, p. 8) (2.2.3.5). Therefore a supportive environment emphasises the psychosocial relationship that plays a vital role in the girls' healthy development and well-being.

3.2.3.4.4. *Category 4: Low self-control*

Low self-control refers to the difficulties that the early adolescent girls experience to control themselves emotionally, verbally and physically.

(a) Findings

The participants feel trapped and experience a loss of self-control in terms of their emotions due to the judgements and pressure from others:

... most importantly self-control [6adv];

I feel confused and irritated and frustrated like I'm stuck and can't move and I feel so angry that I could rip someone's head off sometimes [1-17];

... it's getting to me now! I've already started crying [2-3];

I feel caught between teachers' favouritism and my peers rejecting me so I feel confused, frustrated and like everything is unfair [5-27];

I don't know how to deal with the stuff and I just leave it and let it fester [2-177];

I feel frustrated like I just want to scream! Like the real me is trapped and I can't get her out [1-18];

... probably hit those people in the face [2-52].

The way the girls are made to feel at times causes them to lose control and sometimes they take their pent-up feelings out on their families. This leads to feelings of guilt:

... people who think I'm fat can go suck my balls. And my mom is really irritating my now [2-4];

... my mom and I are, we fight so much now because I want to be by myself [3-87];

I feel guilty when I shout at them and stuff [8-47].

(b) Literature check and discussion

The early adolescent girl's low self-control may be related to her sense of a lack of power and control in her school environment. As explained by Levine (2006, p. 71), the more one is able to exert control in the world, the more one will feel able to control one's self and thereby act effectively in one's own best interests. According to Pipher (1994, p. 170), girls who experience a loss of control may become depressed. Self-harming behaviours may follow as a result of low self-control and impulsivity. As the girls lose control over their lives and themselves, they mutilate themselves in the hope of counteracting inner pain with outer pain. Pipher (1994, p. 158) describes this as young women carving themselves into "culturally acceptable pieces". As illustrated in 2.2.3.3, conditional regard may lead to negative feelings towards one's self, including feeling not good enough (Assor et al., 2004, pp. 47-87; Cicchetti & Cohen, 2006, p. 832; Kollat, 2007, p. iii; Luby et al., 2009, pp. 1156-1166). In this case the early adolescent girl may become trapped in a negative pattern of behaviour as she spirals out of control towards disorders that are detrimental to her healthy development and well-being. In line with the findings and systems theory (Becvar & Becvar, 2006, p. 66) (2.2.3.3), the early adolescent girl who has learnt to express herself in an aggressive manner within the family may take her aggression out on the family members.

3.2.3.4.5. *Category 5: Inability to stand up for authentic self*

Being unable to stand up for one's authentic self refers to the girl's inability to be honest in her communication with others, as well as to develop her authentic self.

(a) Findings

The participants feel that issues such as the favouritism of teachers in school sports and the high competitiveness among peers discourage them from continuing to play a sport that may have once helped them develop their authentic talents:

It interferes with my ability to play tennis well [5-28];

... then it makes me a lot more scared to try new stuff [9-13];

... well now after the way they have treated us I'm going to quit I don't want to play anymore [7-14].

Girls who are judged by their peers feel unable to stand up for themselves among their peers:

I was just weak, like I was unable to fight, like I had no voice [2-163];

... try stand up for yourself [3adv];

... there is a real person here who has feelings and people just don't care, they walk all over you and they try (sic) make me someone I'm not and I don't feel strong enough to stand up for myself [1-27];

Well at school my friend and I are like very different people we're more like introverts [10-14];

So we are afraid to stand up against popular people [8-16].

They are often unable to express their true feelings to their families:

I couldn't talk to anyone and it was harder to deal with [10adv];

... even though my family support me I don't allow them to because I hold back because I'm not happy with myself and therefore can't be my real self [9-15];

... she looked at me and said you (sic) putting on weight so I just said sorry because then I know she will stop for a while [8-6];

... haven't spoken to my mom about any of this, too scared of what she might think of me [L3-22];

They don't always know how it feels to be in a situation you are in or how you feel, they don't know both sides of the story but if you tell them it is either too personal or embarrassing [4-79].

(b) Literature check and discussion

The findings confirm 2.2.2.5, as it is the parents' responsibility to develop healthy boundaries in their children who need to master the ability to assert themselves in a balanced manner without withdrawing emotionally (Cloud & Townsend, 1992, p. 94). As demonstrated, such healthy boundaries will affect the early adolescent girl through all her developmental stages and in all her relationships (Delisle, 2011, pp. 49, 56) (2.2.2.5). As explained in Bowlby's attachment theory (Cloud & Townsend, 1992, p. 78; Delisle, 2011, p. 57 & Gatla Reader, 2009, p. 37) (2.2.2.5), a secure attachment in the form of healthy boundaries is the foundation for developing a sense of security and is therefore vital for the early adolescent girl's well-being. Therefore the nature of this attachment will determine whether she finds it easier or more difficult to express herself in a healthy way. As the findings show and as observed in 2.2.3.7, early adolescent girls may become angry if they feel forced into the "new responsibilities" of their "new role" in society while struggling with mixed cultural messages relating to their bodies and independence (McMillan, 2011, p. 3041). The ability to express such feelings and needs is important as the child who is

able to express her needs is able to effectively stand up for herself compared to the child who is helpless to change her situation (Levine, 2006, p. 72). The inability for self-expression and the internalising of feelings places the early adolescent girl in a vulnerable state in terms of risky behaviour as research shows that early adolescent girls who internalise their feelings may rely on sexual activity to boost their self-esteem or seek the approval of others. Those who externalise their feelings, on the other hand, might engage in early sexual activity in the context of rebelling, rule breaking and risky behaviour (Starr et al., 2012, pp. 403-420) (2.2.3.6).

3.2.3.4.6. *Category 6: Need for acceptance and recognition of authentic self*

The need for acceptance and recognition of authentic self refers to the girl's need to feel good enough and appreciated for who she is authentically.

(a) Findings

The participants have a deep need to be recognised:

... when you do something good to show them that you are not bad they don't recognise it [10-4];

... but the coaches never recognise it [3-14];

... the teachers make me feel under pressure because I'm always trying to impress them to get them to recognise me because they choose the top girls for the teams [9-16];

... like that's what I like about this school is if you do something really well you get called onto the stage and get recognised [6-22];

... people just do it for colours [9-13];

... it makes me feel like I'm a leader and can show good leadership and show people the way to do things at the school [5-7].

They have therefore developed a need for a perfect performance in the hope of being the best at something and to show others that they are good enough to be accepted (and not rejected):

I put more pressure on myself to do well in sports because that's what I do well, so I try be the best to stand out and look special and to be recognised by others [9-11];

I'm afraid that if I get fat I'll be teased and it makes me feel pressured because I don't know how to stop it happening so I feel like I'm becoming obsessed with my fear of fat and need to stay skinny [8-19];

But now if you fail it's not ok [9-21];

... you want your parents to be like proud of you [4-12].

(b) Literature check and discussion

The findings, which show a high need among the early adolescent girls for recognition for their authentic self and worth, confirm 2.2.3.7 (Dobson, 2010a, p. 25). This need can be explained in that the early adolescent girl is plagued with feelings of inferiority that attack her self-worth, leaving her questioning herself. The self-questioning is complicated by the mixed societal messages and expectations she receives, therefore increasing her need for recognition and acceptance. As further demonstrated in 2.2.3.7, not feeling accepted may cause confusion in the girls which will lead to a weaker 'sense of self' (Fonda, 2011, p. 43 & Pipher, 1994, pp. 35-36). Every individual has the need to receive confirmation for his/her existence as a unique human being (Hycner & Jacobs, 1995, p. 24). James (in Burns, 2010, p. 95) states that "the deepest principle in the human nature is the craving to be appreciated". The early adolescent girl may be left not feeling good enough, disconfirmed and ashamed (Assor et al., 2004, pp. 47-87; Cicchetti & Cohen, 2006, p. 832; Kollat, 2007, p. iii & Luby et al., 2009, pp. 1156-1166) (2.2.3.3). This process of shame is described in 2.2.3.3 as a "recursive loop of shame" (Resnick, 2009, p. 152) that can be linked to the girls "perceived imperfections" and due to her "starving for recognition" she may become obsessed with perfection leading to possible abnormal issues such as dysfunctional body images and eating disorders (Ghosh, 2007, para. 5).

As illustrated further in 2.2.3.3, this obsession with perfection causes a fear and magnification of failure, with the sufferers' rigid, inflexible mind-set making them less able to cope with the growing pressure as it increases the cycle of fear and anxiety (Ben-Shahar, 2009, p. 122). The findings are confirmed by current literature, as early adolescent girls may even develop a group identity crisis in their desperate need for recognition, leading to possible feelings of "alienation" (Neuman & Neuman, 2011, p. 336) (2.2.3.5). Lack of connectedness with peers, in the form of social isolation, can place early adolescent girls at risk for disorders. The lived experience of those who feel as though they do not belong will place the girls in a state of isolation with a generalised way of not belonging becoming their primary mode of interpersonal relationships (Clegg, 2006, pp. 53-81) (2.2.3.5). In their search for social acceptance and an autonomous identity, early adolescent girls will react to the messages of

others (Pipher, 1994, p. 22) and may easily become dissatisfied with themselves (Hargreaves & Tiggerman, 2003, pp. 367-373). As demonstrated in 2.2.3.8, extreme self-criticism and unhealthy perfectionism may follow, causing constant worry over mistakes and self-doubt with an obsession to meet the expectations of others (Frost et al. in Young et al., 2004, pp. 273-283). According to Adderholdt and Goldberg (1999, pp. 12, 18, 23) and Levine (2006, p. 29), compliance with high expectations for a perfect performance can be as addictive as drugs, as perfectionists link their identities with their achievements. Their entire self-worth is dependent on the outcome, and anything short of first place is considered a failure. Unhealthy perfectionism has been linked to parental psychological control, eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression (Ben-Shahar, 2009, p. 139; Soenens et al., 2005, pp. 487-498; Soenens et al., 2007, pp. 239-249 & Soenens et al., 2008, pp. 144-152) (2.2.3.8).

3.2.3.4.7. *Category 7: Depression*

Depression refers to the girls' feelings of sadness, loneliness, helplessness and hopelessness.

(a) Findings

The participants withdraw due to not feeling good enough, which makes them feel sad and lonely:

... so I withdraw to try to protect myself [8-16]; I am actually depressed [3-39]; I doubted myself I think I was depressed [6-6]; ... that's a depressing thought [j5-1]; ... some are negative, sad, depressed, annoyed [c3].

In their obsession to be recognised and accepted, the girls feel trapped between losing themselves and wanting to get the approval of others. Thus they find it difficult to feel satisfied:

... it's like I get caught trying to show them who I am but then pulling away and not showing them and not developing my talents well because of what they think of me [9-32]; People will follow the norm even if it slowly kills them [c2].

This causes them to at times take their frustrations out on their family, which increases their feelings of helplessness and hopelessness:

Then I feel guilty for taking it out on them so I just feel bad all the time, depressed and hopeless [1-25];
... it often affects my motivation negatively like I don't want to do anything [2-25];
I'm not a very happy person not very motivated or excited to do anything [10-48].

(b) Literature check and discussion

According to Maslow (in Meyer et al., 2003, p. 337), the early adolescent girl is in the process of developing her self-esteem. According to the hierarchy of needs, this is only made possible if her earlier needs for safety, security and love have been met. Maslow (in Meyer et al., 2003, p. 341) emphasises the fact that deserved respect is the most stable and therefore healthiest basis for self-esteem. Self-esteem plays an important role in the girls' emotional state and is clearly important for her stable emotional state. As demonstrated in 2.2.3.5, the emotions of early adolescent girls may be more useful than cognitive aspects in understanding their reasons for risking early sexual behaviour (O'Sullivan & Hearn, 2008, pp. 168-179). Emotional stress and depression have been identified as factors that steer early adolescent girls to alcohol abuse, which then may lead to risky sexual behaviour (Davila, 2008, pp. 26-31; Hipwell et al., 2012, pp. 118-128 & Steinberg & Davila, 2008, pp. 350-362) (2.2.3.5). Depression is also linked to smoking and other addictive behaviours in early adolescent girls 11-14 year-old girls (Chung et al., 2010, pp. 647-650) (2.2.3.5).

As explained by Jordaan and Jordaan (1998, p. 545), during adolescence the girls are in a more emotionally sensitive state due the physical and hormonal changes taking place in the body, which may lead to inappropriate ways of self-expression. These inappropriate ways of self-expression can be seen as increasing among adolescents in our modern-day society. Between 1992 and 2004, the number of females between ages 5 and 19 who were hospitalised in the United States for depression rose by 81%, while 5 000 children and adolescents were admitted on account of self-harm injuries (Pulugurtha, 2007, para. 1). According to Lakhan and Hagger-Johnson (2007, p. 21) who studied the impact of prescribed psychotropics on youths, prescriptions for anti-depressants for children and young adults increased dramatically – along with the suicidal rate. Their findings were in line with a warning by the American Food and Drug Administration and the European Medicines Agency during 2003-2004 about the increased suicide risk of initiating anti-depressants in

children and adolescents. Early intervention through preventing depression and the need for medication proved to be the best option (Gibson, 2009, para. 4-5).

3.2.3.5. *The early adolescent girls' negative psychosocial lived experiences of the private school*

The early adolescent girl's negative psychosocial lived experiences of the private school focus on all areas interpreted by the girls as unsupportive of their authenticity. They feel that this stops them from developing their gifts and talents, and works against their well-being. Such negative experiences can therefore be seen as detrimental to their healthy psychosocial development. The main themes that emerged as negative experiences are related to pressure to meet the high standards set, which is compounded by the conditional regard of peers and teachers. These negative experiences have been themed and categorised in terms of frequency of mention by the participants. The conditional regard of others, particularly from peers, emerged as topping these experiences. Conditional regard has been shown to have adverse emotional and academic consequences, which may lead to anxiety and depression among adolescents (Luby et al., 2009, p. 1156-1166). As the early adolescent girls' experience of 'adolescence' is negatively affected by adverse social factors (Bandura, 1964, p. 230; Brooks-Gunn & Warren, 1989, pp. 40-55), the girls' psychosocial experiences in terms of the conditional regard of others can be seen as having a negative impact on their healthy development and well-being.

Available research confirms a need for an autonomy-supportive approach and repeatedly highlights the negative effects of a conditional regard on the child's self-worth and autonomy (Assor et al., 2009, pp. 482-497; Duncan et al., 2009, pp. 255-270; Grolnick et al., 1997, pp. 135-167; Kamins & Dweck in Assor et al., 2004, pp. 47-87; Luby et al., 2009, p. 1156-1166 & Roth et al., 2009, pp. 1119-1142) (2.2.3.8). Harter (1991) and Wilson (1991) (in Grolnick & Beiswenger, 2006, pp. 230-237) state that children who are treated in an autonomy-supportive way have higher self-esteem and lower symptoms of depression and anxiety. An autonomy-supportive approach involves considering the child's perspective, acknowledging her feelings, setting limits, providing a meaningful rationale and minimising the use of controlling language and pressuring contingencies (Grolnick et al., 1997, pp. 135-167). In this way there is a conditional regard of the morals, values and behaviours the child may choose, but an unconditional love for the individual.

According to Taylor (2011, p. 60), parents can love their children in the wrong way by praising them “unceasingly”, “unrealistically” and incongruently and rewarding them in terms of their achievements and accomplishments, which he terms “outcome love”. This may lead children to experience feelings of sadness, worthlessness, anger, guilt, shame and internal pressure to succeed. Focus on achievements may lead to academic and athletic success, yet leaves the child’s inner world governed by turmoil and angst as she develops a conflicted view of the world due to the “unpredictable, inconsistent”, conditional love received from peers, teachers and parents. It has been shown that parents who support the pre-adolescent child’s autonomy and encourage her without being overly controlling, help promote her effective “emotional regulation during adolescence” (Roth et al., 2009, pp. 1119-1142). Such support is in the best interest of the early adolescent girl and promotes her general well-being.

3.3. Conclusion

The findings that crystallised from the data reveal that although early adolescent girls experience a fair amount of positive psychosocial lived experiences in a private school setting (which support their healthy psychosocial development and enhance their well-being), the negative psychosocial lived experiences are a matter of concern. The girls’ negative experiences of the school compound their existing vulnerability and add to the pressures of modern-day living. They are in a process of self-discovery and identity formation, and since they are unsure of themselves to begin with, they are highly sensitive to the opinions of others. Louw et al. (1998, p. 449), explain that as adolescents have an intense desire to belong, their interest in their peer group is intensified during this phase. As early adolescent girls move away from family in order to form new social relationships, their relationships with their peers play an important role in their psychosocial development. The conditional regard of others (in particular peers, but also teachers who are a part of the social context of the school) in the form of judgements, unfair treatments, ridiculing and rejection has a detrimental effect on the early adolescent girls’ healthy psychosocial development and overall well-being.

CHAPTER 4

REFLECTION ON THE STUDY

4.1. Overview

The aim of the study was to ultimately create awareness among parents and teachers of the need experienced by early adolescent girls in a private school setting for support in their continued healthy development (1.1). The researcher's interest has been to explore the lived experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting so as to gain a deeper understanding of how they can be better supported in terms of their psychosocial well-being. The rationale for the study (1.2) is strengthened by the fact that current research on early adolescent girls in a private school setting focuses mainly on international perspectives. The gap that exists in the available research on the perspectives of early adolescent girls in private schools in a South African context is thus acknowledged and addressed. Early adolescent girls' voices are often not heard and many parents are unaware of their daughters' perspectives and lived experiences, and so this research identifies and acknowledges the need for the girls to be given a voice. It is the researcher's hope that in obtaining knowledge through this study, contributions may be made to the identification of guiding principles as to how early adolescent girls in a private school setting – being in a vulnerable state on account of their gender, transitional developmental phase, modern-day expectations and challenges – may be better supported in their on-going healthy development and well-being.

The study focused on answering the primary research question of how early adolescent girls experience a private school setting. This primary research question was unpacked into two secondary research questions that aimed to explore the girls' lived experiences in terms of their interpretation of them as positive and negative. The data describing such experiences was collected first through a literature study (1.5.4.1; Chapter 2) that explored recent literature dealing with the key concepts of the study, namely early adolescent girls, well-being, lived experience and private schooling. The empirical data collection process followed in two phases (1.5.4.2), the first being an expression of the girls' lived experiences through a medium of their choice, being collages, writing a confidential letter or keeping a journal for a period of ten school days. In the second phase, ten girls were chosen from the initial group of volunteers to take part in in-depth interviews aimed at exploring their experiences

more deeply and gaining a better understanding of such experiences. This process ultimately allowed for the crystallisation of the data.

The researcher made use of field notes and researcher reflective notes (1.5.4.7) as an additional source of evidence. In the final phase of data collection (and as a source to be used in formulating the recommendations of this study), the participants offered written personal advice to other girls who probably found themselves in a similar situation.

All the data as collected through the various phases were analysed and interpreted according to Creswell's application of Tesch's method (1.5.5), which arranged the data into categories and allowed a thematic construction from such categories.

4.2. Critical Evaluation of the Research Study

4.2.1. Strengths

Since this study was conducted within the framework of an interpretive descriptive paradigm (1.5.1), the researcher set aside her preconceived ideas and allowed the true meanings ascribed by early adolescent girls to their experiences of a private school to be understood without being manipulated or controlled. The researcher was aware of the fact that interpretive description considers the inseparableness of the researcher and participant, as well as their interactive influence on each other. However, her focus was on allowing the participants to describe their lived experience of the situation being studied. A deeper understanding of the girls' interpretations of their experiences, combined with the researcher's interpretation, led to a richer, often co-constructed, description of their lived experiences of the school. The interpretive description allowed for the emergence of thematic patterns whilst accounting for each girl's individual perception.

Since the research study was of a qualitative nature, the researcher ensured the trustworthiness of the data by adhering to such aspects as found in the work of Lincoln and Guba, referred to in 1.6. The credibility (1.6.1) of the study was ensured through the crystallisation of the data as patterns began to emerge from the findings. Prolonged engagement with the data added to the credibility of the findings. The transferability (1.6.2) of the study was ensured through providing dense descriptions of the data, identifying participants by means of purposive selection in order to maximise the range of information, and the avoiding biased sources. The

dependability (1.6.3) of the study was ensured through the use of diverse sources of data that had been collected phase-wise from a sufficient number of participants and through analysing such data both intra- and inter-comparatively. Neutrality was adhered to as the findings of the present study were shaped by the participants' perspectives and not through research bias – in fact, the researcher adhered closely to the very words used by the participants. Conformability (1.6.4) was enhanced as the data was compared to research both locally and abroad. The principle of authenticity was applied in terms of the goal of the study being to give the early adolescent girls a voice, to empower them with the intention of individual growth and to create social change by creating awareness among their parents and teachers of the support needed for their continued well-being. The authenticity (1.6.5) of the study was enhanced through the aspects of anonymity, privacy and confidentiality, as participants were encouraged to be honest in expressing their views and experiences. The audit trail of the raw data collected during the study, as well as the record of the data analysis, is available on request and serves as full assurance of the authenticity of the research.

Ethical considerations (1.8) were adhered to as the study was grounded in the fundamental ethical principles of protecting participants from both physical and psychological harm, ensuring voluntary participation, obtaining informed consent, respecting confidentiality and granting the right to self-determination. The researcher gave special attention to the fact that the girls were under-age and therefore a vulnerable group.

4.2.2. Limitations and challenges

The researcher was unable to address the girls in person initially, due to the recommendation by the headmaster that a familiar teacher with whom they feel safe should introduce the research to them. The girls therefore received the instructions for Phase One via a third party, which placed a limitation on the data due to some miscommunication. As a number of the girls misunderstood the request made of them, their answers were not in line with the research question, with the result that their data could not be used.

Furthermore, due to the school's busy schedule, the researcher was not given sufficient time to inform the parents of the potential volunteers in enough detail about the study so as to allay their fears of harm to their daughters. If this introduction to

the parents had been handled more effectively, more volunteers might have become available for selection.

The busy schedule of the school also prompted the teacher appointed by the headmaster to oversee the research to insist that the researcher should interview the girls in Phase Two of data collection during assembly periods. The rationale was so as not to intrude on the girls' lessons during school hours or on their extramural activities after school. This arrangement proved to be quite a challenge to the researcher during a particular week as, due to the death of a fellow student, a few days of assembly periods were lost and had to be made up on days when the school photos were taken. On those days, the researcher and participants involved experienced constant interruptions. Although the researcher was able to cope with such challenges, they were evident of the time pressures that the girls experience at school.

4.3. Findings

At the onset of this study the assumption was that the private school setting amplifies the modern-day challenges to which early adolescent girls are exposed. Although this was viewed as having a possible negative effect on their psychosocial lived experiences and therefore their healthy development, it was never the intention of the researcher to focus solely on the negative experiences of these girls in a private school setting. On the contrary, it was the researcher's impression that the positive experiences of the girls would be a solid starting base from which to increase the support needed by the early adolescent girl in a private school setting so as to promote their healthy development and well-being. The findings that emerged from the data crystallised into a single positive theme consisting of various categories, as well as into various negative themes with subsequent categories, which showed a complexity and diversity among the negative experiences.

The positive experiences as interpreted by the early adolescent girls of the private school concerned focused on areas that the girls regarded as offering them positive support in their healthy growth and development. Such areas included the positive influence of the holistic education (3.2.2.1) offered by the school, as well as various levels and types of support received from family (3.2.2.2), friends (3.2.2.3) and teachers (3.2.2.4) during their early adolescent school journey.

The negative experiences as interpreted by the early adolescent girls at this private school crystallised into four main themes that each branched out into subsequent categories. The first theme involved a conditional regard from peers (3.2.3.1) and was categorised as peer pressure to be cool (3.2.3.1.1) and peer bullying (3.2.3.1.2). The second theme involved conditional regard from teachers (3.2.3.2) and diversified into three categories: the degrading treatment of girls by teachers (3.2.3.2.1); favouritism towards specific girls and sport (3.2.3.2.2), and inconsistent teaching (3.2.3.2.3). The third theme involved pressure to meet the private school's standards (3.2.3.3) and also expanded into three categories: high academic standard (3.2.3.3.1); high sport standard (3.2.3.3.2), and high standard of conduct (3.2.3.3.3). The fourth theme that emerged was self-concept (3.2.3.4), which could be arranged into seven categories: low self-esteem (3.2.3.4.1); self-consciousness (3.2.3.4.2); low self-confidence (3.2.3.4.3); low self-control (3.2.3.4.4); inability to stand up for authentic self (3.2.3.4.5); need for acceptance as well as recognition of authentic self (3.2.3.4.6), and depression (3.2.3.4.7).

The findings of the study in terms of the girls' positive experiences are confirmed by existing literature (3.2.2.1), in that holistic education can be viewed as beneficial to the well-being of the girls. Besides ensuring the academic and extramural development of the girls, holistic education aims to develop their moral character and spiritual identity. The girls perceive holistic education as supportive of their authenticity and the development of their unique gifts and talents. It therefore plays a positive role in their healthy autonomous development, a factor that is of huge significance to the early adolescent girls who find themselves in the phase of identity formation (3.2.2.5).

The support that the girls receive from family, friends and teachers constitutes a further aspect of their positive experiences in the private school setting. This support can be viewed as an additional factor that assists the girls' healthy development and well-being, as the girls experience each type of support to be in support of their authenticity at various levels. The positive support from family allows the girls to be balanced in their autonomous responsibilities as they feel guided by a secure attachment. This allows the girls to feel confirmed as worthy, unique individuals because their families are "emotionally available" (3.2.2.2) to them in totality. Emotional availability may include a form of quality time, which allows the girls to feel valuable, heard and understood by their families. The support received from friends

(3.2.2.3) gives the girls a feeling of intimacy, connection and trust, while the support from teachers (3.2.2.4) offers them emotional comfort and protection in the form of fair treatment and acceptance among their teachers and peers. Although the girls consider the types of support received from friends, teachers and family to all differ from one another, together they support the girls' autonomous, authentic development and are therefore beneficial to their psychosocial development and well-being.

The negative experiences indicated by the girls may be categorised into various forms of rejection and conditional regard from peers and teachers, as well as a perceived pressure to meet the high standards of the private school. All of these have a negative effect on the girls' self-concept as a whole and therefore can be seen as having a negative effect on their psychosocial development and well-being. Existing research confirms the negative effects of such negative experiences overall. However, the findings also point to various issues that may be regarded as 'new' findings.

The crystallisation of such findings of a 'new' nature may be seen firstly in the categories named "favouritism from teachers" and "inconsistent teaching". Neither of these categories was evident in the literature study performed by the researcher. The findings therefore suggest a particular contextual effect inherent in this particular private school. The favouritism experienced by the girls may be explained as a perception due to their need for achievement and recognition; in other words, when they do not receive the latter, they ascribe it to favouritism. Furthermore, teachers may focus strongly on achievement and on the excellence for which the school ethos calls, and thus treat those who fit into the mould more favourably than those who do not. Similarly, the category of inconsistent teaching may have emerged due to the school's ethos, which focuses on excellence in all areas. The girls may feel pressured to meet the standard for obedience and perhaps perceive any inconsistency in terms of teachers' enforcement of such a standard as unfair. Perhaps the girls at private schools with a higher tolerance for disobedience do not experience the same pressure as the girls who participated in this study, and therefore they do not experience inconsistent teaching as an issue of concern.

Whatever the contributing factors are, a clear awareness has been raised of the needs of early adolescent girls in this private school, and these should be addressed when taking into consideration factors such as the girls' emotional sensitivity and

vulnerability due to a “complex interaction of pubertal and societal influences” (3.2.3.2.2). The girls need their teachers to promote a spirit of cooperation rather than competition among students and to consistently acknowledge all students, not only the high-achieving, personal favourites (3.2.3.2.2).

Although peer pressure and bullying are problems of severe proportion in most schools, the teachers (as heading the group of peers) have the potential to demonstrate and instil a fairness and respect towards all students – thus setting a positive example and adopting a considerate attitude that may be mirrored by peers. Therefore the adolescent girls not only want their teachers to respect them, listen to them and protect them from humiliation, but they also need them to set a good example to their peers on how peers should treat one another.

The contradictory nature of teachers’ opposite extreme behaviours may cause early adolescent girls much distress on account of their developmental stage and cause them to feel disconnected from and unsupported by teachers, which may then influence the way their peers view and treat them. Adolescents are characterised as “absolute thinkers”, which causes them to view contradictions through the “distorted lens of super-sensitivity” (3.2.3.2.3). This may trigger a negative cycle and be harmful to their healthy psychosocial development and well-being. Their perceived rejection, as well as their perception of a lack of support from teachers and peers may also affect their identity formation.

Other negative experiences as interpreted by the girls relate to the pressure experienced in having to attain or maintain a high standard of performance in academics (3.2.3.3.1), sport (3.2.3.3.2) and conduct (3.2.3.3.3). Although these findings are confirmed by the literature study, we are reminded that it is the girl’s “fear of ridicule” (3.2.3.4), due to her sensitive developmental phase, which increases the pressure she feels to achieve such standards, as she feels everybody is watching her and waiting for her to “mess up” (3.2.3.3.1). If teachers and parents were to adopt more of an accepting, consistent attitude of acknowledgement of all students, no matter their achievements, both in the classroom and on the sports field, it may help to alleviate some of this pressure for the girls.

It is the researcher’s interpretation that, although many parents may think that they are being supportive of their daughters, many girls have a different perception. As is evident from the findings of the study (3.2.3.4.4), the girls who do not feel supported at home may project their feelings and frustrations onto other girls at

school in the form of bullying. The parents' role is therefore just as vital as that of the teachers, as they provide the secure attachment and foundational safety for healthy growth, which in turn may assist teachers in their jobs as the girls may be more secure and not overly sensitive. Great support is required by the early adolescent girl from her environment during this time of fear and uncertainty. Research shows that her need for support and understanding is increased due to the fact that the more hostility and confusion, and the less love, understanding and support the adolescent receives, the greater the conflict and difficulties she will experience during adolescence. Adolescence as a whole is a time of self-discovery and therefore tremendous support is needed by adolescents as they enter this crucial phase of identity formation (3.2.2.5).

4.4. Contribution of the Study to the Body of Psychological Knowledge

The value of the findings of the study (shown in detail in Chapter 3) is confirmed and strengthened in current literature, which shows the benefit of unconditional love and support for the early adolescent girl's authentic and autonomous psychosocial development. At the same time, the current literature shows the detrimental effect of conditional regard and pressure, which interferes with the acceptance of the individual's unique authenticity and her confirmation as a human being.

Central to the field of psychology, this study not only contributes to the knowledge of what constitutes both positive and negative aspects of private schooling, but also confirms the effects of such aspects on the psychosocial development and well-being of early adolescent girls, with the intention to build on the positives and work on minimising the negatives.

Moreover, the researcher is of the opinion that the study actually succeeded in giving the girls a voice and creating awareness among the girls that they are not alone and can seek help. In so doing, the study seems to have empowered the girls greatly, as is clear from the remark made by one of the girls:

"If girls are having problems at school and facing stress and stuff they should rather talk to someone like I eventually got to speak to you. But during all of it I couldn't talk to anyone and it was harder to deal with that than not talking about it. By bottling it up and doing nothing about it, it just made it worse." [10adv]

Participants 1, 2, 3 and 10 were referred for counselling for their depressive symptoms, they made use of such referrals.

The value of the 'new' findings lies in alerting us to the fact that the high standard for performance at the private school is causing the girls to feel pressured to attain and maintain such standards. It also shows that this pressure is increased by the girls' vulnerable developmental phase, which places them in an overly sensitive state with a fear of not meeting the standard and an extreme sensitivity to the opinions of others. Early adolescent girls are therefore at risk of developing a distorted perception of reality, which may be harmful to their psychosocial development and well-being.

The researcher's role in undertaking this study was to explore and describe the psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting, as it was the researcher's deliberate intention to create awareness of such experiences. The study was conducted with a preventative measure in mind. The knowledge gained from the study shows how these early adolescent girls may be better supported during their vulnerable stage so as to prevent disorders and add value to their well-being by ensuring positive ways to work towards their healthy psychosocial development. This study was not done with a view to contributing to therapy, but rather in the hope of preventing the need for therapy in as many girls as possible.

4.5. Recommendations

The high standard of private schooling is a sign of the times and a modern-day accepted necessity. In various ways it is vitally important for and beneficial to the students of such schools who are taught to thrive in a fast-moving and competitive society. However, it is the researcher's recommendation that greater appreciation be given to each individual student's uniqueness and less emphasis be placed on their achievement of a set standard, so as to instil a long-term respect for self and others, encouraging a more communal and less individualistic approach in all. Research shows that the key to happiness and well-being may be found in a more giving, confident, loving attitude – as opposed to a selfish, critical, competitive attitude (Cloud, 2011, pp. 21-31).

Although the private school involved in this study has a strong outreach programme, which is a positive factor that contributes to the girls' well-being (3.2.2.1), research reminds us that schools should adopt **R**espect and **R**esponsibility as a combined fourth "**R**" (2.2.3.2) along with the other three – reading, writing and

arithmetic. Future scientific research may therefore focus on investigating the existence of the fourth “R” in the private school of this study.

Various further research studies may be conducted at this private school to determine the impact of not meeting the high standard, or not receiving such affiliated recognition in the form of stage awards, on the early adolescent girl’s identity formation process (2.2.2.2).

An aspect that did not come up as a significant finding among the ten participants in the study, but that the researcher feels is worth mentioning, was that some of the girls expressed their lived experiences as what may be described as a “spiritual identity crisis”. It was the perception of these girls that they experienced judgment and rejection from their peers and teachers at the school, despite it being a school with a strong Christian ethos. Some of the girls who are not “strong” Christians but who are rather in the process of discovering their faith due to their family’s not having strong Christian roots, felt dissuaded in their new Christian faith and were inclined to turn away from it, as they began to see Christians as hypocritical. This may well be the experience of a significant number of the remaining fifty early adolescent girls at the school who did not participate in the study. Therefore it is the researcher’s opinion that a possible “spiritual identity crisis”, as experienced by early adolescent girls in private schools with a religious ethos, should be explored in future research as an additional source of knowledge in the identity formation of adolescents as a whole.

Another aspect of the findings that the researcher interprets as interesting, is that when the girls experienced rejection and conditional regard from teachers and peers at school, it encouraged a cycle of “falseness” (3.2.3.1.1) which then spilled over into the family. The girls did not express their true feelings to family members for fear of being rejected by them too (as by the teachers and peers). Being rejected by their families would seem to be an unbearable thought for the girls to deal with. Future research is recommended to further explore this concept within the private school setting.

In order to gain benefit from this research, it is suggested that teachers, peers and parents remain aware of and sensitive to the vulnerable state in which the early adolescent girls find themselves. Particular focus should be on supporting the girls, through loving acknowledgement and acceptance, with an on-going practice of ‘mindful awareness’ of the effect that chosen words, behaviours and possible

conditional regard may have on the early adolescent girls' identity formation, psychosocial development and well-being. Teachers, students and parents need to work together, each taking responsibility, with teamwork being the essence.

With regard to the pressure to meet the expectations of others and the bullying experienced by the participants, and in keeping with the spirit of the interpretive descriptive paradigm of the study, the participants were asked (at a later stage and as a final phase of data collection) to offer their written advice to other girls who may find themselves in similar situations. This was done as a further way of ensuring trustworthiness of the qualitative study, as recommendations would hence not be based solely on the researcher's interpretation, but are inclusive of the participants' interpretations.

The participants advised girls who found themselves in similar situations, to firstly be authentic and truthful:

"... it's worth nothing if you lose yourself. People will often lie and push themselves in to get an approval from the 'cool' kids. Pathetic! No! Stop it! If you are yourself, no matter what happens, you will always be your best." [1adv]

"Don't try to be friends with people that you can't be yourself with. Never give up at something you love. Don't do it for colours do it because you love it." [9adv]

"Don't make friends with the wrong crowd, popularity does NOT matter, people will love you more if you fight for what's right." [3adv]

The participants also advised girls to remind themselves of their self-worth:

"...keep mindful of who you are, know and respect your own morals and beliefs... I am worth it... people who treat you with such a lack of respect are the ones with the problem." [6adv]

"Be happy with who you are." [9adv]

"If a person bullies, it is only because they have low self-esteem." [7adv]

"... because being yourself means that you are already brilliant and good at things. When you are yourself you are everything that you could ever be. God can then shine through in that way because you're not covered in 'fake-ness', so now you can accept who you are and when you do this you become stronger and more confident in who you are..." [1adv]

It was further suggested by the participants that if a problem is out of a girl's control, she should seek help from her teachers or parents:

“Never keep it to yourself, always talk about the problem to somebody you love and trust.” [3adv]

“Teachers can see who is getting away with things and can get them into trouble.” [9adv]

“I would suggest that they speak to someone and speak up, don’t keep it to themselves.” [4adv]

“... they should rather talk to someone like I eventually got to talk to you.” [10adv]

“I would try to convince her to speak up and talk to an adult about the situation.” [7adv]

The participants suggested that the girls stand up for themselves and others:

“Try and stand up for yourself as many times as possible, if you know you haven’t done anything wrong; make sure you fight until you get treated fairly.” [3adv]

“They should stand up for themselves and not take it... and treat others as equal.” [4adv]

“... stand up for yourself and let them know you will not take it.” [1adv]

“If I had discovered that a girl was being bullied, I would help her as much as I possibly can.” [7adv]

“I’d tell her to stick up for herself and not let anybody bring her down.” [7adv]

The following summary of advice to other girls was given by participant 1 in the form of famous quotes:

“If the brave do not lead the meek will not follow” – Ken Annandale

“Believing in yourself is the first step towards greatness”– Unknown

“If you don’t stand for something, you’ll fall for anything” – Phil McGraw

“Be the change you want to see in the world” – Mahatma Ghandi

In line with the above advice received from the participants, the findings of the study and current literature, it is recommended by the researcher that a programme be initiated in the private school to promote an open forum for early adolescent girls. In this way they will be given a voice in a safe environment so as to support one another and minimise peer pressure and bullying. In support of the need identified by the girls themselves, the researcher further recommends that an external counsellor

be employed by the school to allow for one-on-one counselling if required. The girls indicated that they did not feel comfortable with the existing system of a fellow teacher performing a dual role of teacher and counsellor.

'Mindfulness' (2.2.3.8) workshops may also add value in teaching parents how to develop a secure attachment with their children, and how to be present and practise spending "quality time" with their children (Healthy Parenting Today, 2002, para. 1; Loomans, 2005, p. 17). According to Loomans (2005, p. 12), children are asking of their parents: "Notice me, often take joy in my every existence, then I'll grow up and know that I am special and help others to feel the same". Loomans recommends that parents spend quality time with their children, which she describes as a time to "revel in your child, without any preoccupations or distractions – to revel is to take intense satisfaction in the existence of another – to feel one's heart swell with cherishing" (Loomans, 2005, p. 13).

Siegel (2011, p. 100) argues that a secure attachment is developed as parents are "attuned" to their children, which is done by being present and mindful. Children then develop a secure attachment and learn how to "regulate their body, develop healthy communication skills, maintain balanced emotions, practise response flexibility, develop insight, develop empathy, modulate fear and develop their intuition and morality". Being attuned to the other is not the same as mirroring the other. "Mirrorment" is pure resonance as explained by Siegel (2011, p. 111), whereas "attunement" has "resonance as one feature". It allows the individual to maintain his/her integrity; he/she does not "become the other person". Therefore, as the individual meets with the other, he/she is able to remain aware that "this is me and this is my resonance with the other, which is only one part of my experience, it is not the totality of me". This is the essence of a secure attachment and strong, healthy personal boundaries (2.2.2.5), which enable one to remain resilient in an unsupportive environment.

In view of the effects of such "mirrorment" (seeing that the individual's perception is based on his/her own phenomenological view (2.2.2.4)), the way in which the girl sees herself is mirrored in the way she sees others. This affects the way she acts towards others, and as they will mirror her behaviour back to her, this would explain the early adolescent who has a low self-image and perceives others to be rejecting of her. However, if this girl has developed a secure attachment with her parents, she will feel stronger in herself and more confident in her abilities, with a

healthier self-image. She will mirror this confidence to others, who will mirror her behaviour back to her – with a smaller likelihood of causing a “distorted perception” (3.2.3.2.3) of reality on the girl’s part.

In matching the well-being and psychosocial development of early adolescent girls in a private school setting with the findings of the study and current literature, it is recommended that the implementation of ‘mindfulness workshops’ for parents, teachers and students be investigated by the school. Such workshops may teach parents, teachers and students skills that will add to the early adolescent girls being more resilient and less susceptible to the modern-day pressures of the school, offering them better support in their transitional phase.

Finally, it is recommended that future studies be conducted in various other private schools so as to explore the psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting. This will yield a more generalised insight into the psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls in private school settings in Gauteng and perhaps at a later stage in South Africa, so as to work towards the continued healthy psychosocial development and well-being of adolescents in the country as a whole.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion in the form of a brief summary of the study, which included the strengths and limitations, findings, contributions to knowledge and recommendations for future research. In conclusion, the interpretive descriptive nature of the study allowed for a combination of interpretations to be presented, as understood from the perspectives of the researcher and participants. These perspectives were supported by a solid literature study on the psychosocial lived experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting in terms of their healthy development and well-being.

The findings are in line with current research, which shows that conditional regard as experienced by early adolescent girls from others has a negative effect on their psychosocial development and well-being (3.2.3.3.1; 3.2.3.3.2; 3.2.3.4.1; 3.2.3.4.3). However, the researcher’s assumption at the onset of the study, namely that such conditional regard was being received mainly from parents, was refuted. The findings of the study reveal that conditional regard is in fact rather initiated by the teachers and peers of the private school. This does not, in the researcher’s

opinion, exempt parents from their vital role of forming a secure attachment with their daughters and offering them loving support. On the contrary, based on literature confirming the need for a secure attachment with caregivers, the researcher believes that parents need to ensure they fulfil their role so as to help their early adolescent child to be less susceptible to the rejection of others. If the family is not successful in creating a secure base from which the early adolescent girl can grow, she may become overly sensitive to the conditional regard of others, as explained in the study's findings.

The researcher's reflections settle on the girls' overriding need for trust, as is evident from their interpretations of their lived experiences of the private school setting. It is worth reminding ourselves of the basic human need for safety and trust (2.2.3.5), as well as of the need to feel safe to be oneself with another. In this regard, Hycner (in Hycner & Jacobs, 1995, p. ix) states that "the human heart yearns for contact, above all it yearns for genuine dialogue. Each of us secretly and desperately yearns to be met, to be recognised in our uniqueness, our fullness, our vulnerability. We yearn to be genuinely valued by others as who we are". Margaret Mead (in Gomez, 2011, p. 363) explains that the true meaning of community can be found in a culture that supports the development of the individual's gifts, where there is a "place for every human gift". We need to celebrate each individual's uniqueness so that we can all work together in communion for the good of the whole.

This study has been successful in achieving what it set out to do, namely to explore and describe early adolescent girls' psychosocial lived experiences in a private school setting and to give the girls a voice. The researcher's assumption that the early adolescents in the private school were experiencing pressure in terms of performance expectations pertaining to their academic and extramural achievements was validated by the findings. The researcher's further assumption, that such pressure – in combination with the girls' vulnerable position due to their developmental phase – would have an impact on their self-esteem and identity formation, was also validated by the findings of the study.

In conclusion, the researcher feels satisfied that the depth of knowledge acquired in the findings has helped to create awareness and therefore positive support can in future be offered to early adolescent girls through various options that the school and parents may wish to explore.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: In-depth, semi-structured interviewing sheet

2ND Phase of Data Collection

After first making the participant relaxed and comfortable and using an ice-breaker, interviewer will then begin with **one main core** question:

How do you experience your private school setting? Kindly describe your experiences of your private school setting? (as a deeper exploration of experiences shared in documents as described in Appendix B)

Open-ended questions will be asked, however if closed questions are required for the researcher to check her own interpretation, these will also be used. Probing sub-questions will be used to understand how the private school setting is experienced by the participant, including all aspects of that environment (e.g. school work, school rules, pressures, teachers, parents, siblings, friends, peers, sports, arts, cultures etc.).

Probing questions may be about matters like: How it helps her, hinders her, affects her, what she enjoys/needs, what she doesn't enjoy, how it makes her behave, how she copes, how it affects her relationship with herself, friends, peers, parents, siblings, teachers etc. What are her experiences, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, physically? What messages is she giving others? What messages is she not giving? If she could do anything without consequences, what would it be? Is anything holding her back? What is her unique perception of the private school setting? How does her perception of her experiences stop her from fulfilling her unique gifts and talents and being authentic/true to herself? How does her perception of her experiences help her and how is it positive for her? What is she grateful for? What does a private school setting do for her? What opportunities does it offer/give her? What changes would she like to see? How could she be supported more by parents, teachers and friends? What advice would she give them?

These questions are simply a guide to use for probing; however, it will depend on the participant and the direction she takes in the interview according to her unique experience. An effort will be made to avoid asking leading questions. The main purpose will be to explore and describe the participant's true beliefs and opinions, to allow her to voice her personal truth in order to understand her full experience and needs, both positive and negative and how she can be supported.

Appendix B: Instructions for collages, letters and journal entries**1ST Phase of Data Collection**

- GOAL: 15 GRADE 7 GIRLS DIVIDED INTO 3 GROUPS OF 5 TO TAKE PART IN 1ST PHASE BEING COLLAGE, LETTER OR JOURNALS; 10 GIRLS TO BE CHOSEN AFTER ANALYSIS OF THIS DATA FOR 2ND PHASE OF IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

- Each girl: kindly select to present your experiences of your school either in the form of a collage, a personal letter or journal entries

- The following can be used as a guide in your presentation:
“How I experience my school” in terms of:
 - MYSELF;
 - School work/load/expectations;
 - school rewards; school rules; school sports; school cultural/arts/drama etc.;
 - teachers; peers; friends; parents; spirituality
 - my unique perceptions, meanings, feelings, beliefs

In summary:

- Group – 1: Make a collage A4 (use magazine cut outs) with written explanation on back
- Group – 2: Write a personal letter (approx. 1-2 pages)
- Group – 3: Keep daily journal entries (10 school days)
- Each girl to please write her name on the back of her document, in order to facilitate selection for in-depth interviews, but to return the document to Mrs Wright in a sealed confidential envelope, by 8 August 2012 (collage & letters), or by 16 August 2012 (journal entries), for collection by researcher.

Appendix C: Headmaster consent form**North-West University****HEADMASTER CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of Study: Psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting.

Grade 7 girls at your school are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Maria Campbell BA (Hons) Psych, from the Faculty of Health Sciences at North-West University. The results of this study will be in fulfilment of a MA in Psychology and will contribute to an overall project on embodiment. The girls were selected as possible participants in this study because of their grade (age), gender and attendance at your particular private school in Northern Johannesburg within the cross cultural South African context.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The research goal is to understand the psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls within a private school setting. The input of the grade 7 girls will contribute to giving the girls' a voice and creating awareness among parents and teachers for the support needed for the girls' continued healthy development.

2. PROCEDURES

If the girls volunteer to participate in this study, they will be asked to do the following:

- Choose to either create a collage or write a confidential letter or keep daily journal entries for a period of ten school days, of their experiences within the school, which will remain confidential and handed in to the school in a sealed confidential envelope for collection by the researcher
- The collage is only to be used to collect data and not as a therapeutic technique
- Depending on the depth of data collected, ten girls will be selected to participate in an in-depth interview to explore and describe their personal experiences as they find themselves in the private school setting
- The interview will be conducted on a one-on-one, face-to-face basis at the private school in a private interviewing room
- Only the girl and the researcher will be present during the interview, with strict confidentiality being adhered to at all times

- The interviews will be audiotaped for transcription purposes and the duration of each interview will be approximately 1 hour
- All data will be stored in a safe place only accessible by the researcher or for university audit purposes
- Feedback will be provided to the parents and girls before the findings of the study are published

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The nature of the study involves the collection of collages, confidential letters, journal entries and individual interviewing to explore the girls' lived experiences within the private school setting. This may evoke feelings of discomfort or create awareness of past and current un/satisfactory interactions as well as dialogue or identification of areas of self-development. The researcher will make herself available to address any queries or issues and provide the necessary support in form of recommendations, dialogue or referrals. The girl's participation is voluntary and she may choose to withdraw at any time during the study.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This research may benefit the participants as it will give them a voice and create awareness for parents and teachers of their experiences within the private school setting. The research may work towards future guidelines for other parents and teachers in order to work towards supporting the healthy development of early adolescent girls as well as offer potential areas of growth and self-development on a personal level.

The researcher intends to use the findings to create awareness amongst early adolescent girls, parents and teachers in a cross cultural South African context in order to promote a more supportive approach for early adolescent girls within a private school setting.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

The girls will not be paid for their participation in this study, nor will any fees be charged by the researcher.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with the girls and the school will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudo-codes to ensure the girls' anonymity. All collected data will be kept confidential, labelled with pseudo-codes and stored at North-West University Potchefstroom with selected material being published in a research report at North-West University Potchefstroom.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

The girls' participation is voluntary and they may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. They may also refuse to answer any questions they wish to and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw a participant from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. (refer to point 3).

Your signature indicates that you have agreed to allow the grade 7 girls at your school to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact

Researcher: Maria Campbell 082 403 0330 or maria.campbell@vodamail.co.za

Assistant-Supervisor: Colleen Potgieter 082 338 5900 or colleen@semper.co.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent on behalf of a girl at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of the girls' participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding the girls' rights as research participants, contact Mrs Colleen Potgieter at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family studies at North-West University.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to myself by Maria Campbell [the Researcher] in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I _____ [Principal of the particular private school in Gauteng] hereby consent voluntarily that The Grade 7 Girls [the participants] may participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

**SIGNATURE OF HEADMASTER
ON BEHALF OF THE SCHOOL**

Date

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

I _____ [the Researcher] declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [the Headmaster of the School]. He was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and it was not necessary to use a translator.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

Appendix D: Parent consent form**North-West University****PARENT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of Study: Psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting.

Your daughter in grade 7 is asked to participate in a research study conducted by Maria Campbell BA (Hons) Psych, from the Faculty of Health Sciences at North-West University. The results of this study will be in fulfilment of a MA in Psychology and will contribute to an overall project on embodiment. Your daughter was selected as a possible participant in this study because of her grade (age), gender and attendance at a particular private school in Northern Johannesburg within the cross cultural South African context.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The research goal is to understand the psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls within a private school setting. The input of the grade 7 girls will contribute to giving the girls' a voice and creating awareness among parents and teachers for the support needed for the girls' continued healthy development.

2. PROCEDURES

If your daughter volunteers to participate in this study, she will be asked to do the following:

- Choose to either create a collage, write a personal letter or keep daily journal entries for a period of ten school days of her experiences of the school; all documents are to be handed in by a set date to the school in a sealed confidential envelope for collection by the researcher
- The collage is only to be used to collect data and not as a therapeutic technique
- Depending on the depth of data collected, ten girls will be asked to participate in an interview to explore and describe their personal experiences of the private school setting
- The interview will be conducted on a one-on-one, face-to-face basis at the private school in a private interviewing room

- Only the girl and the researcher will be present during the interview, with strict confidentiality being adhered to at all times
- The interviews will be audiotaped for transcription purposes and the duration of each interview will be approximately 1 hour
- All data will be stored in a safe place only accessible by the researcher and her supervisor or for university audit purposes
- Feedback will be provided to you and your daughter before the findings of the study are published

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The nature of the study involves the collection of collages, confidential letters, journal entries and individual interviewing to explore the girls' lived experiences within the private school setting. This may evoke feelings of discomfort or create awareness of past and current un/satisfactory interactions as well as dialogue or identification of areas of self-development. The researcher will make herself available to address any queries, issues and provide the necessary support in form of recommendations, dialogue or referrals. Your daughter's participation is voluntary and she may choose to withdraw at any time during the study.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This research may benefit the participants as it will give them a voice and create awareness for parents and teachers of their experiences within the private school setting. The research may work towards future guide lines for other parents and teachers in order to work towards supporting the healthy development of early adolescent girls as well as offer potential areas of growth and self-development on a personal level.

The researcher intends to use the findings to create awareness amongst early adolescent girls, parents and teachers in a cross cultural South African context in order to promote a more supportive approach for early adolescent girls within a private school setting.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Your daughter will not be paid for her participation in this study, nor will any fees be charged by the researcher.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with the girls will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudo-codes to ensure your daughter's anonymity. All collected data will be kept confidential, labelled with pseudo-codes and stored at North-West University Potchefstroom with selected material being published in a research report at North-West University Potchefstroom.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your daughter's participation is voluntary and she may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. She may also refuse to answer any questions she wish to and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw your daughter from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. (refer to point 3).

Your signature indicates that you have agreed to allow your daughter to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact

Researcher: Maria Campbell 082 403 0330 or maria.campbell@vodamail.co.za

Assistant-Supervisor: Colleen Potgieter 082 338 5900 or colleen@semper.co.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent on behalf of your daughter at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your daughter's participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your daughter's rights as a research participant, contact Mrs Colleen Potgieter at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family studies at North-West University.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to myself by Maria Campbell [the Researcher] in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I _____ [Parent of the participant] hereby consent voluntarily that my daughter _____ [the participant] may participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

**SIGNATURE OF PARENT
ON BEHALF OF THE PARTICIPANT**

Date

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

I _____ [the Researcher] declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [the Parent]. He/she was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and it was not necessary to use a translator.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

Appendix E: Participant consent form**North-West University****PARTICIPANT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

Title of Study: Psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting.

Grade 7 girls at your school are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Maria Campbell BA (Hons) Psych, from the Faculty of Health Sciences at North-West University. The results of this study will be in fulfilment of a MA in Psychology and will contribute to an overall project on embodiment. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your grade (age), gender and attendance at a particular private school in Northern Johannesburg within the cross cultural South African context.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The research goal is to understand the psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls within a private school setting. The input of the grade 7 girls will contribute to giving the girls' a voice and creating awareness among parents and teachers for the support needed for the girls' continued healthy development.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Choose to either create a collage or write a confidential letter or keep daily journal entries for a period of ten school days of your experiences within the school; documents must be handed in to the school by a set date in a sealed confidential envelope for collection by the researcher
- The collage is only to be used to collect data and not as a therapeutic technique
- Depending on the depth of data collected, ten girls will be asked to participate in an interview to explore and describe their personal experiences as they find themselves in the private school setting
- The interview will be conducted on a one-on-one, face-to-face basis at the private school in a private interviewing room

- Only the girl and the researcher will be present during the interview, with strict confidentiality being adhered to at all times
- The interviews will be audiotaped for transcription purposes and the duration of each interview will be approximately 1 hour
- All data will be stored in a safe place only accessible by the researcher or for university audit purposes
- Feedback will be provided to the parents and girls before the findings of the study is published

3. POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The nature of the study involves the collection of collages, confidential letters, journal entries and individual interviewing to explore the girls' lived experiences within the private school setting. This may evoke feelings of discomfort or create awareness of past and current un/satisfactory interactions as well as dialogue or identification of areas of self-development. The researcher will make herself available to address any queries, issues and provide the necessary support in form of recommendations, dialogue or referrals. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time during the study.

4. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

This research may benefit you and other participants as it will give you a voice and create awareness for parents and teachers of the grade 7 girls' experiences within the private school setting. The research may work towards future guide lines for other parents and teachers in order to work towards supporting the healthy development of early adolescent girls as well as offer potential areas of growth and self-development on a personal level.

The researcher intends to use the findings to create awareness amongst early adolescent girls, parents and teachers in a cross cultural South African context in order to promote a more supportive approach for early adolescent girls within a private school setting.

5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not be paid for your participation in this study, nor will any fees be charged by the researcher.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with yourself or any of the other girls will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of using pseudo-codes to ensure your anonymity. All collected data will be kept confidential, labelled with pseudo-codes and stored at North-West University Potchefstroom with selected material being published in a research report at North-West University Potchefstroom.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you wish to and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw a participant from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. (refer to point 3).

Your signature indicates that you have agreed to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this consent form.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact

Researcher: Maria Campbell 082 403 0330 or maria.campbell@vodamail.co.za

Assistant-Supervisor: Colleen Potgieter 082 338 5900 or colleen@semper.co.za

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Mrs Colleen Potgieter at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family studies at North-West University.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

The information above was described to myself by Maria Campbell [the Researcher] in English and I am in command of this language. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I _____ [the Participant being a grade 7 girl at the particular private school in Gauteng] hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

Date**SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

I _____ [the Researcher] declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [the Participant]. She was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions. This conversation was conducted in English and it was not necessary to use a translator.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

Appendix F: Explanation to collage – Participant 2 (c3)

This is a place where ^{CP1 CP6} your opinion is not important unless it's the same as everyone else's. ^{SI CP3} Where being different is so rare it's considered abnormal. People know more about your life than you do. ^{AN RN}

It's a place where choices are always the same, the easy ^{CP6} path. Where if you resist peer pressure you're 'gay'. You'd rather be seen as cool, fail exams, drop out of school and be able to tell your kids about all the 'crazy' things you did. ^{CP5}

People will follow the 'norm', even if it slowly ^{CP5} kills them.

Those cool people ^{CP3} lie and backstab, as long as they stay on top. People feel alone and broken, but never say anything, or change their statuses every few minutes, hoping someone might give them attention. ^{AN RN}

Mistakes are made, and never forgotten. People are hated and never known. While this goes on we're still expected to get decent marks, perform in extra murals, and complete tasks at home. ^{B2 R1E R1X}

The pressure is raised more and more. ^{AS SS DS OS → pressure HSB}

Yeah, this is school.



Appendix G: Letter – Participant 6 (L3)

The beginning to a story is always the hardest, how do you start? Well this is how.

Grade 4 2009- The best year of my life, had everything I could ever hope for a family who loved me (even though my parents were divorced), the most amazing school and whole bunch of friends that I thought were going to be by my side forever. But sometimes life takes unexpected turns and you end up in places you never expected to be like this one.

We had a fight, but it didn't end well it resulted in name calling and ignoring each other for the rest of the week. Until it got really bad and she decided to start a rumour which at the time she thought would be innocent and wouldn't hurt anyone. But what she didn't realise is that gossip spreads like a wild fire and burns like the pain of standing in one. But how I found out was the worst, "Did you hear? I heard from (her) that you had sex with someone.

Grade 5 2010- The first day of grade five, excitement as well as the nerves roamed the air. All of us to report to the hall. Later on I caught up with my (friends), to my surprise I found no one was talking to me and everyone was giving me dirty looks. All my friends not speaking to me.

Yes, only now did I realise the severity of this rumour and how far it had spread, but as you know words can never be taken back.

So we were all sitting in the hall, nervous as to which class we were going to be in for our second year of big school. Well my class at the time was all I wanted (All my friends even her). So we took our seats and obviously everyone still ignoring me, so I sat by myself in the corner. From there it just got worse sitting alone every break because no one would talk to me, and what everyone thought of me now, made it about ten times worse. So after an agonising long year with no friends, I met Kayla, I was her first friend and she was my only one. Things looked up for me.

Still haven't spoken to my mom about any of this, to scared of what she might think of me. Until one of my (ex- best friends) moms spoke to my mom and told her everything, who knew your mom could help you so much.

Grade 6 2011- By now I had made some new friends and was starting to make peace with everything aside from the mean words being spoken to me such as (slut, prostitute, whore ext.) These hurtful words I will never forget.

By now my mom had spoken to the teachers and the rumour had finally died down. And today I have a bunch of amazing friends that I wouldn't trade for the world. I guess I have the Lord to thank for that.

Now and then I still ask myself questions like what do people think of me and what might have been different? The truth is if I look at the (popular) people of our grade those were all of my friends and it hurts to see how they have moved on and we grew different and apart.

So that brings me to my next point.

PL

Popularity. What is popularity?

37 Personally popularity is an act of superiority, as in I'm better than you, therefore I can have all the nice clothes and all the boys I want, I don't have to be a nice person just pretty, skinny and superficial. People feel to be popular you need to put on a fake mask that covers up your true emotions and who you really are, like a layer of makeup. Being popular, accepted and liked is more important to you than being real and true to yourself, you just have to fit in to be cool.

What is it like not to be popular?

Being unpopular all of a sudden makes you inferior like your worthless (you don't matter) and nobody likes you and you will never be liked or loved. You don't fit in with the fashion or you're not pretty or skinny enough.

Unfortunately it is the truth, you don't see 'uglies' hang with 'pretties' do you? Well at least that's what a (popular) told me. But that is also true people are shallow and only care about their reputation and how others see them, and not how they see themselves. This is a true case of an all about U-niverse.

Grade 6 2011- I got invited to a (popular party) along with some of my other friends, Kiara not being one of them. It was a dress up party and everyone had to come in a scary outfit. Kiara was told to come in a pumpkin outfit, she asked why and this was the (popular kids) response, 'because you're FAT and UGLY'. As if that wasn't bad enough she actually came fearing they would pick on her if she didn't. From that day on she was my friend and she still is.

Grade 7 2012- Grade seven has by far been my most peaceful year concerning all of these things I have mentioned, ignoring the rude comments still being made about me, I choose to keep my head high and forget about these ugly words.

Why? Why if she is so rude and mean to others, is she still so adored by so many people? Is it because she's skinny? Is it because she's beautiful? Or is it because she has the ability to make others feel inferior and cave in to the temptations of satin. Let me tell you from past experiences that there is nothing special about being like that and that I'm glad that I left the way I did. I have finally realised no one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

So this one question remains, why are people so superficial? I mean they accuse me for having sex in grade three? Is it even possible? When they are proud to tell the stories of how they did, and gave a guy a blowjob and smoked at the party and got drunk with their parents, but did they get judged for it? Maybe they judged me because there jealous? I have high grades, I'm compassionate? So make sure your hands are clean before you point your fingers.

The three words (you had sex) caused me more pain than losing all my friends and a year of my life.

Trusting that this will remain confidential

Appendix H: Journal entries – Participant 9 (j3)

Wednesday 1 August

It's one week until the market day and I don't even know what to get or to wear, but I'm sure everything will be fine.

Thursday 2 August

School was fine today, but at school I feel so left out because I'm the only girl in my class without a blackberry, and that's all people talk about: bbm, how cool they are, ect.

Friday 3 August

Today school was really fun because, we all laughed at least once today and lots of funny things happened.

Monday 6 August

There's only two more sleeps to the market day and it looks like we're going to freeze, I still feel so left out because school revolves around BBM and social networks.

Tuesday 7 August

It's market day tomorrow and they should've just canceled it because we are having it inside and it's going to be such a mess.

Wednesday 8 August

The market day today was really fun until afterwards. Afterwards we had to clean up the aftercare and some people did nothing they just played on their phones while we were clearing up, it was really unfair and annoying.

Thursday 9 August

Yesterday so many people had their phones at school, it's like the teachers don't even care. Before and after the market day people were sitting on their phones in front of the teachers! and they didn't get caught, there are some people who bring their phones every single day and never get caught. It's sooo unfair.

Friday 10 August

Today I finished all my homework: reading, writing everything. Last night I went to a sleepover and all she did was sit on her phone the whole night it was sooo annoying.

Monday 13 August

Today school was fun, I got my afrikaans back and I got 100% and it's really strange how people treat you after you get a mark like that. People who usually

completely ignore me talk to me because I got that mark it's really strange.

Tuesday 14 August

Today our NS mushroom tasks were due. So many people forgot theirs at home, and some people were even asking others to do it for them, and the people they ask say YES! People are so lazy these days! And in maths the person that sits in front of me can't keep quiet for 1 minute it's soooo annoying. But other than that school was fun.

Appendix I: Interview – Participant 1 (1)

INTERVIEW: PARTICIPANT 1: 15 August 2012			
RESEARCHER:		PARTICIPANT 1:	
1	Thank you for allowing me to interview you and for your collage, I see you express a lot of different emotions in your collage in terms of your experiences at school and a need to be unique, can you tell me more?	Well like in the sports, I don't play much sport anymore I used to but as I got to about grade 4 I stopped because of the competitiveness amongst the girls in the teams. <i>CP3 CP2 CP3 CP2</i>	Peer Pressure Bullying? sport competitiveness
2	What is that like?	Well it's like you get one girl who thinks she's in the Olympics who everyone thinks is perfect and wants to be her friend then on the sports field if I never feel good enough because I compare myself to her. <i>CP1, CP5</i>	Peer pressure set standard don't measure up?
3	Why do you compare yourself to her?	Because all the teachers and pupils think she is amazing and so I think she is like the standard I must measure myself against. <i>S1 CP2 CP1 CP6</i>	social/cultural pressure opinions of others
4	How do you experience academics?	I do well in academics I'm usually in the top ten. I feel not good enough in sports when I do anything, I don't know maybe it's just me, but everyone seems to be friends with her but I'm not, so then I feel like there is something wrong with me because I'm not. And I feel this pressure I don't want to play because if you mess up they get angry with you, so I'm afraid to mess up and what they will think of me. The girls in the A team are good and then I feel degraded like I'm not as good as them. <i>S1 S2 S3 CP6</i>	Self rejection doubt is something wrong with me degraded - not good enough fear of rejection by peers
5	Who told you not good enough?	Well it's the girls that are so good, they set the standard and if you can't meet it others look down on you, so I don't feel good enough because I can't meet her standard. <i>CP3</i>	Std too high competitiveness peer rejection low self-worth
6	What else do you experience that's like this?	Well with clothes and fashion if this popular girl shops at a certain shop then everyone shops there and whatever clothes she chooses and the trends she sets everyone copies. So when I go out and buy the shoes she has made "fashionable" I feel like her victim, but I do it because I want to look right, the way everyone else does, I don't want to be left out or laughed at. <i>CP3 ANTRN</i>	sets standard want to be self but want to belong Peer Pressure "Cool" Trapped can't be like her can't be self
7	So it's like you want to fit in and feel like you belong in your peer group but then as you said in your collage you desperately want to be recognised for your uniqueness? Can you tell me more?	Yes that's exactly it, I want people to appreciate me and say wow she is really good at that or she has a special talent for that but then I don't want to be left out and made to feel weird and different so I feel confused, I want to be me, but I want to fit in. <i>RN AN</i>	need for recognition need to fit in but want to be accepted low self confusion

<p>8</p>	<p>I understand, this really seems like a problem for you, and may I ask what is your experience of bullying?</p> <p>CP3 S2 S1 CP3 S3</p>	<p>I often feel bullied, well like this girl is having her party soon and 95% of the grade will get invited but I will be in the 5% not invited because I don't fit in with them in sports and whatever other "cool" things they do. It's like when we were in grade 1 we had to invite the whole class so no one was left out and now in grade 7 its goes back to that again everyone is very sensitive and feels hurt and rejected easily if they get left out. And so now when I don't get invited I feel there is something wrong with me. Because in grade 7 if a person doesn't like a person then they don't invite them to their party on purpose then everyone in the grade thinks you not cool enough and there's something wrong with you and they are not so friendly with you and so it feels like they gang up against you by pushing you out and you start questioning yourself because this is the age you start questioning yourself and everything. So I doubt myself, I don't have confidence in myself because I think there is something wrong with me.</p>	<p>Peer Pressure Bullied => not cool => Very Sensitive Self conscious Self rejection? Peer rejection Self doubt => Low confidence Low self confidence</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>So why do you think this is the time you are questioning yourself?</p>	<p>Because becoming a teenager now it's the time you trying to understand who you are, it's like you try find yourself and ask "who am I?" S1</p>	<p>Search Self Identity</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>So with these cool girls, they are deciding who you are, for you?</p> <p>CP2</p>	<p>Ja, they decide for me who I am, if I am cool or if I am a freak or a goth. But who are they to decide? That's why I really want to get out of this school. I just want to go to High School and start again, there's going to be no emotion...I'm going to miss you type of stuff...I'll just be glad to go.</p>	<p>Peer pressure Stops authenticity Angry hurt! Don't know how to handle</p>
<p>11</p>	<p>What makes you think this won't happen in high school?</p> <p>R3 S3</p>	<p>I know it will carry on and happen but this time I'll be prepared and there'll be new people and less pressure and more opportunities to be myself and not his little OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) child</p>	<p>Incompetent => Need real self => distorted self image</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>Who told you, you are an OCD child?</p> <p>CP3 ↓ CP2 ↓ CP6</p>	<p>No one, I'm just using the expression it's how I feel I'm becoming sometimes. Sometimes I have these rituals like when I go to bed I have to have my pillows in a certain way, my teddies, my eye patches, my ear plugs, my lip ice and my tissues and my glass of water, it all has to be in the same place and available to me even though I hardly ever use any of it, it like makes me feel safe in the routine I do but at the same time I feel weak and confused as to why I need to do it.</p> <p>CP6 S3</p>	<p>Peer pressure ↳ "rituals" ↳ make someone else's not Incompetent low self confidence</p>

13	<p>So you have recognised these OCD type tendencies in yourself because of how you feel amongst peers and so you think everyone sees you that way?</p> <p>CP2 CP3 CP4</p>	<p>Yes, and I know I am not OCD but the way they treat me is changing me into it, like they say I'm weird and a goth and now I'm starting to do weird things like I believe what they say about me, like I'm becoming what they said I was.</p>	<p>Became who they say she is. ↳ Self fulfilling</p>
14	<p>Can you explain why you think you become what they say you are.</p> <p>S1 S2 SS? CP3 CP6</p>	<p>Well it's like I'm already feeling confused about who I am becoming a teenager and all, so as I'm trying to find myself and get to know who I actually am, because I'm not sure I almost start believing what they say, it's like I start doubting myself.</p>	<p>Due to vulnerability ⇒ opinions of peers ⇒ self doubt</p>
15	<p>Do you think this peer pressure to be cool is at other schools too?</p> <p>CP1</p>	<p>Yes I think this cool thing is in all schools, there are mean girls in all schools suck ups, clicks and apparently if you sit with "geeks", mean girls will use it against you.</p>	<p>Peer pressure to be cool + fit in</p>
16	<p>If we take this "geek" thing how does that fit in with your academics? If you in top ten are you a geek?</p> <p>AS AS+SS = CP1 DS+AS ≠ CP1</p>	<p>Yes if you are very good academically you are a geek, but the girls who play sport and do well academically are not geeks but if you do well in academics and don't take part in sports but rather art like me then they don't "know" you because you don't play in their teams and they "assume" you a geek, they make up a person that you are not. It amazes me that people can speak such junk about me when they don't even know me and with me they don't even get my name right so they really know nothing about me!</p>	<p>Peers decide what is cool + acceptable → Make you someone you not → rumours/lies No recognition for real self.</p>
17	<p>How does that make you feel, that they assume you are someone you are not and don't even know your name?</p> <p>R3 S1/S6 S4</p>	<p>It makes me feel... why? Why am I not cool to you? It makes me feel am I not good enough? Like I'm not worth the time to get to know and then on the other hand I feel why am I so important to you that you have to make fun of me? Why are you discussing me and spreading rumours about me if I'm not important? So I feel confused and irritated and frustrated like I'm stuck and can't move and I feel so angry that I could rip someone's head off sometimes.</p>	<p>Peer pressure Self doubt low self worth Confusion Frustration/anger Lack of self control.</p>
18	<p>How does this all affect who you really are? Do you know who you are?</p> <p>S1 S4 S5</p>	<p>No I don't know who I am, I'm living under a shadow, I don't know who I am and this time in my life is when I'm trying to find out who I am, so it's so hard I feel so frustrated like I just want to scream! Like the real me is trapped and I can't get her out.</p>	<p>Aware of identity formed Trapped. Losing self control?</p>

19	<p>That does sound difficult. Do you think this competitiveness in sports you spoke of earlier is only in private schools or government too?</p>	<p>Yes sport competitiveness is a private school thing I think, this is exactly what I've always hated in primary school. The competitiveness among the team players is bad, they don't play as a team they each compete against each other. It makes me think what is the point, when do you get to feel supported and like safe in a team like you have each other's backs and will stand up for each other no matter what?</p>	<p>Selfish - each 4 herself Pressure - sports (competitive) Intra team No care for each other</p>
20	<p>And do you think this will be different in high school?</p>	<p>Yes! In high school they have the "wolves" they are all part of one pack, team, they stand together, work together as a team not against each other! And even though it is probably still important to be "cool" they are more relaxed and seem so much more dedicated to Christianity, they seem passionate. We heard one of their assemblies the other day. So I know in High School you can develop your relationship with God better too. So it's that inner team competitiveness that made me stop sport and now that I don't do sport I am classified as shy and anti-social. I'm none of that! And also I don't think everyone wants to be known as their brothers "little sister", I want to have my own name! But at the moment that's the best I've got like it's my only chance!</p>	<p>Positive Communion Connection Christianity Stand together Peer pressure intra-team competitiveness - shuts development + relations to God & with each other Need to be accepted for who we are.</p>
21	<p>You make it sound like it's your only chance of survival...the only connection to your authentic self, can you explain?</p>	<p>Yes that's exactly it, it's not the real me, being known as my brothers little sister but it's as close a link to my real self as I'm going to get right now, so it's better than nothing. At the moment no one thinks anything of me, I'm just lame, a geek and right now the fact that I had an older brother at high school gives me a 1% chance, even though he is cool and so they say we are nothing alike. It's like when everyone found out I had an older brother in high school they thought I was so cool, but it didn't last, the novelty wore off quickly but I clung to it as much as I could. (AN+R)</p>	<p>Blocked - in authentic setting for 2nd best Need to be cool Not responsible Hanging onto something not REAL</p>
22	<p>How does that feel for you?</p>	<p>It's like living two lives when you go to school everyone thinks you this person that you not, but you don't know how to change it, you feel frustrated and trapped and I think it's unfair.</p>	<p>Peer pressure causes false self Blocks authenticity - unfair frustrated trapped</p>

inauthentic settles for second best need to be cool not responsible hanging on to something not real
 CP1 CP2 CP6

CP2
 Need=HS!

HS!
 R3 - HS
 make you into someone you're not & then still reject you!

CP6

23	<p>I see you often tell me how you feel by saying "you" and you don't often refer to yourself as "I", does it make it easier to accept?</p> <p>CP2 CP6 RN</p>	<p>Yes it does make it easier to accept the pain, because it's very hard "you" have to live off other people's reputation of you and live off your older brother 'cause you don't have anything else to live off! It's also like it's not really me so why should I refer to me as I when I feel I am only a person because of someone else, so it's them, "you" not me and "I"...</p>	<p>Dissociate self from pain "You" not "I" PAINFUL!</p>
24	<p>That is so interesting to me, so you feel you can't live off anything of yourself?</p> <p>AS SS CN → CP2 CP3 PQR</p>	<p>No I don't have myself at the moment because no one thinks I'm cool or worth anything. So I'm just not good enough and there is just too much competition. Emotionally I feel like an underdog, physically I don't feel fit, I feel down and don't have a lot of energy, I feel depressed and spiritually I question God, this is unfair and why doesn't he help make it better? I doubt myself all the time and so I need my family to keep reassuring me and supporting me and making me feel more secure.</p>	<p>Don't trust Self Peers don't think she's worth it so she doesn't Competent pressure too great</p>
25	<p>And how do you experience your family support?</p> <p>54 SI HS3 SI 54 D</p>	<p>Well my family try support me a lot but I am always so angry and frustrated from what happens at school that I usually snap at my mom and dad a lot and take it out on them, and then with my brother I expect him to make me feel special and fix what the kids have school have... messed up and if he says one wrong thing to me I feel like it's the end of the world and that he also thinks I'm not worth anything. I know they love me but I think I don't give them much of a chance now. Then I feel guilty for taking it out on them so I just feel bad all the time, depressed and hopeless.</p>	<p>Family pressure! High expectations for family Take it out on them Hopeless Depression?</p>
26	<p>Hopeless?</p> <p>D</p>	<p>Yes it's like I know they love me and they want the best for me, sometimes I don't feel like I can do things though, I don't feel like I have confidence in myself, when I was small my mom pampered me a lot, but I know it's just that she loves me.... but then why do I still feel so frustrated and trapped?</p>	<p>Over protective parents? don't trust her - she doesn't trust Self ⇒ incompetent</p>
27	<p>That sounds very painful for you?</p> <p>R3 CP3</p>	<p>Yes I feel in pain a lot, like I'm always tired and down and can't take it anymore... there is a real person here who has feelings and people just don't care, they walk all over you, and they try make me someone I'm not and I don't feel strong enough to stand up for myself sometimes. CP5</p>	<p>way treated → weak Can't stand up for self.</p>
28	<p>I understand.... If we move back to the academics again, you say you do well in this area, is there much pressure that you experience?</p> <p>CP2 RN Coping?</p>	<p>Well yes the academic pressure is really high, we get loads of homework and lots to study for tests and cycles but I study well under pressure, when I cram it in I seem to produce better work.</p>	<p>high work load ⇒ academic pressure.</p>

29	<p>Why do you think this is?</p> <p><i>Cope?</i></p>	<p>Because if I don't say I have to do something in two weeks' time, then I would worry for two weeks but if I leave it for last minute there is less pressure and stress because I only have two days to worry.</p>	<p>Avoidance Coping mechanism.</p>
30	<p>So it seems there is a lot of pressure but this is your way of controlling or coping with it?</p> <p><i>Pressure! AS AS? CPI-CP2 CT4</i></p>	<p>Yes the standard is very high at our school and the work load is a lot so we are under a lot of pressure and that's the way I handle it so it doesn't get to me much, because I want to pass and do well and go to university and have a great job one day, so I know I just have to do what they tell me to now. But I also do well academically so it's the one area I can shine, but then sometimes I feel I put too much pressure on myself to do well because if I don't do well then I feel like the cool kids say I'm not good enough or worth anything.</p>	<p>Pressure - High Standards - academics</p> <p>Positive Holistic</p> <p>try keep up to achieve future goals</p> <p>Peer Pressure increases Academic pressure</p>
31	<p>I understand, and what about the school rules?</p>	<p>Well like we seem to be being treated worse now than when we were younger, I mean we are the oldest in the school in grade 7 now and this is the year they choose to bring in all these silly rules. Like the diary thing, I mean I get my work done and I'm responsible but if I forget to get my mom to sign my diary I get shouted at. I mean my mom doesn't even look at the work or remind me to do it she just signs meaninglessly, so what's the difference?</p>	<p>Rules/teachers treat like babies less self confidence weak less able to stand up for self + against peer pressure.</p>
32	<p>So this diary thing makes you feel how?</p> <p><i>CT4 → S3</i></p>	<p>Like its extra unnecessary pressure they put us under, I don't even have to always write everything down in my diary I can remember it but it's like they don't trust us to remember to do it, why don't they just let us learn the hard way if we forget we can get bad marks, at least we will feel more in control of ourselves and learn to take consequences of our actions, I'm sure if that happened we would never forget again. And if I don't have confidence in myself I find I keep looking for help from others.</p>	<p>they don't trust us so we don't trust us.</p> <p>lay self confidence</p> <p>overprotective</p> <p>lack of power + control look to others for support can't self support</p>
33	<p>How does that make you feel?</p> <p><i>CT4? AS? CPA2 CT4 → S3</i></p>	<p>Like if you don't trust me I don't trust myself and I can't build confidence in myself, so I don't learn to take more responsibility for myself now that I'm becoming a teenager which is the thing we need to learn now. I think it is so stupid!</p>	<p>Low self confidence.</p>

<p>34</p>	<p>So do you feel the teachers put too much pressure on you with diary management which just adds to all your work pressure to achieve good marks?</p> <p>CT4 → S3 S4 + S3</p>	<p>Yes! This diary management rule is just adding to my work pressure. And with all this added unnecessary pressure to perform in a certain way I feel like the responsibility is too much and so because I am always so busy working 'til late at night trying to get all homework and tasks finished I feel I don't have time to do silly things like make my bed in the morning or keep my room clean so I end up feeling more frustrated and incompetent cause I can't even take responsibility for little things that a grade 1 can do.</p>	<p>"silly" "babyish" rules ⇒ add more pressure</p> <p>pressure ⇒ too much responsibility ⇒ low self confidence</p> <p>Low self confidence</p>
<p>35</p>	<p>What other rules are pressuring you?</p> <p>CPA? CT1 CT4 → S3</p>	<p>Like this stupid cap rule, you have to wear your cap on the field at break now in the sun, for skin cancer, I mean we are in grade 7, we have been running around without caps on since grade R and now in our last year at the school when we should have some privileges, we have earned it, but they are making us wear caps like babies. It's embarrassing and degrading!</p>	<p>Treated inferior act inferior Teachers degrading</p>
<p>36</p>	<p>So you feel you are becoming teenagers and will be going to high school soon and should be treated accordingly but you are still being treated like junior primary children?</p> <p>CP4</p>	<p>Yes that is it, they treat us like children and we are teenagers, there is a difference! It's frustrating and so I just want to rebel! At this school there are just too many rules and you have to remember all of them or you get shouted at. They just add to our pressure to do well.</p>	<p>⇒ Teachers/School to adapt/adapt just boundaries teens not kids ↓ pressure rebel?</p>
<p>37</p>	<p>It does sound frustrating ... in what ways do you think you rebel if at all?</p> <p>CT4 S5 S4 S1 CP3</p>	<p>Well recently I started wearing my hair a bit more messy to rebel a bit but then the teachers keep shouting at me so then I feel like I'm bad or not good. RO enough again anyway, and I am normal I do want the teachers to like me and approve of me but at the same time like I said my real self is feeling frustrated and trapped and dying to come out! And like the teachers also treat you different, if you are not sporty and not a prefect you are like the "in between kids" you get shouted at more, they show favouritism towards the prefects and sporty kids. And with our peers, if you are not a prefect or not "cool" you are left out. And the prefects and "cool" kids break the rules and don't wear caps and if we wear our caps they make fun of us but if we don't the teachers shout at us!</p>	<p>= rebel - pressure ↑ teachers shout ↓ low self worth (reinforced) ↓ conflict ↓ trapped Teachers - Unfair degrading</p>

<p>38</p>	<p>It sounds like you can't win...?</p> <p>R3 CT4</p>	<p>Yes, it's just so unfair if we should wear our caps then everyone should have to and instead of motivating and encouraging us, by wearing them too and making the prefects wear them too, the teachers shout at us. Like if every single person in the school wore a cap then no one would feel odd or weird or be ridiculed. We get treated unfairly and like babies when we are just becoming teenagers and nearly going to high school, they should treat us like it!</p>	<p>Unfair teachers demotivate by (Shouting + enforcing "degrading" rules) Teens! not kids</p>
<p>39</p>	<p>So have you been screamed at a lot by teachers, what's that like for you?</p> <p>CT1 S4 CT1 AS CT1 S1 S4 SS R2</p>	<p>Yes I often get shouted at by teachers in a real degrading way, like this one time I didn't do so well in some of my work because I was feeling really down, feeling left out and not good enough, so I know I was actually rebelling a bit by not doing my homework properly and I know the teacher probably felt frustrated because I always do such good work so she knows what I'm capable of and she also teaches the top maths class so I think she felt I was going to bring the class standard down and maybe her reputation as a good teacher. But anyway the teacher thought I was messing around and not doing my homework and she walked into this other class I was in and screamed at me in front of the other teacher and the whole class. It was so embarrassing, I felt really pathetic, but I also felt helpless like if I tried to explain myself to her she may accuse me of being cheeky and take me to principal and I may be suspended or expelled, so I didn't dare!</p>	<p>Teacher Degrading shout in front of other! + pressure to keep straight Teachers - inconsistent unfair/confused? Teachers - degrading Afraid to stand up for self strict discipline!</p>
<p>40</p>	<p>Is that the only teacher who shouted at you like that?</p> <p>CT-2</p>	<p>No I have had quite a few teachers shout at me for silly things, like when I was talking to one of my friends at break and she is a prefect and was on duty and I was not supposed to be near her. And another time when my hair was hanging in my eyes a bit and a teacher shouted at me and told me to fix my messy hair. But then the prefects, especially our head girl, always has messy hair and breaks the rules and she gets away with it. It's so unfair!</p>	<p>Degrading unfair Teachers - Favortism unfair! Low self worth.</p>
<p>41</p>	<p>And how does it make you feel?</p> <p>S1 CP3 LT2 S1</p>	<p>I feel like there is something wrong with me, the teachers, the cool kids, they don't like me, I feel not good enough, not worth something, not special, not important like them, like I don't matter.</p>	<p>Favortism conditional regard from teachers + peers self doubt Low self worth</p>

<p>42</p>	<p>How do you experience the parents at your school?</p> <p>CPA AS? + ES</p>	<p>The parents are like ridiculous! Some are normal and nice but most of them are so competitive with each other and their kids, they are always at the school, they know everybody's business and whose child got how many awards and who is doing what it makes me sick! I am so glad my mom is not like that! They pressurise their kids to do well academically and in extra-murals and they are like suck ups with the school and the teachers.</p>	<p>Parents - Sport → pressure → competitive → Increase pressure on rest to compete + keep up ⇒ Anxiety!</p>
<p>43</p>	<p>What does that do to you?</p> <p>S4</p>	<p>It irritates me, it makes me feel more pressured because I think all the kids are competing against me because their moms want them to and I feel panicky.</p>	<p>pressure - Sport too stressful - parents?</p>
<p>44</p>	<p>Do you think it stops you from developing all your gifts and talents?</p> <p>CPA1 CP3 R2 S1 S3 ANTRN</p>	<p>I think their competitiveness may stop me from developing all my gifts and talents because I get so stressed I don't even want to be a part of them and I just want to withdraw, like I did in the sport but lately I have found I'm even doing that in academics sometimes. Like I can't take the pressure from them to compete because I panic and may fail but also the pressure from me to be the best to show the cool kids that I am special and clever.</p>	<p>Parent competit pressure ⇒ stop grow ⇒ fear failure in conflict want to do well + show cool kids that she is good enough!</p>
<p>45</p>	<p>Where else do you feel this?</p> <p>Effects of competitiveness pressure CP5 CP3</p>	<p>Like when teachers hand out textbooks, the kids all scramble to get the best for themselves and I always let others go first cause my mom taught me that way, but then I get left with a horrible old text book, and if I happen to get a nice one then others who got a horrible one nag and get mean until you just give it to them to shut them up, competitive and selfish all the way through!</p>	<p>Kids are self centered + only interested in own achievement No team work!</p>
<p>46</p>	<p>So do you think it is the parents fault that the kids are so competitive, has it anything to do with being wealthy?</p> <p>CPA CP5 S1 S2 S3 UNFAIR</p>	<p>Yes I think it's definitely the parent's fault that their kids are competitive and selfish, and they make it unpleasant for those of us that are not. And it is also to do with being very rich, like my family is just average but a lot of these competitive and cool kids come from extremely rich families and they do give off this attitude like they think they better than everyone else. Even the parents do with the cars they drive. And the kids go on all these expensive overseas holidays like at the end of every term and the last time my family did was like four years ago so then I think it's just not fair and I start wishing I could go overseas more often.</p>	<p>Kids selfish (parent competitive) Spoilt/rich Peer Pressure "cool" used to get what they want + think superior + can control other</p>
			<p>→ unfair</p>

<p>47</p>	<p>I see, so in going back to all this sort of conditional regard by teachers and peers, it adds pressure to your existing pressure to do well academically?</p> <p>CP3 AS → → RO S1 S4 S5 → (D)</p>	<p>Yes the way they treat me pressurises me more, I mean I already want to do well academically, now I am put under more pressure to do well socially and feel accepted by teachers and peers. It's like I need to know I matter and make a difference and am not replaceable. But they make me feel I am not good enough and not special and don't matter at all. And that's why the pressure to do well academically is made worse because now I really want to do well to show them I am valuable. But then when I do well academically it is still not recognised by peers because I don't play sport so I'm just considered a geek so I stay frustrated and angry. And then I get even more irritated with myself when I do well because it makes me feel more like a geek, which I'm not! So I just stay confused and I feel lost and depressed most of the time.</p>	<p>Conditional regard from teachers + peers. ⇒ increase academic pressure need to be recognised + appreciated !! Ironically when do well still not accepted! (if not sporty/prefer) Anger ⇒ Disaffection ⇒ Hopeless.</p>
<p>48</p>	<p>So how does this affect your relationships with your family members?</p> <p>CP3 CP2 S3 (D)</p>	<p>Well I think like I said I put more pressure on them to make me feel more secure, and special and I always want them to spend quality time with me and make me feel respected for who I am and loved and to understand me and when they don't I feel devastated.</p>	<p>puts more pressure on family expect them to meet all needs.</p>
<p>49</p>	<p>And do you explain this to your family?</p> <p>S1 Fear CP2 ↓ S2 S3 HS3 P1</p>	<p>Sometimes I tell my mom a bit but its awkward I don't tell my family my true feelings too much because I'm so scared they will think I'm weird like the kids at school do and I can't risk losing them to, I can't risk them rejecting me too.</p>	<p>Don't express block support fear of rejection from parent</p>
<p>50</p>	<p>So where do your friends fit in?</p> <p>HS3 + HS4 AN + RN</p>	<p>Well I see my friends as an extension of my family, and I need the same from them, I need them to make me feel safe and loved and respected and special, I need us to stick together and help each other.</p>	<p>⇒ need to feel loved + supported</p>
<p>51</p>	<p>I heard about another "not hugging" rule, how did that affect you and your friends?</p> <p>HS4 S1</p>	<p>Again, what happened to respect and dignity? They said when you get to grade 7 you get treated specially and get privileges and now we get none. No hugging! It makes me feel like a puppet, I need to hug my friends and we need to comfort each other too. That's why I want to go to High School. It's like I don't want to leave but I really want to go!</p>	<p>!! Blocked by Rules Ambiguous feelings.</p>

<p>52</p>	<p>So how could you sum it all up for me?</p> <p>CP+TRO SS+AS=CPI Rebel - SS+AS=CP DS+AS≠CP</p> <p>CPG SI S3 AS+SS AN+RN</p>	<p>The people at this school only want to know you if you have achieved something which they consider to be cool, they all only see black and white, you are either sporty and not academics then you are cool, if you not sporty and not academic then you cool like the rebels, but if you just do well at art and academics then you are not cool! Some of the girls who don't do well academically but are sporty also fall into the group of rebels and they make me think they are so "hard core" that they are able to stand up against peers and teachers. I don't fit in with them and I don't fit in with the group that excel in both sports and academics and who seem so amazing. So I doubt myself, I lose confidence in myself and my abilities. The pressure to do well and achieve good marks adds pressure and it can either make you fanatical or stops you from doing your best all this while you are becoming a teen and already feel pressured to know who you are!</p>	<p>Superficial Selfish Self gain</p> <p>Groups Cool, popular Uncool/not popular</p> <p>lose self to be like them Stop doing well academically => rebel</p> <p>But don't fit in Pressure to do well is made worse by peer pressure already state</p>
<p>53</p>	<p>Thank you for your time I found it so interesting talking to you and I wish you a very good time in high school.</p>	<p>Thank you</p>	<p>to know who you ARE</p>

Appendix J: Advice – Participant 7 (7adv)

Advice

H54 If I had discovered that a girl was being bullied, I would help her as much as I possibly can. I would try to convince her to speak up and talk to an adult about the situation.
 H35 I'd tell her to stick up for herself and not let anybody bring her down. If a person bullies, it's only because they have a low self-esteem.

Participant 7

CP4

- Advice — get support from friends
- speak to adult
 - stand up for self (don't let them bring you down)
 - They have issues

Appendix K: Field notes – Participant 3 (20 August 2012)OBSERVATION NOTES:

Participant 3 seems very emotional, like a rollercoaster, she is up and then down, her eyes say she is about to cry while her voice tone is excitable and loud. Her voice is constantly trembling as if she would burst into tears at any moment. She seems like she is about to explode or implode, due to possible anger and unfairness mixed with fact that she is too afraid to now express herself causing her to keep it all in and possibly be experiencing depression. She comes across as a very soft, kind, caring person who through being mistreated is becoming aggressive and angry however she may be turning this inward on herself now.

There is desperation in her voice, crying out for someone to give her a chance, to believe in her, to stop rejected her and making her into someone she is not.

SELF-REFLECTIVE NOTES:

I felt very emotional during the session, I felt her pain. I felt the unfairness of the situation and how this girl seems to be slipping through the system.¹ This case motivated me as it reminded me why I do what I do and the passion I feel toward teenagers and helping them through on their journey. It reminded me how the environment can change people from whom they truly are and make them into someone they are not and then still reject them for it! I am aware that she is shocked at how they don't believe her and that they keep accusing her of lying..... why don't they believe me she keeps asking, it makes me feel for her, my heart feels for her frustration and pain.

¹ Participant 3 was referred for counselling for her depression. She made use of the referral.

Appendix L: Certificate – Language editing

DECLARATION

I herewith declare that I,

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completed the *language editing** of the MA(Psychology) dissertation

entitled

Psychosocial experiences of early adolescent girls in a private school setting

which had been submitted to me by

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Date completed: 08-04-2013

****Please note that no responsibility can be taken for the veracity of statements or arguments in the document concerned or for changes made subsequent to the completion of language editing. Also remember that content editing is not part of a language editor's task and is in fact unethical.***