# Relationality in a digital age: A pastoral theological perspective on the counselling of couples

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It all starts here ™

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this study project is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it to any other university in order to obtain a degree.

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Chantal Ferreira


Date: 24 May 2016

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**To our heavenly Father, I stand amazed at Your grace!**

# ABSTRACT

**Relationality in the digital age: A pastoral theological perspective on the counselling of couples**

This study investigated relationality within the digital age in order to gain a pastoral theological perspective on the counselling of couples. As the aim of this study was to equip the pastoral counsellor in effective ministry towards couples within the digital age a literature study was done to determine what the context of the digital age consists of and what challenges it offers towards couples' relationships. The research process followed was based on Osmer's (2008) method of practical theological interpretation where normative perspectives concerning relationality were gathered from the book of 1 Peter. Pastoral guidelines were discovered by comparing the results from the literature study to the norms portrayed in 1 Peter. The results of this study showed that pastoral support towards couples can increase in effectiveness when pastoral counsellors understand the context and challenge of the digital age and have the ability to bring contextual realities in hermeneutical conversation with theological normative perspectives that remain true and valid irrespective of ever changing environments.

**Key Terms:** couples' counselling; digital age; pastoral theology; practical theology; relationality.

# OPSOMMING

**Verhoudingsmatigheid in 'n digital era: 'n pastorale teologiese persepktief op die berading van persone in romantiese verhoudings.**

In hierdie studie is die aard en betekenis van verhoudingsmatigheid in die konteks van 'n digitale era ondersoek ten einde 'n pastorale teologiese perspektief op die berading van persone in romantiese verhoudings te ontwikkel. Die doel van die studie is gerig op die bied van riglyne aan die pastorale berader om paartjies in die digitale era meer effektief ten opsigte van hul verhouding te begelei. In ooreenstemming met hierdie doel is 'n literatuurstudie onderneem om die konteks van die digitale era en die uitdagings wat dit vir paartjies bied te beskryf. Die navorsingsproses wat hierdie studie gevolg het is gebaseer op Osmer (2008) se metode van praktiese teologiese interpretasie waar normatiewe perspektiewe rondom verhoudingsmatigheid versamel is vanuit die boek 1 Petrus. Pastorale riglyne is geformuleer deur die resultate van die literatuurstudie te vergelyk met die norme soos gevind in 1 Petrus. Die resultate van hierdie studie het bewys dat .effektiewe berading nie slegs bepaal word deur beraders se begrip van die konteks van die digitale era nie maar juis hul vermoë om dit wat voortdurend verander in gesprek te bring met normatiewe perspektiewe wat waar en geldig bly ongeag veranderende situasies.

**Sleutelterme:** Berading van persone met 'n bepaalde verhoudingsverbintenis; digitale era; pastorale teologie; praktiese teologie; verhoudingsmatigheid.

**Key Terms defined:**

**Couples' counselling:** For the purposes of this study the understanding of "couples" refers to any romantic relationship that has the potential to grow into a marriage. Special focus will be placed on romantic relationships amongst young people. The focus on adolescents and young adults in this study can be motivated by the development tasks of this particular development phase, in particular the critical task of self-identity formation  and its effect within the context of interpersonal relationships.

**Digital age:** "Digital age" will serve as the context in which the study concerning relationality will take place. It can be described as the present environment in which digital media can be found in all spheres of life (Cloete, 2015:1).

**Pastoral theology:** Pastoral  theology  is one of the "religious actions studied by practical theologians" (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990). Pastoral theology refers to connecting one's understanding of God with real life situations that people face in order to discover meaning in these situations (Louw, 1999:3).

**Practical theology:** Practical theology is a discipline within the broader theological scientific field and focuses on the encounter between God and humanity (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990:7).

**Relationality:** According to Louw (2015) relationality speaks of the quality of relationships that help individuals to understand their purpose in life and their distinctiveness. Relationality also includes individuals' orientation towards reality which affects the quality of relationships. Within this dissertation the term relationality refers to people's perceptions and approaches towards relationships that may determine to a large extend how people position themselves in the context of relationships.

**Sleutelterme gedefinieer:**

**Berading van persone met 'n bepaalde verhoudingsverbintenis:** As gevolg van die doel van hierdie studie sal daar spesifieke fokus geplaas word op die berading van mense in ernstige romantiese verhoudings met die potensiaal om in 'n huwelik  te groei. Dit sluit dan ook in jong getroude paartjies en romantiese verhoudings tussen adolessente en jong volwassenes. Die motivering hiervoor is die feit dat adolessensie en jong volwassenheid gekenmerk word as 'n kritiese tyd van identiteisvorming in 'n persoon se lewe en dat dit dan 'n effek het op interpersoonlike verhoudings.

**Digitale era:** Die digitale era dien as die konteks waarbinne die studie rondom verhoudingsmatigheid plaasvind. Dit kan beskryf word as die huidige omgewing waar digitale media teenwoordig is in al die sfere van die samelwing (Cloete, 2015:1).

**Pastorale teologie:** Pastoraat dien as 'n geloofshandeling wat deur praktiese teoloë bestudeer word (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990a). Pastorale teologie verwys na die verbintenisse tussen ons verstaan van God en realistiese lewensituatsies waarin mense hulleself bevind, wat poog om die vraagstuk na sin en betekenis te beantwoord (Louw, 1999:3).

**Praktiese teologie:** Praktiese teologie is deel van die wetenskapsveld van teologie en fokus op die kommunikatewe handelinge in die ontmoetingsgebeure tussen God en die mens (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990a:7-8).

**Verhoudingsmatigheid:** Volgens Louw (2015) dui verhoudingsmatigheid op die kwaliteit van verhoudings wat die individu help om die rede vir sy betaan beter te begryp. Dit sluit ook in individue se oriëntasie tot die werklikheid wat die kwaliteit van verhoudings beinvloed. In hierdie studie sal die term "verhoudingmatigheid" ook verwys na mense se persepsies en benaderinge tot verhoudings en die effek hiervan op die kwaliteit van verhoudings.

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## 1.1    Background and problem statement

"What we discover is that, reduced to the most basic level possible, there exist only three things: matter, energy, and relationships" (Fore, 2011:15).

Fore (2011:15) makes this statement in an article he wrote entitled: *A theology of communication*. Further on in this article he states that "everything relates to something or else it does not exist" (Fore, 2011:15). Atoms relate to molecules, flowers to bees, human beings to each other and humanity to God (Fore, 2011:15). Everything finds its existence within relationships. When the researcher refers to relationality within this dissertation, however, the focus is on the relationship between God and humanity as well as human relationships. Relationships are at the core of human existence. Coe and Hall (2010:213) emphasizes the importance of mankind's relationality towards God by stating the following: "it turns out that we are radically relational beyond any concept or experience of human relationality". They go further in explaining how mankind was created to exist within relationships with each other but more importantly to exist in relationship with God.

God expresses Himself as a relational God through the existence and expression of the Trinity. Collins (1993:74) confirms this when he says that the God who created humanity is intimately familiar with relationships, and that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit related to each other before human beings were ever created. Suchocki (as cited by Kwon 2001:41) agrees with this in stating: "Trinity can arguably be expressive of an internal relationality within God." This shows that God values the concept of relationships highly, it is part of His being. We were created in His image and likeness (Gen.1:26) and therefore relationships will also be something that human beings naturally want to engage in and were originally created to flourish in. People were created to exist within relationships, with God, each other, the self and nature (Coe & Hall, 2010:13).

Within the digital era, it is interesting to find that relationships are being greatly influenced by various elements. Jan Butter, an Anglican scholar (2015), proclaims that anyone who has access to digital technology has been profoundly influenced in how they see themselves as well as their relationships with others. Cloete (2015:1) describes the digital age as the current context in which media is present in all spheres of life. She also goes further in saying that one can study the characteristics of digital media in order to identify its influence on human beings, their existence and their social context. Although Cloete (2015:3) wrote various articles and did research on subjects such as youth, digital culture, and other fields in practical theology, she still claims that "the field of religion in internet studies definitely needs more scholarly attention

as it seems to have tremendous implications…" Within her last, most recent article Cloete (2015) did briefly mention that technology influences relationships but she did not go into detail concerning what this influence entails or what its effects will be on a pastoral theological approach to couples' counselling. The focus of Cloete's article is on problematizing the nature of the digital age and highlighting the need for theological reflection.

Since 2010 there has been substantial research done on the connection between theology, and especially practical theology, and the digital age (Butter, 2015; Cloete, 2015; Fore, 2011; Van den Berg, 2012; Van den Berg, 2014). None of these articles focused on a pastoral theological perspective. When doing research for similar studies within the South African context that includes pastoral theology, digital age and couples' counselling there hardly exists anything. When referring to a pastoral theological perspective the researcher makes use of Louw's definition of pastoral theology. Louw (1999:3) states that pastoral theology wants to connect one's understanding of God with real life situations that people face in order to make sense out of these situations and to recognise God's purpose in these situations.

Adams (1980:1) states that it is "irresponsible and dangerous to attempt to do practical work apart from a sound theological base". Based on this quote the findings of this study will be aimed at supporting pastors within the AFM in the practice of couples' counselling. This is due to the acceptance that all AFM pastors do have a strong theological base on which these discoveries can be build and used in practice.

"The interactions between humans and technology provide a significant site for theological reflection" (Cloete, 2015:6). Based on the potential effect of technology on human relationships there exists a need for a pastoral theological perspective on couples' counselling in the digital age.

The problem statement this study would like to address is the influence of the digital era upon the nature of relationships in general and in particular couples' relationships. The nature of couples' relationships within a digital age needs to be understood in its complexity in order for the researcher to respond theologically in a contextual and relevant manner. Within South African literature, there is a need for pastoral theological reflection on the influence of technology upon couples' counselling and what potential challenges this might present to pastoral counsellors. This presents a question regarding the practice of counselling from a Christian worldview; are there normative theological concepts that can serve as a guide in counselling couples in the midst of this digital era?

## 1.2  Research Question

In trying to understand the complex nature of relationality in the digital age and the implications for offering support to couples, the research question will be the following:

What unique contribution can a pastoral theological perspective offer towards couples' counselling within the digital age?

Sub questions that arise from this:

(1)    What is the nature and dynamics of relationality in the digital age?

(2)    What are the dynamics of couples' relationships within the digital age?

(3)    Why does these dynamics exist within couples' relationships?

(4)    What normative perspective can pastoral theology offer on relationality within the digital age?

(5)    How can couples living in a digital age be supported by pastoral counselling?

## 1.3  Aim, Objectives and purpose of this research

### 1.3.1  Aim

The main aim of this study is to identify and describe a unique theological contribution towards guidelines for counsellors to support couples' relationships in a digital age from a pastoral theological perspective.

### 1.3.2  Objectives

- To explore and describe relationality within the digital age.
- To do an interdisciplinary study on couples' relationships within the digital age.
- To study and evaluate why these dynamics exist.
- To study and present a pastoral theological perspective on relationality in the digital age.
- To determine how these results can offer unique pastoral theological guidelines for the counselling of couples that may equip the pastoral counsellor.

### 1.3.3  Purpose

Osmer speaks about how congregational leaders frequently need to deepen their understanding concerning specific issues that are presented in ministry. In this instance he is specifically

referring to a counselling situation in which the pastor might not have had enough knowledge to minister to the counselee effectively and therefore the pastor needed to gain more knowledge (Osmer, 2008:43).The purpose of this dissertation would then be to serve as a resource through which Christian counsellors can gain knowledge in how to understand and address the issues that confront couples in a technologically consumed world from a pastoral theological perspective.

## 1.4 Theoretical Argument

The central theoretical argument of this study is that pastoral care can offer a unique contribution to couple counselling based on a contextual understanding of the influence of the digital age and a normative theological perspective on the nature of relationships.

## 1.5 Research Methodology

Mouton (2001:56) is of the opinion that the research methodology's focus should be on the procedures, tools and steps to be followed within the research process. Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee (2006:44) describe basic research as the gathering of facts and information which can be used to challenge or develop theories. In order to comply with both of these focusses and to address the research question effectively the researcher chose to do a conceptual literature study. Maree (2007:71) describes the characteristics of a conceptual study as critically engaging with the understanding of concepts. He goes further in stating that these concepts are the basis from which theories are constructed.

According to De Vos and Strydom (2011:37) "Theory is an attempt to explain and or/predict a particular phenomenon". De Vos and Strydom (2011:38) also explain theory in light of conceptual frameworks which needs to be in place before empirical research can be done. Theory then gives way for further research. For this study the researcher have, however, chosen to focus on identifying critical elements of a pastoral theoretical perspective and not to apply a theory for the improvement of couples' counselling praxis. Therefore a conceptual study is preferred. This research methodology does challenge the generally accepted order of doing an empirical study before designing a theory. Alberts (as cited by De Vos & Strydom (2011:40) does, however, state that designing a theory before doing the empirical research might at times be more preferable. By making use of secondary sources a conceptual study aims at generating knowledge which can be added to an existing body of knowledge (Maree, 2007:71).

The focus will thus not be to contribute to the praxis of actual counselling but to the theory from which the pastor will perform the counselling. The researcher does agree with Heyns and Pieterse (1990:30) that theory can never be separated form praxis. However, the identified research gap of this dissertation requires firstly a focus on the theory so that methods for praxis

can be developed at a later stage. The history of praxis will influence the theory (Heyns & Pieterse, 1990:30). Therefore the researcher will make use of analysing existing data, both national and international, concerning the influence of technology on relationships. Heyns and Pieterse (1990:31) also state that it is dangerous to have praxis only without theory because this will lead praxis into the wrong direction. Therefore a conceptual literature study will be best suitable in order to contribute to the development of a theological theoretical perspective that can inform and direct the praxis of couples counselling.

The research methodology builds upon the theological basis theory of Louw (1999:4), with regards to pastoral counselling. This is done in order to increase human understanding of the impact of the digital age on relationships and the implications thereof for pastoral couples' counselling. Louw's (1999:4) theological basis theory entails helping the pastor to reflect and gain clarity concerning the nature of his/her pastoral role and the nature of pastoral care. This reflection will be done by identifying critical normative elements for a pastoral approach to couples' counselling, while keeping the contextual reality of the digital age and its influence on relationships in mind.

The results of this study will be directed to AFM pastors in South Africa. However, this will not limit the results of this research to only that of the AFM but can also serve a broader community of pastoral counsellors.

Richard Osmer's description of the method of practical theological interpretation has been utilised as a basic structure in this study. Osmer (2008:4) explains the process of practical theological interpretation of a given problem situation along the lines of four tasks that need to be executed. The following questions based on Osmer's description of practical theological interpretation are aligned with the goals of this study and are addressed in the various chapters of the research report.

(1)  A descriptive study by means of a literature analysis of both national and international statistics and evidence concerning the presence of technology in relationships was done in order to define relationality in the digital age.

(2)  In order to determine the dynamics of couples' relationships within the digital age a literature analysis was done to evaluate both current and past perspectives on the influence of technology on humanity.

(3)  The researcher made use of the interpretive task in order to determine why these dynamics exist. The "transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue" will be applied (Osmer, 2008:170). This was done from an interdisciplinary perspective gained from

different study fields such as Communication Sciences, Psychology and Neuroscience. This was done based on the evaluation given by Osmer (2008:114):

- Identifying and evaluating the model of a theory as well as the conceptual field this is built on.

- Identifying the disciplinary perspective of the theory.

- Identifying and assessing the central argument of the theory.

(4) The normative task aimed to present a theological perspective on relationality within the digital age. This was accomplished by doing in depth scriptural studies concerning the dynamics of healthy relationships, bearing in mind the dependence on the Holy Spirit's guidance in this process, thus making use of prophetic discernment as defined by Osmer (2008:133). Scripture served as the main guideline in determining God's original intent with relationships. The book of 1 Peter was investigated as it not only portrays God as a relational being but also gives guidelines concerning how believers should act in different relationships based on the fact that they experienced rebirth as affected by God. Osmer (2008:4) also says that one can make use of theological concepts and learn from "good practice" in order to interpret a situation and to guide one's response.

(5) Lastly the researcher applied the pragmatic task by comparing the results of the conceptual research with the guidelines given in scripture and conclude by stating how this can support the pastor in counselling couples.

### 1.5.1 Literature review

It became clear during the preliminary study that there exists limited research concerning theological reflections of the digital age and even less research has been made available concerning this in the South African databases. When the term "pastoral care", "pastoral counselling", and "couples counselling" is added to this there is even less information available. The researcher made use of national as well as international scientific resources. There are various search engines available on the NWU library that will help in this process. These are the examples of what search engines will be used:  EBSCO HOST; PsychInfo; PsychArticles; Google Scholar; SACat, SAePublication, Health Source.

### 1.6  Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1      Orientation to the research

Chapter 2      Relationality within the digital age

Chapter 3      Couple's relationships within the digital age: An interdisciplinary exploration

# CHAPTER 2:    RELATIONALITY WITHIN THE DIGITAL AGE

## 2.1    Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore and describe through a literature study the context of the digital age and its implications about the nature of human relationships. The task of this chapter is aligned with the first phase of the practical theological interpretation process as described by Richard Osmer (2008:4). He defines the descriptive-empirical task as a process of gathering information that will help to discern patters and dynamics of a specific context. Applied to this study, the research question of this chapter, *what is going on within the digital age with specific reference to human relationships*, serves as the foundation of the contextual orientation for investigating the unique contribution that a pastoral theological perspective can offer towards couples' counselling. The focus of this chapter is thus on the main contextual influences and implications of the digital era on relationships in general and on the manner in which people relate to each other. In the next chapter the focus will turn more towards couples' relationships in connection with the findings of this chapter.

Relationships are affected by influences in social conventions, norms and rules and if we want to understand human relationships we need to study these contextual influences (Duck, 1992:20). Duck (1992:2) rightly argues "If we wish to improve relationships and to get a better understanding of their processes, then we must understand this Big Picture". His emphasis on understanding the complexity of the context for the improvement of relationships resonates strongly with the contextual nature of doing practical theological research. Within pastoral theological study the aim is to connect people's understanding of God with real life situations so that people can make sense out of these situations and recognise God's purpose in these situations (Louw, 1999:3). Therefore it is important for the purpose of this study to firstly understand the context and unique situations people face in the digital age before the researcher can continue with research on the pastoral perspective that can be offered towards couples' counselling.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the history and development of the digital age, which gives a clearer picture of its influence on the way in which people currently exist and interact with each other. Against this background, the concept of relationality is explored by looking at characteristics that naturally exist within relationships. A critical question posed to the literature is; how and to what extent are relationships being influenced by the digital age? This is explained in separate sections as the nature and dynamics of relationships.

The purpose in studying the dynamics of relationships has been to determine how the different human elements, involved in relationships, are being shaped by the digital age. This will assist

in gaining clarity concerning relationality within the digital age. National and international literature has thus been studied in order to discover the natural character of relationships due to the existence of the digital age. Amongst others the following literature serve as main resources for this chapter:

- Alone *Together* by Sherry Turkle (2011).

- *Personal Connections in the digital age* by Nancy K. Baym (2010).

The motive for choosing these sources is that both of these authors have years of experience in research regarding the digital age and these two specific publications add value to the topic of relationality and they contain recent information.

## 2.2    The digital age: A contextual orientation

The concept of relationality has been in existence since the start of humanity. As mentioned in the beginning of this dissertation, "mankind was created to exist within relationships". Within this dissertation relationality will speak of the quality of relationships that help individuals to understand their purpose for existence and distinctiveness, this also includes people's orientation towards reality and their perceptions and approaches towards relationships. Relationships are by no means static but always finds itself in a process of change (Auhagen & Von Salisch, 1996:4). This will be especially applicable in the following chapter where the digital age serves as the biggest influence and focus of change in relationships. **"Digital age"** serves as the context in which the study concerning relationality takes place. It can be described as the present environment in which digital media can be found in all the spheres of life (Cloete, 2015:1). When studying the concept of the digital age it becomes evident that it does not have such an ancient history as the concept of relationships.

The digital age also known as the digital culture only came into existence and received recognition in the late 1900s. Baym (2010:13) writes about how the internet was originally created to safeguard military knowledge and the first internet connection was already made in 1969.

The chances are good that not many people expected it to escalate at the great speed that it did and no one anticipated it to grow into the great communication medium that it currently is. Since 1969 it seems as if technology had developed and gained more and more ground at an enormous speed (Bauerlein, 2011:ix - xi). Julie Hiramine (2012:11) also confirms this in her book *Guardians of Purity*:

"Now check out how quickly it took the following things to reach a market audience of fifty million:

- Radio: 38 Years

- TV: 13 Years

- Internet: 4 Years

- iPod: 3 Years

- Facebook: 2 years"

This statement confirms that as technology increased in development it also gained ground into people's lives at a faster and faster pace. The fact is that there is a very small percentage (if any) of people on earth that has not been affected by technology. The most logical question that arises from this statement is: what about the social economic factor? There exists a perception that people who have a low financial income or even those who have no income at all do not have access to technology, but the following article challenges this belief.

According to an article written by Yue Wang (Wang, 2013) the United Nations (UN) released statistics about cell phone usage in 2013. These statistics showed that more people on earth have access to cell phones than to toilets. He states: "Out of the world's estimated 7 billion people, 6 billion have access to mobile phones. Only 4.5 billion have access to working toilets" (Wang, 2013).

The article goes further in saying how India, one of the most populated yet poorest countries in the world has 1.2 billion mobile subscribers (almost half of the population) and only a third of the population has access to toilets. The UN is striving to address this problem across the world and give more people access to toilets due to it causing a lot of health problems. Important for this study, however, is to realize that technology and the easy access of cell phones are gaining ground all over the world regardless of economic influences. It is almost as if the digital age involves all of mankind regardless of age, gender or socio-economic circumstances, as if the digital age has no limits. The more important to note is that the small number of people not yet affected by the digital age will soon be assisted into entering the digital age. Shwayder (2012) confirms this in her article titled: "One-Third of World's Population Using Internet, Developing Nations Showing Biggest Gains". The article is based on information gathered from the UN's telecommunication's agency. The UN released a report stating that their goal is to equip 60% of the world with internet access by 2015. Thus they want to increase internet access within the developing countries from 24% to 50% and in the least developed countries from 6% to 15%.

There is basically no part of the world that can deny the existence of technology within their societies. It is true that in some parts of the world technology has a greater influence than in other parts but it can no longer be said that Africa and specifically South Africa is not affected by the digital age. Regardless of the fact that third-world countries have a slower internet

connection, it became evident that no one is left outside of the "global village." This exact fact confirms that one can look to first world countries with faster internet connections in order to gain insight that might help third world countries like South Africa to act proactively in this digital age.

Sherry Turkle (2011:xi - xii) connects this great influence of technology with human relationships in all her studies concerning technology. Her research looks as follows:

In the 1970s Turkle started her research about how people are engaging with computers. In 1984 she wrote her first book about computers and people – *The second self*. In the early 1990s she started to look at people engaging in communities via computers, this led to her second book being published in 1995 – *Life on the screen*. Her most recent book published in 2011 – *Alone together* entails studies about "a fully networked life" and "an evolution in robotics".

It is clear through the progression of her studies that technology started to play a bigger role in the daily lives of individuals. The topics of her books also indicate that these developments had an increasing impact on individuals as well as their relationships. What is even more interesting about Turkle's findings is her comment on the connection between technology and relationships: "These days, insecure in our relationships and anxious about intimacies, we look to technology for ways to be in relationships and protect ourselves from them at the same time…We fear the risks and disappointments of relationships with our fellow humans. We expect more from technology and less from each other" (Turkle, 2011:xii).

It is clear that technology has infiltrated most of society at a tremendous speed and that the digital age has had a definite influence on relationships. Within the next part of this chapter the focus will turn to the "connectivity culture" where the aim will be to explain how these insecurities and anxieties concerning relationships in the digital age looks.

### 2.2.1   A connectivity culture

The title "connectivity culture" is taken from Sherry Turkle as she uses it in her book *Alone Together*. She writes about this "culture" that exists because of what happened in America on 9/11. The bombing of the World Trade Centre caused people to be more conscious about having their phones with them and it encouraged people to always be connected. This connection serves as a "symbol of physical and emotional safety" (Turkle, 2011:247). Although this title is not commonly used, there is evidence of the existence of these occurrences in other writings. Other authors also acknowledge the fact that the majority of people today live a lifestyle of constant connection and continuous interaction (Baron, 2008; Baym, 2010:22; Huddleston, 2015a). Baron describes the same situation by saying that people are "always on in

a networked and mobile world" (Baron, 2008:213). She goes further say that being "always on" comes at a cost that can be measured in personal, ethnical, and cognitive terms. All of these can have a direct influence on one's social interaction (Baron, 2008:213).

Being constantly connected or "always on" definitely has its advantages and disadvantages. Within this part of the chapter the researcher wants to highlight two of the many effects of a connectivity culture on relationships; "connected and anxious", "connected but still alone". The reason for choosing to focus on these effects is the fact that it is recognised and discussed by a number of authors and that it directly affects relationships, thus providing this study with a better understanding of relationality within the digital age.

### 2.2.2 Connected and anxious

As previously mentioned Sherry Turkle speaks about the connectivity culture based on the events on 9/11. She says that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 encouraged parents to give their children cell phones in order to stay connected. Together with this children and young people believe it is good to always be connected in the case of an emergency, being connected makes them feel safe (Turkle, 2011:246-247). It is clear that this connectivity culture exists because people are trying to reduce anxieties. But it seems as if there is some research and authors who claim that this constant connectivity actually creates anxieties of its own (Baym, 2010:22; Turkle, 2011:248). Although it will be an impossible task to discuss all the possible anxieties that exist within a connectivity culture the aim of this section will be to mention most anxieties pertaining to relationships.

Baym (2010:3-7) discusses a few types of anxieties people experience within this connectivity culture and it is also supported by various authors:

(1)   The fear of people being able to control each other. Baym (2010:3-4) explains how within the digital age people have the ability to choose with whom they want to engage and how. Although this might be empowering to an individual it leaves that same individual at the mercies of someone else (Baym, 2010:4). People experience anxiety due to the uncertainty that accompanies this situation. There is never certainty about whether someone is ignoring to reply or whether they are in a crisis where they can't reply or whether they choose texting above a phone call in order to avoid conflict.

(2)   There always exists a chance that private matters can be made public. Baym (2010:4) says that there exists a blur concerning the boundaries between mass communication and personal communication.

(3)   Tension due to managing authentic online presentations and real-life presentations. Turkle (2011) elaborates on this when she dedicates a whole chapter in her book to this issue, it is discussed in more detail in 2.4.4 in correlation with the topic on identity confusion.

(4)   Risks in online relationships that might not be safe. Danah Boyd confirms that this does create anxiety when she dedicates a whole chapter in her book to address the issue. She is of the opinion that it is mostly parents that experience anxiety concerning the online safety of their children in regards to sexual predators. On the other hand are teenagers aware of this safety risk and are therefore cautious in trying to avoid becoming victims (Boyd, 2014:100-128). Together with this arises anxiety concerning online bullying of which every person online can become a victim.

(5)   Having to be available always for people to get in touch. Although this serves as a characteristic of the connectivity culture and was briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter it deserves more exploration pertaining to how it can cause anxiety. Baron's research confirmed that people experience a "psychological burden of always needing to be available to their social network" (2011:8). On a different occasion Baron also stated that being "always on" leaves people exhausted (Baron, 2008:215). Tapscott also confirmed how this constant connection are experienced as overwhelming (2009:94). It is clear that this is one of the greatest anxieties people experience concerning relationships in the digital age.

This overview proves the fact that anxiety prominently exists within, and because of, the digital age and that people that are constantly connected will experience some sort of stress.

On top of the anxieties already mentioned, Brad Huddleston refers to two more, the first one: FOMO – the Fear of Missing Out (Hegarty & Phillpott, 2013). Tapscott (2009:94) connects FOMO with number 5 as mentioned above. He explains that people wish they could turn off their cell phones in order to have a moment of peace, away from having to be constantly connected, but they fear they would miss out on something important. The same issue is confirmed in research that Turkle did (2011:165 - 167). She had numerous conversations with people who said they felt pressured to have to respond to e-mails/phone calls/messages etc. and that it had to take place within a certain time frame which creates more anxiety. Still they believe that they cannot live without these connections as they might miss out on something. On top of the anxiety that the connectivity culture creates there exists inner conflict as people are stuck between two needs: wanting to be always connected and yearning for a more peaceful environment. The second anxiety that Huddleston (Hegarty & Phillpott, 2013) refers to

is called nomophobia which is the fear of being disconnected from your phone, this fear is also closely linked to the one just discussed.

A question that arises from these anxieties exists in regards to the value people place on relationships within the digital age. If being constantly connected creates tension in a person's life, what motivates them to keep on engaging in relationships in this way? It might be that the connectivity culture has created some sort of addiction or maybe dependence upon this type of relational engagement. This question refers to the "why" element of Osmer's (2008:4) interpretive task and will therefore receive more attention in chapter 3. For now the researcher wants to focus on the second element highlighted within a connectivity culture: connected but still alone.

### 2.2.3  Connected but still alone

Except for the fact that people are always connected and therefore experience anxiety, this connectivity also creates a feeling of loneliness. Turkle (2011:11 & 206) already tells something of the issue of people being connected but still feeling alone within the digital age. Other authors agree with Turkle that the digital age defines a time of many connections and yet people feel very lonely (Deresiewicz, 2009:314; Baym, 2010:35-39).

Steve Duck believes that loneliness is not the same as being alone and he makes this distinction based on his belief concerning solitude (Duck, 1992:59). Although this might be a valid argument, there are several authors who link both the terms alone and loneliness with the digital age (Anon, 2003:45; Baron, 2008:215; Deresiewicz, 2009:313). It is thus clear that regardless of one's definition of the term, there exists a definite correlation between loneliness/alone and the digital age.

An article written by Amichai-Hamburger and Ben-Artzi, confirmed through research that making use of the internet can encourage loneliness (Amichai-Hamburger & Ben-Artzi, 2003:71). Collins also agrees that loneliness is becoming more prevalent due to the existence of technology and that the internet might have the "greatest relationship to loneliness". He goes further to say that research has shown that "the internet not only creates loneliness but also attracts lonely people" (Collins, 2007:198). Taking both of these statements into account it seems as if a cycle of loneliness exists within the digital age. Whether it is lonely people making use of the internet to feel less lonely or the internet causing its users to feel lonely, it does not seem as if it will ever resolve the problem of feeling lonely.

Both Danah Boyd (2014) and Sherry Turkle (2011) mention the correlation between loneliness and the internet yet they also have conflicting opinions on the issue. Boyd (2014) argues that it is because of loneliness that people turn to technology where Turkle (2011:12-13) states that it

is because of the engagement with technology that people experience loneliness. Neither one of these statements is wrong but they both address different sides of the same issue. Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2003:669) confirms this when they say that "… neither of the hypotheses about the direction of relationship between loneliness and Internet use is sufficient. Instead, the relationship may be bi-directional".

The fact of the matter is that there does exist a direct relationship between technology and loneliness. People are feeling more alone regardless of the fact that they are in a connectivity culture (Turkle, 2011:12). Irrespective of how this takes place it can be concluded that relationality within the digital age is characterised by loneliness.

Duck (1992:59) was quite right when he connected loneliness to solitude. Deresiewicz (2009:314) confirms that within the digital age there exists a fear of loneliness and that people have "lost the ability to be alone" together with this they have also lost "their capacity for solitude". Due to the loss of solitude people are also no longer taking time to examine themselves and to have a "sense of their own depths" which in turn will affect the depth of their relationships with others (Deresiewicz, 2009:315).

Although Baym (2010:38,117) believes that the internet gives lonely people the ability to connect online which would not have been possible for them to do offline - she also says that only when these relationships grow into offline relationships (or extend to offline relationships) people will start to feel less lonely. It then leads the researcher to believe that loneliness which is connected and encouraged by the connectivity element of the digital age might jeopardize the intimacy and depth of both online and offline relationships. Both terms, intimacy and depth, refer to the nature of relationships but these two terms are, however, not the only elements describing this nature. This highlights the need to further elaborate on the nature of relationships which will receive attention in the next part of this chapter.

## 2.3   The nature of relationships within the digital age

The reason for separating the nature and the dynamics of relationships is based on the different definitions of these two terms which implies different focus points. When one refers to the nature of something it describes its features, qualities or character. The researcher just mentioned that loneliness within the digital age might be jeopardizing the intimacy and depths of relationships. Intimacies and depths then refer to characteristics of relationships which are discussed as part of the nature of relationships.

Literature implies that there are certain characteristics evident in relationships due to the presence of technology in individuals' lives. As proven in the beginning of this chapter it cannot be denied that technology does exist in all the spheres of life. It is a fact that the majority of

people currently living on earth are effected to a certain extend by the digital age. The focus of this part of the study will be to determine what the nature of relationships is within the digital age. What are natural occurrences and characteristics that will exist in relationships due to the influence of the digital age? These elements are only a study of the majority of people and their current relationships, it is thus a generalization and not an accepted norm. The researcher does, however, believe that this nature of relationships is accurate and that everyone will be able to identify some, if not all, of these elements in their modern-day relationships.

The study this far showed that people are experiencing anxiety due to the existence of technology and having to be connected all the time. There is also a lot of research that has proved that people are still experiencing loneliness within this greatly connected culture. Therefore the following steps in the research are aimed at the depths of relationships within the digital age.

### 2.3.1   Shallow Relationships

Authors such as Baym (2010:10) argue that technological communication media give opportunity for relationships to exist where in the past it would never have been possible. Through mass media communication can take place where it was never before imaginable. She goes further to say that anonymity online encourages relationship types to exist that could not have been likely in the past. It eliminates issues such as race, age, gender differences, disabilities etc. (Baym, 2010:34-35). Although the researcher agrees with this the intimacy of these relationships are questioned. If they can now exist where in the past it was not possible without online communication will it then ever grow to offline relationships and therefore grow in intimacy? If race or age was barriers to possible relationships in the past will this still not limit these relationships to exist only online? Regardless of this Baym also states at a later stage that "the internet has expanded our access to weak ties…" (2010:125). Irrespective of the fact that Baym believes technology now creates new opportunities for relationships to exist she herself doubts the intimacy of these relationships.

"But when technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then, easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy" (Turkle, 2011:16).

It is a fact that if relationships within the digital age only exist because of digital connections it will naturally take on the element of shallowness.

### 2.3.1.1   Multitasking

There are reason to believe that multitasking is creating more shallow relationships, whether these be online or offline. Maggie Jackson refers to a study done in 2006 where teenagers

stated that face to face interaction was preferred but with Instant Messaging you can get much more done (Jackson, 2011). A different study done by Naomi Barron proved the same attitude amongst university students. The majority of the students were always busy multitasking while engaging in Instant Messaging (Baron, 2008:41). Further on in her study Barron also asked the students "For which non-computer activities is multitasking not appropriate?" 59% of the answers was "face-to-face conversations". This is contradicting to research done by Baron (2008:41-42) at an earlier stage; where 41% of students admitted to multitasking between face-to-face conversations and Instant Messaging (further on revered to as IM). Another study done by the University of Kansas showed that the majority of college students combined face to face conversation with computer use (Baym *et al.*, 2004).

It seems as if people expect that intimacies are limited in digital relationships, still they prefer it digitally as they believe one can connect with more people at once. It is evident that multitasking when communicating with people online is a common phenomenon. This raises doubts as to how intimate these online relationships can be when the individuals involved are not focussing on one conversation/person at a time. Simultaneously there must be something that motivates this form of multitasking as this is not people's preferred form of action.

Research done by the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2009 found that teenagers spent a total of 7 hours and 38 minutes consuming media per day. Except for this they multitask the media use most of the time which then leaves them at 10 hours and 45 minutes of media intake per day (Rideout *et al.*, 2010:2).

The Barna Group released statistics in 2011 concerning the influence of technology on families in which they stated that "parents are spending nearly the same amount of time per day as their tweens and teen-aged kids consuming media". They go further in saying that "the digital world has influenced all members of the family, not just teens" (Barna, 2011). It is clear that no one is left out of the equation concerning media use and that multitasking is evident in all of this.

Huddleston says that a rush of Dopamine gets released into one's brain when one multitasks which releases a rewarding feeling. Therefore a person actually wants to multitask, it makes you feel good. People can actually get addicted to the feeling created when multitasking (Huddleston, 2015a:16). People are thus engaging in a lot of actions at once without realizing what motivates them to do this. It then explains why people do not actually desire to combine face to face conversations with technology use but still this is the way in which they interact. This then implies that people are unconsciously combining face to face interaction with other forms of media when actually they still have a longing for undivided human interaction.

Baron mentions research done by various neuroscientists that proves that multitasking slows down the brain's performance and that it is actually impossible to concentrate on two things at once. On top of this each task would have been done more successfully if approached individually (Baron, 2008:217). Taking this into consideration when discussing relational engagement one cannot deny the fact that it should also have an effect on the depth of the engagement as people multitask conversations.

Carr compares the different effects on one's brain between reading books and surfing the Web. He says that reading on the internet has a lot more distractions than reading books due to the hyperlinks that people can follow online which is not possible through book reading, and that these hyperlinks have a multitasking effect on one's brain. He calls it "the permanent state of distractedness that defines the online life" (Carr, 2012:112). As mentioned above, college students combine face to face interaction with computer use. As with the hyperlinks there are a lot of things happening at once on a computer screen, which in itself is already multitasking (Carr, 2012:91). When this is combined with interaction between humans it is only imaginable how overloaded one's brain must feel, and how distracted one actually is from human interaction.

The researcher wants to take a step further and say that this "permanent state of distractedness" might not only define online life but also that of offline life. It is as if this study is revealing questions concerning this "permanent state of distractedness" and its effects on both online and offline relationships.

Thus far it has been proven that online multitasking is encouraging shallow relationships online as people actually desire quality face to face engagements yet they combine it all the time with some sort of media use. The next question that arises concerns offline relationships.

Jackson says that parents are interacting 20 percent less with their children because they are constantly distracted. When they do interact this happens passively with statements such as "Don't bother me, I'm watching TV" (Jackson, 2011:273). Brad Huddleston (2015a:8) confirms this when he tells stories about young children asking him to speak to their parents and take away their phones because the parents aren't giving the children undivided attention. Turkle (2011:161) also acknowledges this as she states that adults' attention is divided between children and mobile devices. People are constantly connected, multitasking while in the company of others and children are experiencing the effect of not having their parent's full attention. Multitasking media has a definite influence on offline relationships. A simple thing such as having the TV on all the time in one's home without someone actually watching also negatively affect people's interaction with each other (Jackson, 2011:273).

Linda Stone came up with an interesting interpretation of multitasking in the digital age. She calls it "Continuous Partial Attention" (CPA). Stone believes that there is a difference between multitasking and CPA this is due to different motivations. Multitasking is motivated by being productive and by getting more things done in less time thus one of the activities happens sort off automatically. CPA is motivated by a desire not to miss anything, it is a constant state of always-on crisis. She also believes that over the last 20 years people have become experts at CPA (Stone, 2008). Taking into consideration Stone's understanding of CPA it makes sense that technology and the instant availability of information can cause offline relationships to grow shallower as people are always-on, scared that they might miss out on something. When Small and Vorgan (Small & Vorgan, 2009) discuss Stone's theory they say that "we risk losing personal touch with our real-life relationships and may experience an artificial sense of intimacy". This continuous partial attention replaces authentic intimacy in relationships due to people no longer separating themselves from their devices and devoting their full attention to a person. Huddleston agrees with this when he makes suggestions about how people can "minimize multitasking at home". He says that when spending quality time with family one should eliminate all devices in order for everyone to *be* together (Huddleston, 2015a:25).

In the midst of many technological devices and opportunities to engage with people there exists strong evidence that both online and offline relationships lose some of their intimacies. Turkle (2011:161) describes it by saying that we have "moved from multi-tasking to multi-lifing".

### 2.3.2 What about emotions?

Another question concerning the natural characteristics of relationships within the digital age are pertaining to the sharing of emotions. It is obvious that it will be much more complicated to share one's true feelings through Instant Messaging as there is not necessarily face to face engagement. Research done by the Stanford Institute for the Quantitative Study of Society (Markoff, 2004) confirmed that one hour spent on the internet reduces face to face contact with friends, co-workers and family by 23.5 minutes. Markoff quotes one of the researchers in saying "You can't get a hug or a kiss or a smile over the internet" (Markoff, 2004).

A hug, a kiss and a smile speaks of actions loaded with emotion.

Through interviews done by Sherry Turkle it became evident that IM helps people to put their emotions at a distance. Some people prefer this as it gives them time to act calmly upon the receiving of bad news. "They keep themselves at a distance from their feelings" (Turkle, 2011:206). Is it possible that people are consciously choosing to suppress their emotions or are they unaware of this taking place and what influence does technology have on this occurrence?

There seem to be two major reactions in literature concerning this:

(1)     The first one implies that people are aware of this taking place and that it is a conscious decision they make.

(2)     Secondly research shows that people are cognitively losing the ability to experience certain emotions, therefore amongst other things they are not aware of what is happening.

## 2.3.2.1   A conscious decision

Except for Turkle's evidence mentioned above Baron also agrees with this. She states that people always want to control conversations and avoid face to face encounters especially when communicating bad news. Back in the old days people chose to write letters in order to end a romantic relationship rather than having to communicate it face to face. Baron believes that this type of control existed long before the digital age, it only multiplied with the introduction of new technologies (Baron, 2008:34-35). In a later writing of Baron (2015) she said that one should not give up on audible conversation as it defines humanity, she also referred to John Locke who said that he was worried about the "de-voicing of society".

With people avoiding certain face to face interactions and even phone calls there exists a decrease in voice communication. This leads to a decrease in interpretation of emotions, as emotions can be interpreted through the hearing of someone's voice (Yawei *et al.*, 2012). It can thus be said that through non-verbal communication devices people are interpreting fewer emotions. Boyd (2014:122-123) disagrees with this when she tells a story about a teenage girl who committed suicide. She says that the girl's MySpace page was loaded with emotional outpourings and that people were not recognising it in order to offer her professional help. Boyd believes that emotions are being communicated by teens through social media, people are just not making an effort to recognise it. The researcher still believe it is more effective to understand a person's emotional state through hearing their voice and that it can be difficult to correctly interpret a person's emotions via text. In South Africa statistics show that 69% of mobile users prefer texting above phone calls which might encourage this loss of emotional communication (Hutton, 2011).

The following statistics were drawn to measure the number of active Whatzapp users in different countries. It shows that South Africa is number 1 in the world. It is clear that text communication is very popular in South Africa which might imply that a high amount of communication is taking place through texting.

| Country | Share |
|---|---|
| South Africa | 78% |
| Malaysia | 75% |
| Argentina | 74% |
| Singapore | 72% |
| Hong Kong | 71% |
| Spain | 70% |
| India | 69% |
| Mexico | 67% |
| UAE | 63% |
| Italy | 62% |
| Netherlands | 61% |
| Germany | 57% |
| Brazil | 56% |
| Saudi Arabia | 56% |
| Indonesia | 52% |
| Turkey | 49% |
| United Kingdom | 84% |
| Ireland | 84% |
| Australia | 16% |
| Philippines | 16% |
| Russia | 14% |
| Canada | 18% |
| Taiwan | 18% |
| Sweden | 10% |
| Thailand | 9% |
| United States | 8% |
| Vietnam | 7% |
| France | 6% |
| Poland | 4% |
| China | 4% |
| South Korea | 2% |
| Japan | 0% |

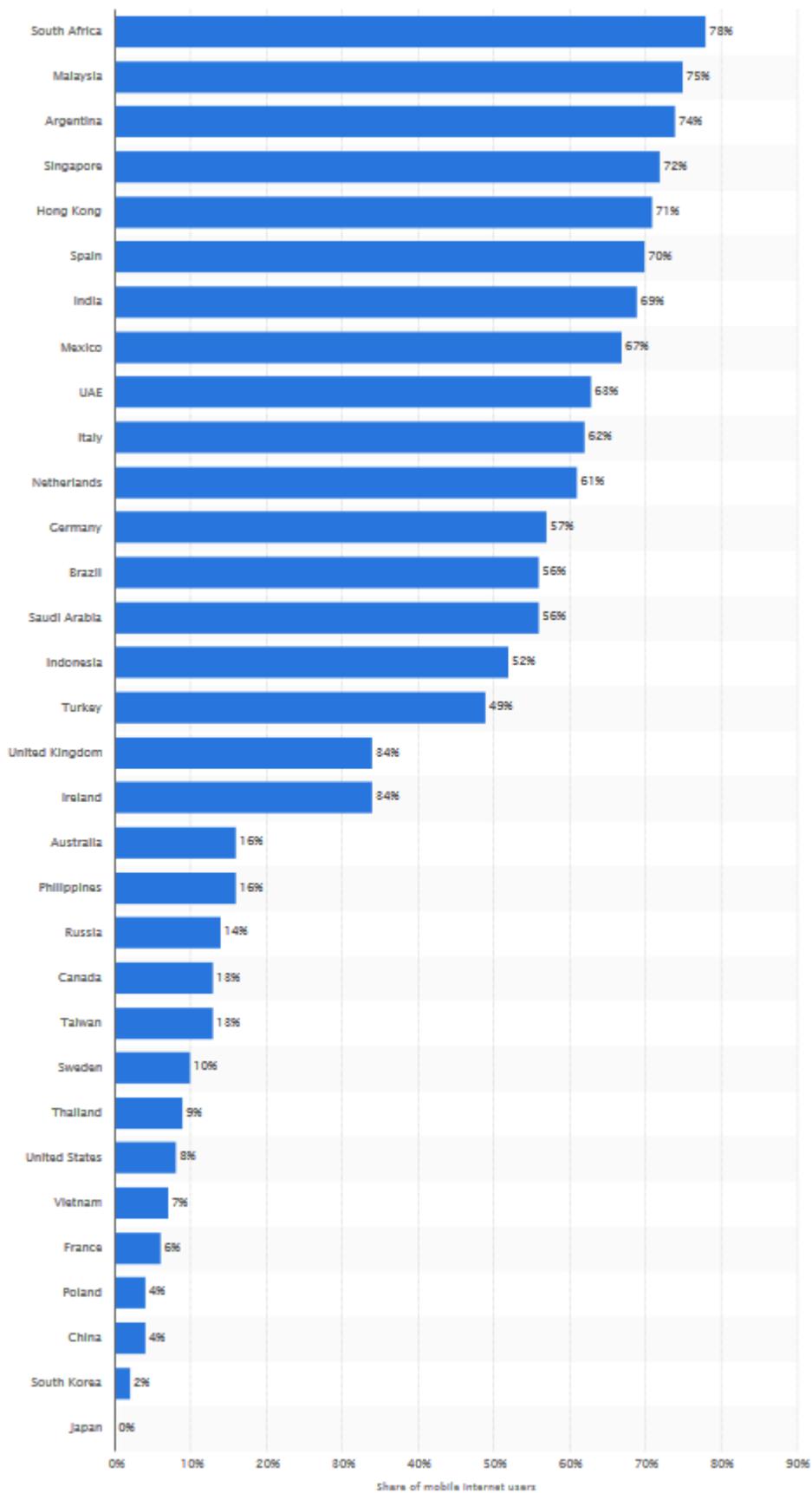Share of mobile internet users

**Figure 2-1:       Share (Statista, 2014)**

Except for emotions being communicated through tone of voice Goleman talks about how it is being communicated through what people see. He is especially talking about physical interaction and how a person observes someone's actions which leads to emotions being contagious (Goleman, 2007:13-15). Although many technological communication media are limiting in this sense there does exist the occasional Skype call in which one can view someone else's reaction in order to interpret their emotions. But this is still a very important matter to take into consideration, as most of the time people communicating within this digital era cannot see each other's reaction to something that is communicated. This might be another add on to less emotions being correctly interpreted or not being communicated at all.

What might serve as a positive element to this is the existence of emoticons in texting. This will be discussed in more detail under the theme of dynamics as the researcher believe this is a dynamic that adds to the change of relationships in the digital age. Irrespective of this it is noteworthy that emoticons are helping people to see emotions to a certain extent but it did not resolve the entire problem of communicating emotions effectively (Baym, 2010:60).

It is clear that people are choosing when to share what emotions, how, to what extent and with who and it might even be that people are so eager to control everything in life that they want to be prepared upon sharing emotions. It seems as if people want to feel "safe" and therefore want to control their emotions (Derks *et al.*, 2007b:2). People are conscious about sharing their emotions and the digital age is encouraging this

### 2.3.2.2 An unconscious effect on the brain

A second response found in literature to the question concerning emotional expressions via technology states that people are developing an inability concerning certain emotions due to too much technological use.

Huddleston (2015a:48) mentions various stories in which people actually died while playing video games. This took place due to spending too much time gaming without taking a break. Although this is a scary thought the researcher want to place focus not on the victim but on the bystanders in these situations. In a newspaper report the author refers to comments made by police that investigated two of these deaths. The police mentioned how other people playing games in the area of the person's death just continued with their games in the midst of investigators gathering the information from the crime scene. These people continued with their lives as if nothing had happened, and as if they didn't realize someone in their vicinity had just died (Frans-Presse, 17 Jan. 2015). Huddleston (2015b) mentioned at a different occasion that too much video gaming can affect one's brain in terms of experiencing empathy and compassion. It can literally take away that ability of the brain to experience these emotions and

because of this it makes sense that the other gamers did not react when police investigated the crime scene. They had become numb instead of feeling empathy and compassion.

Carr also mentions something of this "numbness of the brain". To the same extent that computers strengthen people's minds it can also alter it. Together with this Carr discusses the fact that this makes it difficult for the brain to distinguish between human characteristics and computer characteristics. The brain can thus attribute human characteristics to computers and *vice versa*. Carr also mentions the effect this has on the brain's ability to interpret other people's actions, he says that this can "pose a threat to our integrity as human beings" (Carr, 2012:213-214). Research was done on which parts of the brain are responsible for processing emotions such as empathy and compassion. The researchers confronted individuals with different real life stories though various communication media during which they monitored brain activity via a brain scan. The following was a concluding remark concerning the results of the experiment: "The rapidity and parallel processing of attention requiring information, which hallmark the digital age, might reduce the frequency of full experience of such emotions, with potentially negative consequences" (Immordino-Yang *et al.*, 2009:8024).

The human brain cannot process emotions such as empathy and compassion while being busy with media multitasking. Together with this the brain gets numb when introduced to too much technological use. It is evident that the high speed at which technology works is unhealthy for emotional brain functioning and it might even jeopardise healthy relationships.

Howard and Davis also agree that empathy is declining and they link this to the explosion in social media use after the year 2000. "Could viewing the world through our apps be hurting our ability to view the world through another's eyes?" (Howard & Davis, 2013:111-113). Howards and Davis attribute this decline in empathy to the fact that people are more confident about being cruel online. It is as if it is easier for people to say mean things through texting and social media, maybe even things they would never have been willing to voice face to face.

The fact that online gaming and constant flow of media are numbing the brain into experiencing less empathy and compassion is only adding to the fact that people feel brave to say whatever they want through social media. This is clearly not only a fact for online relationships but it is affecting offline engagements as well. Huddleston's story about the people that did not react when a crime was investigated next to them is the first sign of these offline effects. Although Boyd (2014:78-79) also acknowledges that an unhealthy relationship with technology can "stunt emotional development" amongst teens, she believes that society should not only blame technology. The fact is that there are other elements that also influence this. To a certain extent what Boyd says is true, still the researcher cannot deny the influence of technology on human interaction. And the decrease in empathy and compassion cannot be ignored.

The natural occurrences discussed in this part of the dissertation touched on some extreme influences of technology on human relations and these influences may be evident to a lesser extent amongst the majority of technology users. Still, these issues cannot be ignored when looking at the nature of relationships within the digital age, a lot can be learned from these extreme case studies. It is clear that relationality within the digital age naturally consists of shallowness, as well as an unwillingness and an inability to share intimate emotions. These characteristics might automatically exist within relationships in the digital age, almost as if people are not consciously aware of it. In contrast to this there will also be elements that consciously brings change into relationships within the digital age. Dynamics of relationships that people choose to enforce which makes relationality within the digital age unique. The study of these dynamics leads this research process to the next point of discussion.

## 2.4 Dynamics of relationships within the digital age

Earlier on in this desertion it was said that there exists a differentiation between 'nature' and 'dynamics' due to the different meanings of these terms. Nature just focussed on characteristics that will inevitably exist within relationships within the digital age. Dynamics will now focus on the forces which create change within relationality. Examples of these dynamics are the identity of an individual, the manner in which communication takes place, etc. All of these dynamics will bring change into the normal functioning of relationships. The question to be answered is what does literature say about dynamics within the digital age that is shaping relationships differently?

### 2.4.1 Interpersonal Communication

According to Sillars and Vangelisti communication and relationships are so much entangled that they can barely be seen as separate entities. Communication is the means by which people maintain relationships (Sillars & Vangelisti, 2006:331). Duck (1992:1) states that talking is a vehicle for change in a relationship, it is used to express emotion, to handle conflict and to indicate love and affection. Although many facets of communication were touched on throughout the first half of this chapter, it serves as such an important part of relating that it deserves more attention.

Tossell *et al.* (2012:659) refer to statistics gathered by 'Pew Internet and American Life Project' when they say that text messaging is the most popular way teenagers communicate with their social networks. It even exceeds face to face interaction. Boyd agrees with this but she says the main reason is that teenagers no longer have the freedom to visit with friends regularly. This is because of "parental fear" and lack of transportation options (Boyd, 2014:90). Regardless of the motive, it is a fact that technology has changed the way people communicate and connect with

each other. It might be that less face to face interaction occurs because of the easy communication options offered through digital devices.

The researcher has briefly mentioned the emotional nature of relationships within 2.3.2 and will therefore now only give attention to the role of emoticons in communication. Furthermore focus will be placed on the manner of dealing with conflict as a changing dynamic in relationships in the digital age.

### 2.4.1.1 Emoticons

Under the heading 'what about emotions?' the focus was on defining the emotional capacity of people as affected by the digital age. The focus now turns to how emotions are being communicated via digital media and whether this is affecting communication in relationships positively or negatively. Baym states that there are many ways in which emotions can be expressed in text-based media. Examples of these are emoticons, punctuation, capitalization, informal language etc. Although Baym agrees that socio-emotional communication is easier face to face, there is evidence that it is successful in digital media (Baym, 2010:103). Emoticons receive prominent focus in this discussion as they serve as one of the most prominent communications of emotions in digital communication (Sarkar *et al.*, 2011:34).

"Emoticons are visual cues formed from ordinary typographical symbols that when read sideways represent feelings or emotion. For example, the combination of symbols :-)" (Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998:201). Walther and D'Addario comment that emoticons are used to make the communication of emotions through digital devices easier (Walther & D'Addario, 2001). Emoticons already came into existence in 1972, only "three years into the internet's existence". Although it is making communication via digital devices clearer, it did not completely resolve the problem concerning emotional communication without facial expressions and vocal intonation (Baym, 2010:60).

Most research done could only focus on a few specific emoticons and how people perceive and react towards them (Walther & D'Addario, 2001; Sarkar *et al.*, 2011). This is due to the vast number of emoticons that exists, it is impossible to test people's reactions to all of these at once. The second cause is that some emoticons are used more regularly than others therefore research is done on those used most often (Derks *et al.*, 2007a:845). Therefore these studies made general conclusions about people's use of emoticons based on research done concerning specific emoticons.

Results from various studies confirmed the following:

(1) Emoticons do support communication via different digital media, it serves as a positive support in digital communication and it does have an influence on how messages are interpreted (Derks *et al.*, 2007a; Derks *et al.*, 2007b:1; Sarkar *et al.*, 2011:32).

(2) Evidence shows that, to a great extent, emoticons can fulfil the same roles as non-verbal behaviour in face to face communication (Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998:202; Derks *et al.*, 2007b:1).

(3) People are able to control their emotions through using emoticons in text conversations which is not always easy to do in face to face interaction (Derks *et al.*, 2007b:2).

(4) Emoticons are mostly used to communicate positive messages rather than negative messages (Walther & D'Addario, 2001; Derks *et al.*, 2007a:846).

(5) People aren't always sure what the meanings of specific emoticons are (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:102).

(6) Females are more likely to use emoticons than males (Walther & D'Addario, 2001:327; Baron, 2008:65; Tossell *et al.*, 2012:659).

(7) Sarcasm can be interpreted through messages containing positive emoticons but negative text and the other way around (Derks *et al.*, 2007b:3; Sarkar *et al.*, 2011:26). Walther and D'Addario's (2001:339) research results disagrees with this statement, it can therefore not be accepted as a fact. This might also exist because of the fact that their research already took place in 2001, and more recent research might indicate differently as people are becoming more familiar with the use of emoticons.

It is clear that there exist mixed results in literature on the use of emoticons in the expression of sarcasm. This can lead one to think that people are also not sure how and when to interpret messages as sarcastic. Tossel *et al.* (2012:660) state that when emoticons are included in messages it helps the readers to better understand the emotional context of the message. Other authors do not necessarily disagree with this but they do, however, believe that the existence of emoticons can again be a cause of miscommunication due to the probability of sarcasm (Baym, 2010:60) as well as different understandings of the meanings of emoticons (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:102).

The conclusion of the above referenced literature is that emoticons serve as a supportive add-on to digital communication which can either influence relationships positively or negatively depending on how it is used and how well users know each other offline. It is also clear that different understandings of emoticons can cause conflict in relationships. Emoticons are

definitely not the only factor that can create conflict in relationships in the digital age, more focus will now be placed on this topic.

### 2.4.2   A different way of dealing with conflict

Sillars and Vangelisti write about how difficult it is to understand the process of face to face communication. They state that there are so many aspects involved that it is difficult to comprehend all of it (Sillars & Vangelisti, 2006:339). Rezabel and Cochenour agree with this when they describe the process of understanding communication as an "elusive endeavor" (Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998:202). If it is difficult to only make sense of the process of communication then one can understand that engaging in conversation also has its difficulties. Conflict is bound to surface in human interaction. "Conflict and disagreement are a part of life that cannot be avoided" (Collins, 2007:174).

Previously in this chapter it became clear that communication within the digital age has taken on other forms than only that of face to face communication. If conflict can easily arise within face to face communication then it cannot be denied that it will also exist within other forms of communication and it will inevitably be part of the digital age. The questions that arise concerning this is how does conflict within the digital age look different and how do people deal differently with it?

The researcher has established that emoticons can cause conflict as people might have different meanings for different pictures (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:102). Together with this there exists the possibility of conflict arising from communication gaps caused by texting. People can have different meanings for the same word or they can experience a joke as offensive (Baym, 2010:146). Within the digital age there exist other platforms in which conflict can exist and it is not only limited to face to face interaction. Together with this it offers different ways in which conflict can be dealt with.

Hinde connects conflict and the way it is resolved to the issues of power/control (Hinde, 1996). Although he refers to individuals wanting to exercise control over each other there might also exist a link between conflict in the digital age and individuals wanting to control their own emotions. As seen in 2.3.2.1 people want to control their emotions therefore they prefer texting over phone calls. Baym (2010:145) agrees that some people appreciate dealing with conflict over the internet due to a fear of getting angry too quickly. Focus will now turn to two popular ways of dealing with conflict in the digital era; "flaming" and confession sites.

### 2.4.2.1 Flaming

Even though O'Sullivan and Flanagin declare that there exists uncertainty concerning the definition of "Flaming" most researchers include the fact that it consists out of negative text-based communication (O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003). This communication can also be described as hostile or aggressive and includes swearing, insults, name calling etc. (O'Sullivan & Flanagin, 2003:70; Baym, 2010:57).

Turkle explains how flaming works: it usually starts with one person saying something bad about someone else and then groups of people join in to give their comments. People choose sides and join in the name calling and badmouthing the two people who originally started the conflict. (Turkle, 2011:236). Baym (2010:58) confirms the existence of this by calling it "flame wars". These situations escalate to groups of people engaging in what started out as private conflicting issues. On a different occasion Turkle recalls a conversation she had with a teenage girl concerning her "worst internet fight". This girl tried to resolve the issue face to face with the other boy but that made things online only worse as he started to badmouth her more on Facebook (Turkle, 2011:196). Both of these situations speak of people's inadequate abilities to deal with conflict whether it is face to face or online.

Regarding other forms of conflict characteristic of the digital age are terms such as "cyberbullying". This is a term that is more applicable, although not limited, to school children as was the case with bullying years ago. The main difference between bullying and cyberbullying is the fact that cyberbullying takes place through electronic technology (Huddleston, 2015a:93-94). Slone *et al.* add two more distinctions between the two terms. They state that cyberbullying differs from offline bullying due to the existence of "repetition" and "power imbalance". Repetition refers to the fact that cyberbullying can escalate to a place where other people start using the same information to bully the same victim, repeatedly. Power imbalance speaks about the issue of great numbers of people joining in on the cyberbullying against the same victim (Slonje *et al.*, 2013:26-27). It is evident that there exists similarities between flaming and cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is a serious issue which have previously been linked to depression and suicide. It seems as if the anonymity offered by confession sites adds to the severity of cyberbullying (Conrad, 2014).

### 2.4.2.2 Confessions sites

Except for the fact that people are taking face to face conflict and putting it online, they also seem to use online sites to confess their wrongdoings against others and to apologise. This takes place through what is known as confession sites (Fantz, 2008).

A confession site is a site where people can log on anonymously and post confessions (Turkle, 2011:229). It seems as if there exist contradicting opinions whether these confession sites have positive or negative results. Some of the popular confession sites such as ivescrewedup.com is run by churches. Contradicting to this, several Roman Catholic priests despise these sites (Fantz, 2008). One of these priests stated that the purpose with a confession is to help people take responsibility for what they did wrong. The priests usually encourage people to approach those they have wronged and this is not what is taking place through online confessions. Online confession "is another way for people to avoid taking responsibility" (Fantz, 2008).

Turkle (2011:234) agrees with this when she says that on a confession site it becomes difficult to see the difference between a confession and an apology. Turkle (2011:233) discusses two stories about people who believe placing an apology online is good enough and that you don't have to apologise face to face anymore. Although Turkle also mentions stories about people that disagree with this in saying that such apologies is not acceptable they also believe that the majority of people will still replace face to face apology with online apology. Turkle thinks the real issue may be the fact that people are forgetting that saying "sorry" is not only a confession but it also affects the person you are apologising to – "we forget that what we do affects others" (Turkle, 2011:234). People are not really taking responsibility for their side in a conflict situation. Although most people realise the importance of apologising face to face, confession sites are replacing this with a mere online comment. This might serve as a sign of self-centredness, as long as the words "I am sorry" was typed online there is no need to take further action or responsibility. The person that apologised thinks they have done what was necessary to make themselves feel better regardless of the other person's experience.

It might be possible that too much use of technology can influence one's identity and even encourage an egocentric culture. Therefore it will be important within this dissertation to also focus on identity formation within a digital age.

It is clear that flaming, online bullying and the existence of confession sites influence people's understanding of conflict resolution. Turkle (2011:168) supports this suspicion in saying that e-mail and texting are not the ideal ways in which complicated issues should be dealt with, neither is it the vehicle through which one deeply understands a problem. Van Dijk (2012:258) discusses group dynamics specifically pertaining to online organizational- and business conferences. He says that chances also exist in these cases for flaming to take place which "runs the risk of prematurely ending the conversation by argument or by participant drop-out". It is obvious that people are not effectively dealing with, and growing in, conflict resolution by participating in 'flaming', confession sites or by enforcing cyberbullying. It might be that conversations are ended "prematurely" and people are not really dealing with the problem. Like

Turkle said, this does not help people in growing in their confrontation skills and nothing is being learned "about how to deal with other people" (Turkle, 2011:236).

In "Talking presents a Self" (Duck, 2011:194), Duck states that the identity of an individual is one of the most important aspects of conversation. It influences the way in which a message is communicated as well as the content of the conversation. A person is constructed through communication as that person is expressing himself through communication. The "self" has a direct influence on how the communication will take place and what it will entail. The identity of a person therefore has a strong influence on communication and conversation. The focus will now turn to identity as formed and expressed in the digital age.

### 2.4.3 Identity

Lifton (1993:1) declares that humanity is becoming fluid and many-sided and the sense of self is ever changing in the "flux of our time". It is true, the identity of mankind is always being influenced by characteristics of the time in which the individual lives. Culture has a great influence on identity and within this dissertation the focus lies on the "culture" of the digital age. Duck states that relationships and the identity of individuals cannot be separated from each other. People learn more about themselves through relationships and relationships add to the formation of one's identity (Duck, 2011:21-22). Therefore relationality within the digital age cannot be discussed effectively without studying identity in the digital age.

Collins (2007:263) quotes Egan and Cowan when he defines identity as "a fairly stable mental picture of who you are, a picture that seems to be shared by others who know you". When applying this definition within the digital culture it does complicate things as the digital age is a place of constant change. Miller states that defining identity is problematic and that one should rather refer to "identification" when trying to discuss this within the context of the digital age (Miller, 2011:161). Turkle (2011:158) agrees with Miller when she says that online social worlds provide "new materials" with which identity is developed. It is clear that it will be difficult to try and narrow down one or two comments about identity within the digital age. This study will rather aim at discussing what influences exist on identity formation within the digital age and what do people identify with in the digital age.

Although Collins (2007:263) mentions that identity development is a continual process throughout life, he also says that adolescence is a time during which this becomes more focussed (2007:238). Therefore this part of the study will to a certain degree have a more prominent focus on the life phase of adolescence. The main difference between the digital age and other times in history is the existence as well as the prominence of digital technologies. The focus now turns to the different influences that technology has on a person's identity.

### 2.4.3.1 Narcissism

Literature is full of connections between narcissism and the digital age (Keen, 2006; Rosen, 2007:173; Uhls & Patricia Greenfield, 2011; Hiramine, 2012:244; Howard & Davis, 2013:69,75-77). Most of these resources agree that within the digital age self-centredness is encouraged through the prominence of technologies in people's lives.

Some writers believe that the digital age entails a culture of narcissism. A study done by Uhls and Patricia Greenfield (2011) showed that fame became a more prominent feature in tween television over the past 50 years. They did an interesting study based on the belief that what is being portrayed in tween television programmes will influence the value formation of these young people. Between the years of 1967 and 2007 fame had a dramatic increase in importance for tweens TV programmes. In most of the decades studied fame entailed a position of number 15 out of 16, in 2007 it escalated to number 1. Communicated through TV and internet platforms is the fact that fame should be the number one aspirational value. Although Uhls and Patricia Greenfield (2011) admit that TV content and cultural values are interactive, affecting each other simultaneously, this study have shown that media content providers are consciously trying to enforce self-centredness on tweens. Hiramine (2012:19-20) agrees with the existence of this culture when she says that most of "technology centres around my life, my pictures, my friends, my little world".

Howard and Davis (2013:76) believe that there is no definite indication that narcissism was not prominent in people's lives before the internet. They do, however, agree that there are now so much more ways in which people can receive validation due to online media which might encourage narcissism. Every interaction on a person's mobile device and every like on Facebook communicates: someone is thinking of me, people are paying attention to me.

Together with this comes the existence of "selfies". If it is true that the digital age is creating a more dynamic culture of narcissism then "selfies" might just be an outflow of that. A "selfie" is a picture of yourself taken by you and shared on a social networking site. This phenomenon can be motivated by the following: to get attention from as many people as possible; to get a self-esteem boost; to show off; to get a specific person's attention; boredom; because social media is fun (James, 2014:159-160). Four out of the six motivations mentioned are about the "self" and the name of this phenomenon confirms what it is all about. If anyone doubts whether "selfies" has become a global trend, looking at the Oxford Dictionaries will convince them otherwise. In 2013 the Oxford Dictionaries awarded "selfie" as the word of the year (Anon, 19 Nov. 2013). Although it is only added as a recognised word in the Oxford online dictionaries it is considered as a word that might be added later to the printed Oxford dictionaries as well. It is clear that

"selfies" is a distinct characteristic of the digital age which is becoming part of everyday life and it speaks loudly about the issue of narcissism (Savastio, 2014).

Form a psychological point of view Turkle (2011:177) describes narcissism not as a characteristic of someone that loves themselves but it entails someone with a fragile personality that needs the constant attention in order to exist. Earlier on, under 2.3.1.1 on multitasking, it was mentioned that children within the digital age are receiving divided attention from parents who are multitasking media. Various authors confirmed that the children actually have a desire to have undivided attention from their parents and friends but that this is difficult within the digital age (Jackson, 2011:273-274; Huddleston, 2015a:8). The 'selfie' phenomenon might just be an outcry from a generation in need of more face to face interaction and undivided attention. Turkle (2011:294) describes it in the following manner: "Today's young people have a special vulnerability: although always connected, they feel deprived of attention."

Howard and Davis (2013:119) agree that only when the "Narcissus trap" can be avoided will people be able to develop meaningful identities and healthy relationships. It is evident that identity formation within the digital age is influenced by a narcissistic culture and that it has a direct effect on relationships. But this is not the only stimulus on identity within the digital age, although it will be impossible to mention all the influences, attention will be given to an overview of digital identity and specifically identity formation in online gaming.

### 2.4.3.2 Digital Identity

Except that the digital age might be encouraging narcissism there seems to exist a different world in which identity can be shaped. A person can actually own a digital identity. Within the digital age there exists more opportunities for people to have multiple online identities than ever before. Examples of these are found on social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Instagram etc. On these networking sites one is required to set up an online identity that communicates personal information about oneself (Rosen, 2007:177). Although most of these sites leave the degree to which personal information is shared in the hands of the subscriber these sites still have an influence in guiding what people choose to share indirectly they are guiding ideas about identity (Turkle, 1995b:106). Various authors agree that these social networking sites give individuals the opportunity to own multiple online identities simultaneously (Turkle, 2011:194; Howard & Davis, 2013:170). Turkle (2011:194) states that this is not necessarily a negative thing as this multiple identities give people the feeling of being "whole" due to the fact that the self is "fluid" and "undefensive".

This information leads towards questions concerning fake online identities, anonymity, identity confusion, etc. In the case of teenagers identity formation is important. So, how will these

multiple identities influence their process of identity formation? Boyd (2014:30-33) says that it is difficult for teenagers to know what to share on which media platforms. Each platform has an intended audience to whom they want to speak. Therefore a teenager will upload a specific photo on Facebook with the intended audience they have on Facebook in mind. When someone else such as their parents or school teachers see this photo it becomes a challenge as they were not part of the intended audience. It is clear that teenagers still view their friends' opinions very highly and even online this is important. At a different stage Boyd (2014:17) speaks about how teenagers make fashion decisions aimed more at friends than at family. They still have the desire to be acceptable and this acceptability is still predominantly determined by peer influence. Even online teens mainly aim at communicating with friends and this influences their choices in online identification.

Concerning the influence of peer pressure online it is interesting to hear Turkle speak about numerous teenagers she interviewed who are in a constant struggle to stay "cool" online. This struggle might even cause them at times to place false information on their profiles in order to be accepted (Turkle, 2011:180-186). There will always exist the chance that what you see on social media profiles is not really true. What is more striking is how one teenager explained setting up online profiles. He said that it taught him "how to make a me" (Turkle, 2011:183). Taking into consideration all the things that are not considered cool and what needs to show on your profile for you to be recognised, it can be said that social media is teaching teenagers how to "make a perfect me". How will this influence offline identity and relationships? Will they ever be able to accept themselves, offline, for who they really are? Turkle says these struggles concerning self-presentation are not new, it is an age-old struggle for teenagers to be accepted into their peer groups. "What is new is living them out in public" and being held publicly accountable for any mistake made while discovering one's identity (Turkle, 2011:186). In the digital age teenagers' process of self-discovery is a lot more in the limelight than ever before and it is placing a different type of stress on individuals and on the discovery process.

Howard and Davis say that due to changes in the web over the past fifteen years people's identities are much more intertwined online and offline as had been the case in the past. Based on interviews they had with young people they agree with the fact that online and offline identities do not overlap 100% but there definitely exists more correlations between the two identities than in the past. They state that young people still want to present a "polished self" online but they will do this by omitting negative information instead of setting up false information (Howard & Davis, 2013:62-64).

### 2.4.3.3  Identities in online gaming

Another place in which identities can take form is in the arena of online gaming. In 1995 Turkle wrote about online gaming and the fact that people can "play with their identity" - she wrote this in a discussion about MUD's (Turkle, 1995a:12). The definition of MUD's is Multi-User Dungeons or Multiplayer virtual worlds (Howard & Davis, 2013:62). Later on in Turkle's discussion she wrote about the fact that there is a connection between people's identities and their MUD characters (Turkle, 1995b:106-109).

In 2011 Miller stated that the discussions about MUD's were a bit outdated as the new form of online gaming is now called Avatars (Miller, 2011:165-173). Meadows defines an Avatar as "an interactive, social representation of a user" (Meadows, 2008:13). The main difference between a MUD character and an Avatar is the fact that users can add more details to the identity of the Avatar. In MUD's users were limited to "text-based self-descriptions" of characters where Avatars allow a user to design "physical appearance, skill and aptitude" of the character (Miller, 2011:173). Avatars are therefore much more visual as other players can view the character in 3D through gaming. Avatars increased "identity and gender play" to a next level (Miller, 2011:173). Contemporary online gaming now consists out of Avatars physically engaging with each other online.

Questions concerning the relationships between offline and online identity exists. If Turkle connected people's identities to their MUD characters, what will be the view concerning Avatars? And is it possible that Avatars can influence the identity of their creators?

Miller mentions a few authors that argue against Turkle in saying that there does not exist something such as identity play online. These statements are built on beliefs that identity is a group phenomenon and therefore Turkle's statements are "overly individualistic" (Miller, 2011:165-168). Also identity is seen as being set in offline life and users only want to maintain that identity online (Wynn & Katz, 1997:301). Wynn and Kats go further in saying that only a minority of online gamers participate anonymously, which causes their identities to stay unchanged (Wynn & Katz, 1997:303). Miller agrees with these critics and also states that Turkle's MUD-based work might have been a bit "sensational" (Miller, 2011:168). They seem to have doubted Turkle's declarations that online identity exploration is connected to an individual's offline identity and that these two forms of identity can affect each other.

Although these arguments may be based on valid proof it was critically aimed at Turkle's publications made in 1985, 1995 and 1996. It did not take into consideration her latest publication in 2011 in which she did offer research on Avatar engagements and its effects on

identity. There exists more recent evidence to confirm what Turkle suspected a mere ten years ago.

Jeremy Bailenson, a professor at the Stanford University, speaks about "identity bending" that exists within the digital age and that digital identity has an infinite plasticity (Bailenson, 2013:xiv). Yee *et al.* did a study in 2009 where they pre-designed specific avatars and gave them to users to use while playing an online game. Their results showed that an avatar's appearance can influence the player's behaviour online (Yee *et al.*, 2009:299). This proves that there does exist the phenomenon about "identity play". When people design their avatars with specific characteristics it does have an effect on their game, it then makes sense that people will want to explore with multiple avatar identities in order to improve their gaming skills. Miller (2011:174) confirms that people have multiple avatar identities. Except for this there is evidence that the online and offline identities does influence each other. In a different study avatars were created similar to the identity of the participants. The participant could then see how his/her avatar will be affected through the participant's physical exercise. This motivated the individuals to exercise more (Fox & Bailenson, 2009:17). It is clear that the participants of the study related to the avatars that was created for them, which confirms the fact that the online persona had an effect upon the real-life person. Yee *et al.* (2009:293) also confirm that users may "infer their own attitudes and behaviours from their avatar's appearance". This contradicts Turkle's critics that identity is set offline and that online identities do not affect that. Meadows (2008:96) also confirms this and elaborates with the following quote: "You are the trunk of the identity tree, and your avatars are the leaves".

The last critique that Turkle received concerning this pertained to the issues about anonymity. Although it might be true that most online users are not anonymous and that the existence of social media makes it easier for people to be identifiable online (Howard & Davis, 2013:63), this is not true for online gaming. Wolfendale (2007:111) says that millions of people participate in online gaming: "at any given time the concurrent online population of online games is greater than the population of Singapore." Most of these gamers are typically made anonymous (Yee *et al.*, 2009:292). The fact that people are mostly anonymous in online gaming makes them vulnerable to external influences. Yee *et al.* (2009:292) confirm this when they write about the fact that anonymity causes people to be more externally focussed which in turn creates a lack of focus on inward standards and values. This vulnerability should then have an influence on offline identity.

Based on everything that has been said, it seems evident that although Turkle's comments might have seemed "sensational" during the first time of writing she was not far from right concerning the current state of identity play in online gaming. Meadows says it very clearly: "Whether it is half avatar or half human, we are being propelled into a new world where the

body is built as much as it is born, where it is tool as much as decoration, and where even its existence is a question" (Meadows, 2008:95).

In 2011 Turkle wrote that she still believed adults and adolescents use the internet to explore identity, she goes further to say that in life people never "graduate from working on identity; we simply rework it with the materials at hand" (Turkle, 2011:153,158). It seems as if there is a lot of recent evidence that supports this and that the different "materials" will have different effects on identity. What is more is that recent studies also show that these avatars now affect people's offline behaviour (Bailenson, 2013:xiv) including face to face relationships (Yee *et al.*, 2009:285). Turkle (2011:159-160) recorded another interesting story about how a person's "Second Life" as an avatar is affecting his offline marriage and family life. More attention will be given to this in the next chapter when the focus will be on couples' relationships within the digital age.

To conclude the discussion on identity it is worth while to look at Lifton's concluding comments. Firstly he acknowledges that nothing is certain pertaining to the future, the only sure fact is that the self will keep on changing due to external influences in a changing society. The self is responsible for choosing what to include in this process of growth and change and the self will always have the need to connect to others of similar "species." Important in this process of growth is authenticity. A healthy protean self will always be fluid (Lifton, 1993:229-232). In a digital age identity is definitely fluid as people can change between different avatars and offline experiences. Although this is neither a prominently positive or negative characteristic it definitely serves as a dynamic which brings change into relationships within the digital age. A better understanding of the influences that the digital age offer to the "self" gives better understanding of relationality within the digital age.

## 2.5   Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to describe and evaluate the nature of relationships within the digital age. Through the literature study the following discoveries were made concerning relationality within the digital age:

Although the majority of mankind still exist within face to face relationships the perceptions and approaches towards these relationships have slightly changed. Technology has made it easier to maintain communication in relationships that had previously been limited due to location. It has given mankind the tools needed to keep relationships going where in the past this was impossible (Baym, 2010:11). Yet it seems as if these relationships when maintained mainly through digital communication media are shallower than face to face relationships. Being constantly connected through these mediums causes people to experience anxiety and

increases feelings of loneliness. There exists then a contradictory theory concerning the notion of always being connected: people desire constant connection with each other but the manner in which this takes place within the digital age encourages loneliness. Face to face interaction is still what people desire the most.

Multitasking exists because of the influence that technological screens have on the brain and due to the fear people have of not being always connected. This not only encourages shallow relationships but also influences people's emotions. Digital Media complicate communications involving person identity and feelings, yet challenge people to think of creative ways in which to communicate (Baym, 2010:57), for example the use of emoticons in communicating emotions via text based messages. This can in its turn cause communication gaps to exist. Once again it is confirmed that face to face communication is most effective, especially with intimate relationships. Another phenomenon that exists concerning emotions within the digital age is that of control. People don't want to feel vulnerable and therefore want to be constantly in control of their emotions. Consciously or sub-consciously people decide to share their emotions in a limiting manner. This then has a direct influence on the way in which people choose to deal with interpersonal conflict. Flaming is a common occurrence which does not necessarily encourage people to effectively address a problem. This creates questions concerning the way in which couples will then deal with conflict, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Another dynamic of relationships within the digital age is that of identity. Within the digital age there exists identity play which influences both online and offline life. It does seem as if there might exist a correlation between identity presentation and what was mentioned in 2.3.2 about emotions. Technology has created online life in which people are not comfortable to completely expose themselves. They want to be in control of their emotions and therefore rather deal with difficult conversations through texting where they can hide their emotions. Similarly they don't want to expose the negative or "unacceptable" side of their identities and life experiences online, they would rather omit that and appear online as if they have a perfect life (Howard & Davis, 2013:63-64). Likewise 'selfies' always need to be "perfect" presentations of the self (Milivojević, 2014:295-296) which can in turn either reflect the narcissistic culture encouraged through technology or it can serve as an outcry for more face to face interaction and undivided attention.

The main conclusion for this chapter leads one to think that the digital age created some sort of barrier among people. Due to communication and life sharing mostly taking place through digital devices people might experience distance within their personal relationships. In the next part of this dissertation the researcher will look at how these things influence intimate relationships and especially couples' relationships.

A last comment goes to one of Turkle's statements based on feedback she got from college students as they studied interaction between an old lady (82) and a robot-baby. "…a next generation will become accustomed to a range of relationships: some with pets, others with people, some with avatars, some with computer agents on screens, and still others with robots" (Turkle, 2011:119). Chances exist that this might be a "sensational" comment, still nobody knows what the future holds for relationships, it remains unknown.

The information gathered in this chapter gives a clear picture concerning the context of the digital age and how it presents new arenas in which relationships exist as well as new ways in which people relate to each other. The next step in this research process is to gain clarity concerning couples' relationships against this given background of the digital age. The findings of this chapter will serve as a basis for further research concerning romantic relationships.

# CHAPTER 3    COUPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE DIGITAL AGE: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATION

## 3.1    Introduction

In the previous chapter the focus was on sketching a clear picture concerning the digital age as the context in which the nature and dynamics of relationships in general need to be understood. The focus now turns to couples' relationships. For the purpose of this study the understanding of "couples" refers to serious romantic relationships that have the potential to grow into a marriage, and it also includes newly-married couples. "Nowadays, online chats, emails, SMS, MMS, online dating webs and social network sites often play a part in love and erotic relationships from the first contacts until the breakup" (Lasén & Casado, 2012:552). This quote confirms that technology is greatly influencing romantic relationships. This raises two questions: what is going on in couples' relationships in the digital age and why? Therefore this chapter has a narrower focus: to describe romantic relationships within the digital age, in service of identifying the unique contribution that a pastoral theological perspective can offer towards couples' counselling. In order to accomplish this, the first two tasks of Osmer (2008:4) are used interchangeably. While applying Osmer's descriptive task in order to determine what is going on in couples' relationships, the interpretive task will be kept in mind to discover why these dynamics are present.

Due to the complexity of the culture of the digital age there exists a need to apply the "transversal model of cross-disciplinary dialogue" (Osmer, 2008:170). Information has been gathered from different study fields such as Communication Sciences, the science field of Psychology and Neuroscience. Although there will be a lot of information available within these different fields of study the purpose of this dissertation will limit the research to only gathering information relevant to the current research questions: what is going on and why?

This chapter has a stronger critical focus than the previous chapter as it not only aims at sketching a contextual picture of romantic relationships in the digital age but also wants to determine why specific dynamics exist. It will only be with an in-depth understanding of the complexity of technology that pastoral counselling can make a unique contribution.

The following literature served as main resources viewed for the purpose of chapter 3:

(1)    The Couple and family technology framework offered by Hertlein and Blumer (2014) is recent research about how technology is influencing both couples and families and what challenges this is bringing to therapy sessions. This publication adds great value to this chapter from the field of Psychology.

(2)    Hooked by McIlhaney' and Bush (2008) includes relevant information concerning neuroscience and sexuality which makes a great connection between the influence of technology on the brain and its effects on the sexuality of an individual. Both authors are gynaecologists and have experience in sex education and counselling.

## 3.2    Critical elements of couple's relationships within a digital culture

The key findings of chapter 2 can serve as foundation blocks in understanding the dynamics of specifically couples' relationships within the digital age. Although it can be said that everything mentioned in the previous chapter will have an effect on romantic relationships there do exist specific topics which can have a more critical effect on romantic relationships and therefore need to be researched in more detail. It might be that there exist more critical elements than the ones that follow, yet for the purposes of this dissertation the ones discussed seem sufficient

### 3.2.1    Shallowness

If relationships within the digital age only exist because of digital connections it will naturally take on the element of shallowness (2.3.1). It became evident that issues such as multitasking can cause relationships to be shallower regardless of its existence online or offline. In its turn it then also affects people's abilities to share emotions. For the purpose of this chapter the focus is specifically on couples' relationships. Is it true that these findings are applicable to couples' relationships, to what extent and why will it have an impact?

Firstly it is important to note that partners in a romantic relationship can easily experience lack of attention from each other due to constantly being connected with others via digital devices. Shallowness in relationships can be caused by multitasking and it seems as if couple relationships are not left out of this equation (2.3.1.1). Hertlein and Blumer (2014:49) state that couples are experiencing more interferences into their daily lives than ever before which makes it difficult to spend time together. A newspaper article published on 5 October 2015 confirmed that this is also applicable to couples' relationships in South Africa. Rochelle Human referred to a research study done in Texas while writing her article for a local newspaper *Beeld*, in which she stated that constant cell phone connections can have devastating effects on romantic relationships and South Africans also get upset when their partners are distracted due to cell phone usage (Human, 2015). Vera and Kerry (2006:202) state that spending time together is an important element in the healthy development of couple relationships. Constant technological interruptions are therefore not contributing to couples' relationships in a positive manner as it causes people to be distracted from one another as well as to engage in technological demands that are not truly urgent (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2013:238; Murray & Campbell, 2015:124 &

133). It might even be that individuals experience this as if they are sharing their partners with others via technology while being on a date which was intended to be private.

Hertlein (2012:377) discusses the fact that people may feel more comfortable to share some aspects of who they are, such as their vulnerabilities, only online. This can cause division to exist within a couple's relationship offline. Vulnerability is an important part of connecting with someone in a meaningful way (Howard & Davis, 2013:105). If vulnerability is being replaced or eliminated due to online interaction it will definitely jeopardize the intimacy of the romantic relationships offline. Together with this people in the digital age are sharing fewer emotions, be it consciously or unconsciously (2.3.2). The inability to experience and express empathy and compassion will have a dramatic effect upon couples' relationships especially in the manner they communicate with each other and deal with conflict. If one's ability to experience empathy and compassion is affected conflict can really become brutal. It is clear that what was discussed previously concerning the shallowness of relationships within a digital age has an implication on couples' relationships and the depth and intimacies of romantic relationships is definitely at risk, specifically pertaining to the expression of empathy and compassion. Hertlein and Blumer (2014:42) confirms that empathy is important in establishing trust in couples' relationships. The focus now turns to the way in which couples' communication is being affected in a digital age and whether empathy and compassion are needed in dealing with conflict effectively.

### 3.2.2  Communication

From the field of Communication Science the following information serves this study effectively. Communication is an important aspect of human relationships and it has been greatly influenced through technology (2.4.1). This is especially true when it comes to couples' relationships. Romantic partners can now more frequently connect throughout the day (Coyne *et al.*, 2011:152; Howard & Davis, 2013:95) and research showed that one out of four romantic couples uses technology to discuss both personal and serious issues (Coyne *et al.*, 2011:159; Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011:129). Although it is a fact that the digital age has many positive attributes concerning couples' communication this will not be the main focus of discussion. Questions concerning the prominence of technology in romantic relationships entails the effectiveness and the intimacy of these forms of communication. The main question for this section would then be: how is couples' communication negatively influenced in the digital age?

In order to answer this question it firstly needs to be acknowledged that communication technologies are used differently depending on the level of relational development (Ruppel, 2015:668). Romantic relationships that have not entered the level of offline engagement are discussed under the rubric "online dating" therefore the focus is now on relationships where people are engaging both online and offline.

The fact that many romantic couples' choose to discuss serious issues via digital devices can be supported by many positive motivations (Coyne *et al.*, 2011:151; Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011:121-123). In fact a lot of research proved that communication through media use mostly has positive effects, even pertaining to romantic relationships (Coyne *et al.*, 2011:159; Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011:122). Contradicting this Murray and Campbell (2015:134) declare as recently as 2015 that the people who participated in their research, still experience some negative effects of communications technology.

One of these effects is confirmed in research as "misunderstandings" in digital communication among couples' (Collins, 2007:316; Coyne *et al.*, 2011:151; Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011:122; Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:32-36; Murray & Campbell, 2015:120). Hertlein and Blumer (2014:32) say that this exists due to partners' different understandings of "synchronous" and "asynchronous" communication. They define synchronous communication as communication that happens at the same time, where both parties are able to reply immediately. Asynchronous communication takes place over an unknown timeframe such as e-mails or instant messages where partners are not able to respond immediately. If both partners do not have the same expectations concerning these forms of communication it not only causes misunderstandings but it can also lead to unnecessary conflict. Based on this it is clear that certain types of communication are meant to take place in certain forms. If romantic partners do not have the same understanding concerning the appropriate use of these different forms of communication it can have devastating effects on their relationships. Hertlein and Blumer (2014:35) go further in saying that if couples' want to experience "satisfying intimate and collaborative interaction" face to face communication may be a better option than digital communication.

It became evident that new technologies offer both positive and negative influences to interpersonal communication. If couples' want to grow in intimacy they should not underestimate face to face communication and they also need a unified understanding of the different forms of online communication.

The fact that research does not describe many of the negative effects of communication technologies on couples' relationships might be due to the small amount of research that was done on this specific topic. Together with this there might exist more negative effects in the future use of these technologies as it is clearly being incorporated into couples' relationships more frequently among younger adults than among older adults (Coyne *et al.*, 2011:160). The future might hold interesting discoveries as a current young generation that is more saturated with technology is still to enter into serious romantic relationships such as marriage. Coyne *et al.* (2011:161) support this expectation in saying that cell phone communication and specifically texting might become a primary way of couple communication in the future. This prominent existence of digital communication can amplify the existence of conflict amongst couples.

Therefore the next focus is on the manner in which this and other conflict situations are being dealt with amongst couples' in a digital age.

### 3.2.3 Conflict resolution

Information used for this topic is gathered from both the study field of Communication Science and Psychology. Some examples of how interpersonal conflict is dealt with in a digital age are flaming, cyber bullying and the use of confession sites (2.4.2). Basically the digital age is offering people easy ways to eliminate face to face conflict. But what happens in relationships where you will see the person face to face again, relationships where not saying sorry can have long-term effects, relationships where love is present, where couples and/or marriages are worth fighting for?

Conflict resolution in couples' relationships in the digital age resembles the same characteristics as previously mentioned (2.4.2). As a matter of fact various researchers have found that people believe technological communication is not so emotionally driven which makes it easier to resolve conflict in this manner (Frisby & Westerman, 2010:975; Coyne *et al.*, 2011:160; Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011:128; Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014:5). People believe that it makes it easier to deal with a complicated situation when the extreme emotions are removed from the situation, which is exactly what technological communication offers. Collins (2007:323) agrees that in intimate relationships the facial expressions and tone of voice can add to misunderstandings that can again result in conflict. The question then arises: how does digital communication affect the effective handling of conflict amongst romantic partners?

Frisby and Westerman (2010:971) remark that conflict in romantic relationships is neither good nor bad, but the manner in which the conflict is dealt with will determine whether it will affect the relationship in a positive or negative way. Their study focused on determining what technological channels romantic partners choose to use in dealing with conflict and what motivates these choices. Frisby and Westerman (2010:977) found that romantic partners are deliberately choosing specific communication mediums based on their preferred conflict style as well as what channels are available to use. What is more significant is that most of the participants in this study declared that they mainly use synchronous communication mediums in dealing with conflict. These synchronous communication media entailed the use of cell phones with regards to texting and phone calls (Frisby & Westerman, 2010:976). Other researchers agree with Frisby and Westerman (2010:976) in saying that the level of satisfaction is experienced as the same regardless as to whether the conflict takes place via computer mediated communication (CMC) or face to face communication (Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011:129). Accordingly partners do not experience a big difference between CMC and face to face communication when it comes to conflict resolution.

An overuse of technology can numb a person's ability to experience empathy and compassion (2.3.2.2). With regard to conflict resolution empathy and compassion can serve as two important aspects, protecting both partners involved in the fight. It is a fact that these two emotions are on the decrease in a digital age (Immordino-Yang *et al.*, 2009:8024; Carr, 2012:213-214; Huddleston, 2015b). So how will this affect conflict resolution amongst romantic partners?

Kahn and Lawhorne (2003:4) declare that empathy is an important human skill that has a critical role to play in the process of effective conflict resolution. Without empathy acts of aggression increase. Although Finn and Atkinson (2009:54) state that the existence of technologies can be of support for "victims of intimate partner violence" they also affirm that these same technologies add to the increase of intimate partner violence. This is due to the fact that technologies are used more frequently in connection with violent acts. The existence of cyber bullying was previously mentioned but except for this there exists something called "cyberstalking". Cyberstalking consists of harassing or threatening someone repeatedly online with the intention of creating fear (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:190). Finn and Atkinson (2009:54) mention an online resource centre that helps between 50 and 75 women on a weekly basis concerning effects of cyberstalking. One third of these cases involve an ex-intimate partner. There clearly exists a percentage of partners that deal with a conflict issue and then end their relationships after which they have a problem in coping with the new situation. Technology is helping in prolonging such negative conflict situations through cyberstalking. One cannot help but think whether this type of online behaviour might lead to offline abuse. There does exist some evidence that supports this, based on research done in the United States: 81% of women who experienced stalking are also being physically assaulted (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:194). A great number of these women's perpetrators are romantically involved with them.

It is irresponsible to say that before technology these things did not exist, because they probably did. What is true though is that technology is making it easier for these negative conflict situations to continue and to even increase. With emotions such as empathy and compassion decreasing romantic partners might not realise the weight of their choice to deal with conflict through digital devices. Although previous research showed that romantic partners do not experience a big difference between CMC and face to face communication when it comes to conflict resolution it might be that they are not always aware of the different effects that these different communication media offer.

Coyne *et al.* (2011:159) mention the fact that saying damaging words to someone via technology does not decrease the impact it has on that person. It might as well have been said face to face. It could be that people are more confident in saying things through digital devices which they would never have said face to face. Due to a lack of empathy and compassion they do more harm to the relationships, or the other person, than they realize. It makes sense that

people would then accept abuse and harmful sexual acts portrayed in movies such as *50 Shades of Grey* as acceptable (Huddleston, 2015a:34). The existence of avatars being slaves of each other is also not looked upon with disgust, it is just accepted as part of the online game; Second Life (Meadows, 2008:31). Together with this excessive participation in virtual gaming is also confirmed to intensify levels of aggression which then becomes evident during conflicting situations (Coyne *et al.*, 2012:390). Regardless of the extreme effects of couples dealing with conflict via devices it does serve as a prominent way in which couples' conflict can look different in the digital age. Results from a specific research study showed that 3% of partners deliberately chose to hurt their partners through media (Coyne *et al.*, 2011:159). Further research will then have to answer: what percentage of partners are not deliberately choosing to hurt their partners through media but it is actually taking place?

The focus of this discussion was to study how couples' conflict is being dealt with differently in the digital age. One of the prominent discoveries thus far is that there does exist a greater opportunity for increased aggressive actions during conflict resolution due to the prominence of technologies. Although there are quite a few visible existences in the digital age that can cause couple conflict this was not the current focus. This will, however, become evident throughout the rest of this chapter as potential conflicting situations will surface under some of the other topics of discussion. Conflict between partners can result because of a lot of reasons, not only does misunderstandings within the digital age cause this but it can also, amongst others, be linked to individualism or self-centeredness. Collins (2007:316 & 319) says that conflict can directly be linked to individualism. It is a given fact that many times conflict exists amongst couples because both or one of the parties are self-centred. This not only brings to remembrance the topic discussed in chapter 2 concerning narcissism but it also leads the researcher to the next focus point: identity in the digital age and its effect upon couples' relationships.

### 3.2.4  Identity

A discussion concerning relationality cannot take place without placing some focus on identity (2.4.3). Identity forms an integral part of relationships and this is especially true for couple relationships. Within romantic relationships narcissism and conflict resolution will affect each other as romantic relationships are not usually ended due to a mere misunderstanding. Romantic partners tend to continue a relationship and try to overcome conflicting situations. So how will this look in the case of narcissism being present in couples' relationships? In order to answer this question effectively information was gathered from different study fields including that of Psychology.

Narcissists reveal more drastic negative behaviour during conflict with a romantic partner and if the romantic partner becomes a self-esteem threat the narcissist will decrease closeness in the

relationship (Peterson & DeHart, 2014:478). It makes sense that the degree to which an individual experiences narcissism will determine the measure of effects in romantic relationships and it was previously mentioned that narcissism in the digital age is not yet as extreme as the disease of narcissism that is identified as a psychological disorder. Still the term narcissism caries the same character traits - in some instances it is just more extreme than in others. Nevertheless, the fact remains that narcissism will have drastic implications for any couple relationship. As referred to above, Collins links self-centeredness to conflict, because of people seeking their own way, above all else it causes tension in relationships. The fact that a narcissistic person needs constant praise and attention will also negatively affect a romantic relationship. Saad (2012:27) mentions that narcissists cannot accept others as equal to themselves. This will most probably cause a constant "owner–slave" mentality in a romantic relationship. Everything will have to centre around one of the partners. What is more interesting than this is as mentioned in 2.3.4.1 - narcissism is being encouraged among everyone that is constantly involved with interactive technology. A romantic relationship can become really intense when both partners are narcissistic to a certain degree. This might even add to the fact that cyberstalking prolongs conflict past the stage where it was supposed to end. It is undeniable that narcissism will negatively affect any couple relationship and the fact that the digital age is encouraging such behaviour poses interesting questions to the future of couple relationships.

### 3.2.4.1  Avatar

Except for narcissism another important element of identity in the digital age, pertaining to couples, is that concerning online gaming identity. Carrier *et al.* (2015:39) argue that being online is not necessarily the biggest threat to mankind's ability to express empathy, but gaming has the greatest influence on empathy. Except for the fact that online gaming is negatively shaping empathy and therefore contributing to everything mentioned thus far, online gaming also has a direct impact on couples' relationships. This is especially true in connection with the creating of avatars and other virtual identities which pose the opportunity of amongst others, gender play. It was already established that the creating of an avatar does affect an individual's offline identity as well as offline relationships (Meadows, 2008:96; Fox & Bailenson, 2009:17; Yee *et al.*, 2009:293; Bailenson, 2013:xiv).

It is interesting to note how some online games give individuals the opportunity to create a life outside their offline reality – a "virtual world". In these virtual worlds people can now choose how they want to look and how they want to live life differently, they can "chat, fight, make friends, have sex, kill monsters and even get married" (Wolfendale, 2007:111). A person no longer only creates a new identity (through an avatar) but he/she can create a whole new life that surrounds this identity. This new life might even include a new husband or wife!

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Turkle (2011:159-160) recorded an interview she had with a man who had participated in an online game called Second Life (2.4.3.3). He created an avatar through which he engaged in this game where his avatar, Rolo, married a woman avatar, Jade. He daily connects with Jade via Second Life where they share all of life (both online and offline life) through typing, these avatars can even engage erotically whenever they want to. This man claims that it is easier to "talk" to Jade than to his wife in real life and that he can easily share things with Jade that he cannot share with others. This man's virtual identity seems to be more than a mere engagement in an online game. Although he never met Jade face to face it might as well be said that he had a full on affair with her. He is getting emotional security from this avatar and sharing his life with her, therefore a relationship outside his actual marriage is offering him things that he was supposed to get from his 'real-life' marriage. Although Turkle (2011:160) agrees with this she says there is something more to it. People are engaging "virtual lovers" and there exists a "simultaneity of lives". Online identities and identities in online gaming is definitely offering couples' relationships in the digital age something new. On top of all of this there might also be people who do not see these virtual relationships as affairs, which might once again add to the shallowness of romantic relationships.

The fact is if an individual is engaging in an online relationship via an avatar while in the presence of their spouse, one of the two relationships will receive less attention. Research showed that gamers "felt happier while in the game than anywhere else" (Hertlein & Hawkins, 2012:18) which might indicate a level of discontent in real life couple relationships, instead of dealing with the issue at hand it is easier to enter into the "perfect" marriage via gaming and try to ignore the real life situation. At the end of the day the question remains: which one of the two relationships are most important and which one will receive priority? Which relationship will be the one that actually offers emotional security and which relationship defines the individual's identity as husband or wife?

It might be true that the above-mentioned scenario is an extreme example but the fact is that this exists as an option for couples' relationships in the digital age. It is a reality that influences identity in couples' relationships. It can cause people to doubt what their role is in a relationship, whether each partner truly is committed to the relationship and what is expected from each other. What makes this even more complicated is the fact that these virtual relationships can easily exist without the other partner knowing about it which in turn raises questions concerning trust and authenticity in couples' relationships. This will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

Except that online gaming can make couples' relationships vulnerable to extra-relational intimacy (Coyne *et al.*, 2012:394) due to identity play, it also poses other threats that should receive some attention. This not only pertains to identity but includes quite a few other elements which are discussed under the next topic: 3.3.1, Virtual gaming.

### 3.2.5  Virtual Gaming

The previous section of this chapter ended by mentioning that online gaming has a greater effect on couple relationships which cannot be limited to a discussion of identity play. The focus now turns to these other effects of virtual gaming. Firstly it is important to mention that video gaming and computer gaming have gone through a great change in the 21st century. Although "Avatars" were explained in chapter 2 there exist other important terminology which is not limited to but also includes avatars. This is called "Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game" (MMORPG) (Hertlein & Hawkins, 2012:1). In 2009 the MMORPG.com website claimed to have 1,120,491 members of which the average American gamer is 35 years of age and in general 36% of all gamers are married (Hertlein & Hawkins, 2012:1-2). Gaming is no longer something that can be limited to only teenage users, it plays a prominent role in the lives of adults and their romantic relationships.

Various authors support the statement that gaming can increase relational intimacy (Coyne *et al.*, 2012:394; Hawkins & Hertlein, 2013:150; Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014:1; Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:52-53). This is based on different theories such as the ability offered by gaming for couples to fantasize in their relationships (Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014), it serves as a shared leisure activity, increases socialization skills, and creates an increased understanding of the partner's context (Hertlein & Hawkins, 2012:18).

The same researcher who made the claims about the positive effects also mentions negative effects, almost as if there is no evidence that gaming can only have a good influence on couples, it is always accompanied by negative effects. Some of these negative effects are: creating feelings of exclusion (Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014:1; Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:53), gaming causing conflict concerning various topics (Coyne *et al.*, 2012:389; Hertlein, 2012:380), partners not being involved in household tasks (Hertlein, 2012:380) fantasizing, intimacy disruption and addiction (Hertlein & Hawkins, 2012:20).

It seems as if the positive effects of virtual gaming in couples' relationship are outweighed by the negative effects. Hertlein and Hawkins (2012:2) agree with this by saying that gaming is becoming a "primary presenting problem" in couple relationships and there is a need for therapists and counsellors to understand these effects.

Amongst these negative effects there seems to surface one that creates more tension in couple relationships. This happens when only one partner in the relationship is involved in online gaming. Hertlein and Hawkins (2012:21) mention that this can create feelings of jealousy, resentment and hurt due because gaming receives greater priority over other responsibilities and because one partner feels excluded from a world the other is involved in. The extent of this

phenomenon is confirmed in that there even exist support groups for these excluded partners, people commonly known as "Gamer widows" (Coyne *et al.*, 2012:389; Hertlein & Hawkins, 2012:1 & 2). Don't let the name fool you, gender has got nothing to do with it, both males and females are experiencing this exclusion. It merely refers to any individual who has a partner that is involved in MMORPG to the extent that it is creating damage to the relationship. The mere fact that there exists such support groups places attention on the reality that this is a serious issue in couple relationships. Except for exclusion this creates conflict among couples which can lead to a decrease in marital satisfaction (Coyne *et al.*, 2012:389).

It is clear that virtual gaming does affect couples' relationships. Hertlein and Blumer (2014:57) say that "what one does on social networking sites is more important to relationships than how much time is spent on the sites". This was confirmed through Turkle's story about marriage in the game Second Life (Turkle, 2011:159-160). The game in itself might not always be the problem but what people choose to do on these game sites can have devastating effects for couple relationships. There always exists the opportunity for people to engage romantically through these online games. For someone who is not involved in a romantic relationship this can serve as an opportunity to meet new people and maybe even start a romantic relationship. This will be the next point of discussion: online dating. How is this changing the way romantic relationships take place and come into existence?

### 3.2.6  Online Dating

Online dating might serve as the biggest catalyst of change in couple relationships in the digital age. It is the one thing that completely changed romantic relationships with the rise of the World Wide Web, it serves as the only thing that did not at all exist in relationships a few hundred years ago. Although Baym (2010:101-102) declares that match making has been taking place since the existence of newspapers, she agrees that new media did create new ways in which people could meet others who share the same interests.

Sprecher (2009:762) is of opinion that the term "online dating" is very misleading, it creates a false idea that dating activities take place online. Contrasting to this online dating refers to "a variety of relationship initiation activities". Any serious relationship will move to a place of offline engagement sooner or later. This cartoon by David Sipress humorously confirms this fact:

"We met online."

**Figure 3-1:     We met online (Sipress, 2006)**

Today it is easy to go online and through various platforms offered by social media one can get information about an individual although there never existed any face to face interaction, this makes it quite different from meeting someone face to face for the first time (Sprecher, 2009:763). Usually a first-time face to face engagement takes place with no previous information available. This easily accessed information can even include photos that can guide the decision concerning possible future engagements. Hertlein and Blumer (2014:23) recognises this as the biggest difference between face to face and computer-mediated relationships: the extent to which one's presentation can be edited online.

Research shows that only a minority of marriages and serious romantic relationships originated online. When choosing a marriage partner people still meet in traditional ways without online dating (Sprecher, 2009:766). Still it seems as if online dating is a space that makes meeting partners easier for those who would have struggled otherwise (Baym, 2010:104) People who are shy, socially awkward, lonely and usually struggles with interpersonal interaction often engage in online dating (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:23). Online dating therefore makes it easier for these people to meet potential partners (Whitty, 2008:1846).

There exists some evidence that people who prefer to participate in online dating are mainly interested in sex and not in an emotional relationship (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014). Whitty

(2008:1844) confirms this in saying that online dating sites are growing in popularity as a way to seek out new sexual encounters. This leads the discussion to the next dynamic in couples' relationships: Sexuality.

### 3.2.7 Sexuality

The digital age is not only influencing sex in couples' relationship but also the sexuality of individuals. Louw (1983:124) describes sexuality as the ethical part of sex, the element of understanding sex as a responsibility. It includes but is not limited to the act of sex and serves as the manner in which one develops a self-understanding of one's role in the specific man-woman relationship. From this it can be concluded that any influence in one's sexuality will sometime in life impact on one's sexual engagements. Therefore the focus will not only be placed on the connection between couples' sexual relations and the digital age but also what influence the digital age has on the sexuality of individuals.

Before the focus turns to the influence of the digital age on sexuality it is important to understand "what is going on" (Osmer, 2008:4) in couples' relationships concerning sexuality. The starting point in defining this will be to look at statistics concerning marriage and co-habitation. In order to make this research more applicable to the South African culture the following statistics was taken from research done by Statistics South Africa in 2012, the results were released in December 2014 (Claire, 2014). Between the years 2011 and 2012 registered marriages decreased by 3.7% (Statistics South Africa, 2014:6). Furthermore registered marriages have been constantly decreasing since 2008, fewer and fewer people were getting married. Furthermore the divorce rate increased by 4.9% between 2011 and 2014 (Statistics South Africa, 2014:9). Experts direct the cause of this increase in divorce to "adultery, unrealistic expectations and lack of sexual intimacy" (Claire, 2014). Increasingly more South Africans are choosing to live together without getting married, more people are cohabitating (*City Press*, 3 Nov. 2012). More young adults are accepting non-marital sexual activities as normal (Hawley *et al.*, 2014:1 & 2). People are becoming sexually active at younger and younger ages which causes them to have multiple sexual partners (McIlhaney' & Bush, 2008:65).

It is clear that within the South African context and across the globe there have been dramatic changes in people's perspectives concerning sexuality. Sex is no longer an act reserved only for marriage and it does not even have to take place between two people in a serious relationship (Steiner-Adair & Barker, 2013:185). Together with this people are becoming much more sexually expressive, pornography is on the rise, child pornography is gaining ground and it is much easier to get access to sexually explicit content. Although technology has added to all of these things the question remains: what caused these changes concerning sexuality to occur

in society and what connection do technology and the existence of the digital age have to do with all of it? The next aim of this chapter will be to make use of Osmer's (2008:4) interpretive task in order to determine 'why these dynamics exist concerning sexuality.'

### 3.2.7.1  Sexuality in adolescence

Adolescence is the most important life phase concerning the development of an individual's sexuality this is especially true for the development of sexual organs and the stimulation of sexual hormones (Gouws *et al.*, 2000:11; Collins, 2007:235). In order to determine why people's perceptions concerning sex have changed in the digital age research has to be done on whether and how technology has influenced the sexual development of individuals. Therefore a large part of this discussion will be focused on the current influence of technology on adolescents, specifically pertaining to the sexual development within the phase of adolescents.

The Keiser Research Report published in January 2010 showed that the amount of time that 8–18 year olds spend watching TV has increased a lot. Their research showed that in 1999 this age group spend an average of 3 hours 47 minutes per day watching TV, in 2004 it increased to 3 hours 51 minutes and in 2009 it escalated to 4 hours 29 minutes per day (Rideout *et al.*, 2010:2). Although this research not only refers to teenagers but includes information on "tweens" research shows that adolescence is no longer limited to an age group. As a matter of fact, children are starting to develop sexually at a younger and younger age (Steiner-Adair & Barker, 2013:183). Therefore this research done by the Keiser family foundation will substantially contribute to this discussion.

"A sexual scene occurs on TV 6.7 times per hour" (Hiramine, 2012:1). These scenes include commercials along with all the other programmes being watched. If this statistic is multiplied with the amount of time that these children spend in front of the TV it reveals a shocking amount of ± 29 sexual scenes that adolescents are daily exposed to! Coyne *et al.* (2012:389) confirm that the more television adolescents watch the more they will express sexual desires in dating relationships. Television is definitely not the only form of media through which adolescents get exposed to sex. Previously focusing on a connectivity culture it became evident that parents are encouraging their children to be always connected (2.2) and therefore this young generation lives with their cell phones with them, always (Hertlein, 2012:377). What adolescents do on their phones is not always obvious to those around them, but these devices can definitely serve as a manner through which "inappropriate sexual images" can be shared (Boyd, 2014:64). Baym (2010:43) defines sexting as the ability that young people have to share naked photos of themselves, via their mobile devices. Hertlein and Blumer (2014:59) confirms that sexting is more prominent amongst youth than adults. The fact that Smartphones offer many other features through which sexual content can be shared, such as the sending of sexually explicit

videos, accessing the internet, etc. encourages adolescents to increasingly participate in sexting (Matte). What is more is that smartphones are gaining ground as more people now own smartphones than PC's (Heggestuen, 2013). This phenomenon is clearly not going to disappear in the near future but might serve as a challenge for future generations as well.

Except for the prominence of television and the existence of sexting adolescents have another medium that communicates sexual information to them that did not exist years ago: the internet. This might be one of the biggest catalysts for change in the formation of adolescents' sexuality. And cell phone use no longer only refers to phone calls or text messaging, they can also serve as a manner through which adolescents can gain access to the internet. The first thing that comes to mind when discussing the internet and sex is pornography, which will receive a lot more attention later on as this has a great influence upon relationality in a digital age. The following statistics are, however, worth mentioning concerning adolescence: 6 out of 10 girls are exposed to pornography before the age of 18 and 9 out of 10 boys are exposed to pornography before the age of 18 (Fradd, 2015). The largest age demographic to watch pornography online is between 12 and 17 years old (Huddleston, 2013).

It seems that today adolescents are living in a sexually saturated world (Steiner-Adair & Barker, 2013:183) none of them are left out of the discussion concerning pornography and all of them are exposed to sex at an early age. Steiner-Adair and Barker (2013:183-187) declare that today many families are uncomfortable about having positive conversations about sexuality, because of this the internet has become a "primary source of sex education" and many parents are not fulfilling this educational role anymore. McIlhaney' and Bush (2008:53) agree that the adolescent brain can be positively moulded by the guidance of parents. It can be concluded that in spite of the influence of this sexually saturated culture, parents can still positively change their children's minds concerning sex (McIlhaney' & Bush, 2008:19). It seems logical that this can be two of the reasons why such a drastic change has come about in society concerning sexuality: it might be that teenagers are overwhelmed with information and stimulation concerning sexual content and they don't receive healthy and consistent education concerning this.

Steiner-Adair and Barker (2013:185-186) say on top of all of these devices that are sexually overstimulating, corporate companies have also joined the process. Companies are deliberately using sex as a means though which they promote and sell their products and children are not left out of their target group (Steiner-Adair & Barker, 2013:42). Apart from the development of sexual organs and the stimulation of sexual hormones adolescence highlights a time in life where extreme brain development takes place. There are two periods in an individual's life during which the greatest number of connections develop between brain cells: 2 weeks before birth and just before puberty. Furthermore it is important to know that so many of these cells get produced that those that get "exercised" will continue to exist while the others are meant to

cease existing (McIlhaney' & Bush, 2008:53; Hart & Frejd, 2013:59). Taking into account everything that was just mentioned one cannot deny the influence that the digital age has in increasing sexual activity amongst teens, and stimulating more sexual activity when these teens are adults.

Everything mentioned this far will have an intense effect on the adolescent's brain due to the fact that it is in a crucial phase of development. It is, however, true that the things discussed do not only influence the adolescents' brain but also those of adults, and it might just not be as intense. Before more attention will be given to the neuro-scientific perspective of these findings, focus will turn to sexuality amongst newlyweds. The next discussion will focus on how technology is influencing the brain and sex and the effect it has on adult couple relationships.

### 3.2.7.2  Sexuality in the marriages of newlyweds

The purpose of this dissertation limits the focus of sexuality in marriage to that of newlyweds. In many cases unsatisfied sexual desires are perceived as a cause for divorce (Yabiku & Gager, 2009:983-984). Specifically in the case of newly-married couples, sex is seen as one of the causes of marital stress (Collins, 2007:532). Therefore it is important to briefly touch on the subject of sexuality in marriage especially concerning the influence of the digital age in this area of couples' relationships. Information gathered in 3.2.6.1 showed that the digital age is encouraging sexual encounters from early ages which can increase the existence of multiple sexual partners. The brain's reaction to this causes a greater desire for sexual encounters and makes it difficult for people to stay committed to one sexual partner. It is obvious that this will contribute to sex being a cause of marital stress, specifically in the beginning phases of the marriage. Except for this the digital age offers something new to marriages: online infidelity. Although adultery is not something new there now exist new ways in which this can take place and it seems easier to participate while keeping it a secret from one's spouse (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:58 & 64; Murray & Campbell, 2015:111). Online infidelity is increasingly causing marital problems and it is becoming crucial for counsellors to be able to offer support in terms of this (Murray & Campbell, 2015:118). The question to be answered is: why is internet infidelity on the rise and increasingly creating tension in young marriages?

-  Cybersex

The reality of online infidelity can be attributed to the existence of many factors of which a prominent one is cybersex. As early as the year 2000 there already existed research that confirmed that cybersex addiction is one of the main causes for separation and divorce, and since then it has been confirmed by numerous authors as being true (Schneider, 2000:31; Hertlein & Webster, 2008:448; Whitty, 2008:1843; Hertlein, 2012:377). It seems difficult to pin

down one main definition of cybersex as there are many different opinions in literature concerning this (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:58). The most suitable definition for this study is "a sexual communication between at least two people that is focused on sexual relations and occurs via synchronous internet modes" (Shaughnessy *et al.*, 2011:86). Hart and Frejd (2013:117) elaborate by stating that these encounters are usually with a total stranger.

Although cybersex is a term applicable to all couples' relationships and individuals living in the digital age marriage seems to be the most appropriate place in which the effects of cybersex can be attributed to relational infidelity. There exist polarities in literature concerning whether cybersex is perceived as infidelity or not, as a matter of fact infidelity in the digital age in general is perceived as difficult to define (Gauthier, 2012:31; Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:64; Murray & Campbell, 2015:122). It seems as if people are confused concerning what actions are recognised as adulterous and which are not, this is particularly true for online sexual activities (Whitty, 2003:569; Whitty, 2005:57; Hertlein & Webster, 2008:448-449). Nevertheless, online infidelity is becoming a more popular subject in therapists and counsellors' offices (Hertlein & Webster, 2008:446). There is also research that confirms people still experience the same hurt whether unfaithfulness takes place online or offline (Hertlein & Webster, 2008:448; Cravens *et al.*, 2013:75 &77). Cybersex can have destructive effects on marriages. When done in secret the sexual arousal is paired with adrenaline which creates a desire for more of the same act. Irrespective of the guilt experienced because of infidelity the act gets motivated by a desire for more (Hart & Frejd, 2013:118). There will be elaborated on this in 3.3 where information from neuro-science will make it easier to understand this effect. Maybe the focus should not be on the act or the means in which the infidelity takes place but rather on the unfaithfulness that takes place. How is trust in marriages and romantic relationships influenced in the digital age?

- <u>Transparency</u>

Hart and Frejd (2013:117) connect cybersex with cyber affairs in which they state that cybersex can lead to offline sexual engagements, otherwise known as cyber affairs. Statistics show that 65% of people looking for sex online do have sexual intercourse with their internet partner (Hertlein & Webster, 2008:446). Sexual infidelity is known to be the strongest predictor of divorce whether online or offline, both cause the same amount of emotional pain (Hertlein & Webster, 2008:448; Cravens *et al.*, 2013:75 & 77). There seems to exist evidence that it is much more difficult for newlyweds, and other couple relationships, to maintain a trust relationship in the digital age, due to technology allowing easy connection with people outside of the primary relationship (Murray & Campbell, 2015:135). As mentioned earlier there exist many more opportunities and avenues in the digital age through which one can be unfaithful to one's partner. There even exist webpages on the internet, specifically set up for those who want to enter into an affair (Whitty, 2008:1843)!

In 3.2.3.1 it was briefly mentioned that online gaming identities can create issues concerning trust in couples' relationships. The story recorded about Turkle's (2011:159-160) interview with someone involved in Second Life highlighted that online gaming creates opportunities for "virtual lovers" and a "simultaneity of lives". Coyne *et al.* (2012:390) confirm that flirting does take place and that emotionally intimate bonds can be formed through online gaming. Without the other partner knowing about it, one may live a completely different life online. Wolfendale (2007:111) is very confident that Avatar attachment carries the same moral significance as real-life attachments. Although he makes this statement concerning the attachment between creator (human) and its own creation (avatar), he explains that abuse between avatars greatly impacts their creators (Wolfendale, 2007:113). Based on this declaration one can also say that sexual encounters between avatars will affect their creators. Whatever the definition of an affair and regardless whether it takes place online or offline, it does have an effect upon the individual who plays the game. There does exist an emotional attachment between avatars and their creators and it is inevitable that sexual arousal will occur in the player when his/her avatar engages with another avatar sexually. Huddleston (2013) states that it takes only one third of the tenth of a second for the brain to permanently store an image that was seen with a person's eye. Similarly to pornography sexual images seen in online gaming can stimulate sexual desire in the mind of the gamer.

People can now enter into, and benefit from, virtual relationships without having to take the risks of real-life relationships (Turkle, 2011:218), one of these risks might be to trust one's partner completely. Online gaming is, however, not the only element that creates trust challenges for couples. Hertlein and Ancheta (2014:1) state that impaired trust is a challenge that technology in general introduces to relationships.  Except for cybersex that was just discussed there exists another threat to the trust between romantic partners: the use of social media.

Social networking sites are easily accessible and can negatively affect levels of trust in couples' relationships (Gray, 2013:40). Facebook is one of the top used social networking sites in the world (Tucker, 2014:i; LeFebvre *et al.*, 2015:79) and received much attention in recent literature concerning its effect on romantic relationships (Freeman, 2011; Cravens *et al.*, 2013; Dungey, 2013; Hart & Frejd, 2013:103-108; Wolfe, 2013; Johnson, 2014; Zhong, 2014; LeFebvre *et al.*, 2015).  An American Broadcasting Company stated that in 2011 33% of divorce filings included the word 'Facebook' (Lupkins, 2012) and Hart and Frejd (2013:103) declare that one in every five divorces includes a Facebook affair. The fact that Facebook is easily accessible from any place, does not attract as much suspicion as pornography websites, can easily be kept private and serves as an escape route away from boredom makes it the ideal environment in which online infidelity can take place (Cravens *et al.*, 2013:77).

Louw (2012:89) states that "marriage becomes sick and destructive" without trust and faithfulness. Everything mentioned thus far highlights the fact that it is difficult to maintain faithful and trustworthy couple relationships in the digital age. Although many of the challenges that newlyweds and couples' face are not new the digital age presents these challenges in such a way that it seems more difficult to overcome and couples may even be unaware of the destructive effects of these challenges.

### 3.2.8 Pornography

One thing that pornography has in common with everything mentioned concerning sexuality in the digital age is the fact that technology makes it much easier to access (Collins, 2007:237; Bennett, 2013). As recently as 30 years ago pornography was not as easily accessible as it is today due to the absence of the internet. People actually had to go to adult shops to buy magazines with pornography in it before they could view it, just to name one example. Today people are walking around everywhere with access to pornography in their pockets, just a click away, available on any electronic device (Hart & Frejd, 2013:111). Let's take a look at some of the statistics concerning internet pornography:

- 12% of all websites are pornographic websites. The number of Worldwide visitors to pornographic websites is 72 million monthly (Hiramine, 2012:23,24).

- There are 4.2 million pornographic websites available. The average age of first exposure to pornography is five years. 90% of 8 – 16 year olds have been exposed to pornography on the internet (Chetty, 2014:8).

- 80% of first-time encounters with porn happen at home. 66% of all men watch porn at least once a month, 40% of women watch sexual content weekly. Mobile phones are the most common way through which online pornography is viewed (Huddleston, 2013; Huddleston, 2015a:5 & 31).

- More than eleven million teenagers view pornography on a regular basis (Vitagliano, 2007).

- In 2006 South Africa was the number 1 country in the world with the most keyword searches for the word "porn" on google.com (Chetty, 2014:9).

These statistics confirm firstly that pornography is prominent in the digital age and big numbers of people are viewing it on a regular basis. Secondly, there is a whole generation of children and young people who are exposed to porn at a very young age. Thirdly, it is confirmed that pornography is no longer only an issue for men but women are equally engaged in pornography. The digital culture shows signs of sexual over-stimulation and pornography

addiction.   One cannot deny that the above-mentioned statistics will have an influence on the sexual development of young people and on couples' relationships. In 3.3 it will become evident what effect pornography has on the brain, this will sketch an effective picture concerning what unique challenges pornography offer to couples' relationships in the digital age and why these challenges exist.

## 3.3   A neuroscientific perspective on couple's relationships in the digital age

Although 3.2.6.1 and 3.2.6.2 briefly touched on the subject about the brain and sexuality, neuro-scientific research has a lot more to offer concerning this topic. The information available in this study field concerning the effect of sex and pornography on the brain will be relevant in supporting the purpose of this chapter: determining what is going on in couples' relationships in the digital age and why.

Various authors say that the greatest sex organ is the brain (Hart, 2007:33 & 116; McIlhaney' & Bush, 2008:26). It is therefore essential to study what influence the digital age has on an individual's brain, this does not only pertain to adolescence but also to adulthood as one's brain is always elastic and changing (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:29; Carr, 2012:34; Hart & Frejd, 2013:59). Sex can no longer be viewed as a mere physical experience, there is more to it. It is now possible through neuroscience to see how sex is affecting the brain (McIhaney & Bush, 2008:21). By looking at both of these influences on the brain it will be possible to conclude how the digital age is influencing sexuality which in turn shows how the digital age is impacting on couples' relationships.

It was quickly mentioned that the brain of an adolescent is still evolving and therefore the amount of sexual exposure one receives during this time can have damaging and long-term effects, especially pertaining to sexual development (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:53). The problem with adolescents is however that they cannot always comprehend the long term effects of their choices as this part of their brain, the prefrontal cortex, is still evolving until a person reaches his/her mid-twenties, this is once again why adult guidance is so vital (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:55). It can be said that adolescents who are sexually active cannot always comprehend the consequences of these choices. When it comes to the brain it seems as if these actions have lasting implications. "…the earlier an individual initiates sexual intercourse, the more likely it is that they will have multiple sexual partners" (McIlhaney' & Bush, 2008:76). Everyone knows the risks involved in having multiple sexual partners: the spread of STD's and unplanned pregnancies etc. But it seems as if there are other consequences involved in the brain patterns that are generated.

The prefrontal cortex does not only fulfil an important role in the life of adolescents but is also a vital part of the fully matured adult brain, especially pertaining to sexuality. Before elaborating on that it needs to be quickly mentioned that not much emphasis was placed on the effect of technology on the human brain. There exist research to prove that technology is negatively impacting the following systems in the human brain: the pleasure system, tranquillity system, memory system, learning system, attachment system and spiritual system (Hart & Frejd, 2013:62-71). Theology will benefit from future research done on these subjects. For the current discussion it is however necessary to limit the focus to only that pertaining to the influence of technology on the human brain in regards to sexuality as this will have a defining effect on couples' relationships.

Hart (2007:115-116) states that the whole brain is actively involved during sexual intercourse. McIlhaney' and Bush (2008:27-28) explain these different areas of the brain by discussing the role of neurons, support cells and synapses. Important for this discussion is however the neurochemical production which is released during sexual intercourse (McIlhaney' & Bush, 2008:31). Focused attention is directed to three major neurochemicals: Oxytocin, Vasopressin and Dopamine. McIlhaney' and Bush (2008:31-45) explain the importance of these neurochemicals as follows:

Oxytocin (more prominent in females) and Vasopressin (more dominant in males) have more or less the same function. Both of these neuro-hormones create healthy attachment with the opposite sex (Yabiku & Gager, 2009:984). In the case of women Oxytocin not only creates an attachment to the male sexual partner but it also helps them to create a safe and loving environment for their children. Vasopressin does the same in bonding the man to the woman and to their children. Both of these hormones are therefore important in maintaining healthy family structures. Because of this it makes sense that sexual encounters are meant to take place within committed relationships, even more so within a marriage where there is a guarantee that this 'attachment' won't disappear overnight. If this is not the case it can have unhealthy consequences. McIlhaney and Bush (2008:77) clarifies how this explains why relational breakups where the partners were sexually involved causes greater damage than the mere ending of a relationship. The neurochemical imprints of the sexual relationship remain in the brain long after the relationship ended, which creates a painful experience in the separation process. Hawley *et al.* (2014:2) agree in saying that the end of a sexual relationship causes increased emotional stress above that which is experienced in non-sexual relationships. Various authors agree that this might be a cause for depression and suicide among adolescents as they have less emotional capacity to deal with this than adults (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:78; Hawley *et al.*, 2014:2). Furthermore McIlhaney and Bush (2008:77-78) state that if this process of bonding and separation occurs repeatedly it can damage the human ability to bond with another

person at this intimate level. This might serve as one of the reasons for the increase in divorce rate. If people have multiple sex partners and couples engage in sexual activity outside of marriage it might be more difficult for such individuals to truly commit once they do enter into marriage.

Except for these two neuro-chemicals there also exists dopamine that is produced during sexual intercourse. This neuro-hormone recently received much attention in literature (Hart, 2007:16; McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:31; Carr, 2012:35; Hart & Frejd, 2013:63; K. Madden *et al.*, 2014; Sinclair *et al.*, 2014:1851; Huddleston, 2015a:20). Dopamine is known as the "reward signal" in the brain, it makes a person feel good when he/she did something exciting. It also creates a desire to repeat that same action in order to experience the release of dopamine once again (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:31 & 32). This explains that once an individual had a sexual encounter he/she will experience a need to participate in that same action again. Engaging in sex creates a desire for more sex. Therefore the younger a person is when engaging in sex for the first time, the greater amount of sexual partners he/she will have (McIlhaney' & Bush, 2008:35,62,65). Dopamine release does not take place from a certain age onwards, even little children experience this release (Steiner-Adair & Barker, 2013:151). Carr (2012:35) explains how a build-up of dopamine in the brain causes addiction (this is also the same way in which a human brain becomes addicted to drugs). Outside marriage individuals get addicted to the act of sex, or whatever the act is that provides a release of dopamine, within marriage partners get addicted to each other (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:35). For this to be true it is assumed that there exists only one sexual partner within a marriage. This serves as another obvious reason why sexual promiscuity is prominent in the digital age, as people no longer have only one sexual partner therefore there exists a struggle with commitment and with staying faithful to marriage vows.

There exists even more interesting research concerning the release of dopamine and the digital age.  Although sex is the strongest generator of dopamine (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:35) a certain amount of dopamine also gets released when one is engaging with technology, this is especially true concerning social media (Franceschi-Bicchierai, 2012). Some authors believe that an overflow of technological use can cause addiction as was just described concerning drug addiction (Huddleston, 2015a:9). Contradicting them it is being denied that there exists something like technology addiction. This is confirmed by the fact that it is not recognised in the Manual of Mental Disorders in America (Huddleston, 2015a:9). It does seem as if other countries across the globe are recognising this as a problem (Kim *et al.*, 2006). In South Korea, Taiwan and China there even exist treatment centres where they deal with people suffering from technology addiction. These countries consider Internet addiction as a public health crisis (Huddleston, 2015a:9). The purpose of this study does not allow further discussions concerning

this. It is, however, important to mention that technological addiction might occur due to too much dopamine being produced by the brain (Carr, 2012:35).

All three these neurochemicals are "values-neutral". Regardless of whether the behaviour is beneficial or harmful to the person, all three of these neurochemicals will be produced (McIlhaney & Bush, 2008:45). This can explain why someone involved in adultery will continue with that relationship regardless of whether it will have other positive or negative effects. This raises another question: does pornography have this same effect on the human brain, and may this serve as a reason for why pornography is growing in popularity within the digital age?

Everything mentioned earlier concerning the release of the neuro-chemical dopamine during sexual intercourse is also true in viewing pornography. Pornography also causes dopamine to be released in the brain, causing one to crave that same activity again (Huddleston, 2015a:38 & 39). More than this - neurological research compares the reaction of the brain towards pornography to that of the use of both heroin and cocaine (Bennett, 2013). Pornography is highly addictive! The difference between these drugs and pornography is that one does not necessarily need greater quantities of pornography to cease the craving, instead "more *novel* pornographic content like more taboo sexual acts, child pornography, or sadomasochistic pornography" is needed in order to achieve the same rewarding feeling (Bennett, 2013). At the National Youth Research Conference hosted by UNISA Iyavar Chetty acknowledged that the market for child pornography was exponentially growing in South Africa (Chetty, 2014). This confirms that many individuals are already addicted to pornography and have moved to a place where "more novel pornographic content" is being used in order to have a satisfying experience. It cannot be denied that in South Africa pornography is increasingly becoming a greater concern.

Hart (2007:115-132) elaborates on this extreme form of pornography use by describing something called "Sexual Anhedonia." Anhedonia is the overstimulation of the pleasure centre in the brain due to dopamine flooding which reduces a person's ability to experience pleasure. Once this happens in one's brain, only extremely exciting things can deliver pleasure to the human brain. Although severe anhedonia was only present in people suffering from severe depression, Hart says it is becoming increasingly evident in ordinary people (Hart, 2007:17-18). Therefore it makes sense that porn addicts will need more and more extreme forms of pornography in order to be stimulated. One can then also suffer from sexual anhedonia due to the persistent use of pornography, thus losing the ability to truly enjoy sexual intercourse (Hart, 2007:116). Grov *et al.* (2011:430) confirm that the compulsive use of online sexual activity creates a decreased desire for real-life sexual activity. This will have a great influence on romantic relationships and an even greater effect on marriages especially pertaining to infidelity

and sexual desire. So how are couples then dealing with this reality in their romantic relationships?

Many couples believe watching pornography together will enhance their sexual intimacy as it enhances sexual fantasy and exploration, it also can enhance communication concerning sexual desires (Grov *et al.*, 2011:429; Hertlein, 2012:380-381; Murray & Campbell, 2015:119). With everything just mentioned concerning dopamine release and pornography addiction, this seems difficult to believe. Amongst others Skinner (2012) confirms that watching porn together does not enhance a couple's sexual intimacy but it actually reduces the frequency of sexual intimacy and negatively influences the individuals and the relationship. Although Grov *et al.* (2011:429) agree with this argument they state that it is only true for compulsive pornography users. Grov *et al.* (2011:429-439) did research with 8 376 American participants in order to determine the effect of non-compulsive use of online sexual activities (OSA) on a couple's relationship. It was based on the fact that compulsive use of OSA does have a negative effect on couples' relationships but it was still unclear what the effect would be of non-compulsive or light users. This research found that moderate OSA users experienced positive effects of pornography in their sexual intimacy with their partners, it increased the frequency of sex in the relationship as well the level of satisfaction (Grov *et al.*, 2011:436). Combining the results with information available about the brain and the release of dopamine, chances are good that these non-compulsive users will become compulsive users due to the addictive effect of pornography. Huddleston (2013) confirms this in saying that when men introduce their partners to online pornography the women eventually also gets addicted to it and they struggle to experience sexual satisfaction without pornography.

Grov *et al.* (2011:436) state that women who enjoy "amateur pornography" experience an increase in self-esteem. The fact is that a woman's brain will reach a place where this "amateur pornography" will not release the rewarding signal (dopamine) anymore and increasingly novel pornography will be needed in order to accomplish the same "feel-good" experience (Bennett, 2013; Huddleston, 2015a:39). Contradicting what Grov *et al.* (2011:436) found they themselves state that in the case of only one partner being involved in OSA the other experienced high levels of distress. Furthermore some women said that their partners wanted them to perform inappropriate sexual acts due to the content viewed online which complicated the relationship even more. "After engaging with OSA, some men appear to become focused on actualizing their virtual fantasies with diminished regard for their female partners' real sexual and emotional needs" (Grov *et al.*, 2011:436). Huddleston (2015a:35-36) confirms this by saying that many of the pornographic content viewed takes place regardless of the comfort or approval of the female participants and that many of these women constantly need to be on drugs in order to endure

the physical pain. He also believes that an increase in rape exists because of what is being portrayed in the pornography industry.

The fact that so many children and young people are being exposed to pornography might raise a generation that does not realize the destructive effects of this on couple relationships. Howard and Davis (2013:114) raise concerns for adolescent boys who might one day expect their sexual partners to "be as willing and as undiscriminating" as the composite porn star. Together with this, young people are afraid to commit and become vulnerable in a romantic relationship, it is much easier to enter into a "series of casual relationships based on sex" (Howard & Davis, 2013:114-115). The current generation of 18 – 23 year old women is the first to believe that pornography is not "something bad that their boyfriends do behind their backs" (Huddleston, 2013). It is clear that technology offers more extreme challenges concerning couples' sexuality in a digital age. The long-term effects of this is bound to surface in the near future as the current generation of children living in a sex saturated culture will soon enter into couples' relationships and marriages. What the outcome of this will be is still uncertain, but it seems as if healthy monogamous relationships will be much more challenging to maintain. The divorce rate might still increase unless people are supported to understand the neurological effects of technology on human functioning in general and more specifically on ways of relating to others.

## 3.4    Conclusion

The interdisciplinary perspective presented in this chapter confirmed the fact that couples' relationships are greatly influenced by the digital age (Lasén & Casado, 2012:552). Elements such as shallowness, communication, conflict resolution and identity do not only play a part in human relationships in general but it also shapes the manner in which couples' relationships function in the digital age. Partners will have to deliberately decide to give each other undivided attention while taking the risk of being vulnerable in each other's presence otherwise their relationship runs the risk of becoming shallow. Together with this they cannot build and maintain their relationship by mainly communicating through digital devices. Although this serves as a manner in which more frequent connection can take place (Coyne *et al.*, 2011:159; Perry & Werner-Wilson, 2011:129) it should not be the medium through which conflict is dealt with as it will increase the existence of distance and misunderstandings (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:32). Conflict resolution through digital devices might, however, remove extreme emotions from the conversation (Hertlein & Ancheta, 2014:5) which might be preferred depending on individuals' different conflicting styles. Nevertheless it is important for couples to protect their ability to experience empathy and compassion otherwise conflicting situations may become violent, and once again digital devices serve as a barrier and a threat to these emotions. Individuals face the temptation of becoming narcissistic in a digital age and couples need to be accountable concerning their humility if they want their relationships to flourish without abusing each other

during conflicting situations (Collins, 2007:316 & 319). Simultaneously couples need to manage boundaries concerning online gaming in order to avoid online and offline affairs. This comes down to the fact that each partner is accountable for his/her own behaviour related to technology use (Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:54).

Concerning dynamics that brings change to romantic relationships it was discovered that online dating is increasing in status but only a minority of marriages and serious relationships develop in this manner (Sprecher, 2009:766). Online sexual engagements are, however, very popular and are also encouraging non-marital sexual activities. Due to the prominence of technology children and adolescents are growing up in a sex saturated culture bombarded by "the adult world of sexuality" (Steiner-Adair & Barker, 2013:183) where parents can easily be absent as educators of noble sexuality. This is probably one of the main reasons why many people can't stay committed to marital relationships and struggle with pornography addictions.

This study has benefited a lot from the interdisciplinary perspective offered by the study field of neuroscience which helps to understand why romantic relationship face unique challenges in the digital age. The influence of pornography on the brain can be compared to an addiction to both heroin and cocaine (Bennett, 2013). The most important result to remember is that dopamine release addicts married partners to each other, outside of marriage it just creates addiction to any act that creates the same rewarding feeling (McIlhaney' & Bush, 2008:35). It is easier than ever to participate in infidelity due to the existence of the internet and cybersex, social media and pornography serves as three of the major contributors to this. Sexual anhedonia is inevitable for those who compulsively participate in online sexual activities, and it was proven that any pornographic exposure can possibly grow into compulsive usage, having devastating effects on individuals and all couple relationships.

It became evident that setting and maintaining boundaries have become crucial for the survival of healthy couples' relationships in the digital age (Coyne *et al.*, 2012:395). The lack of boundaries concerning the use of digital devices creates tension in couples' communication (Baym, 2010:149; Hertlein & Blumer, 2014:33), it causes uncertainty concerning what is appropriate in online gaming and what is not and it gives opportunity for participation in cybersex (Hertlein, 2012:380). With the effective implementation of boundaries it will be possible for children to grow up less influenced by the sex culture that currently exists and it will be easier to enjoy monogamous relationships while preserving the future of marriages in a digital age.

This chapter aimed to facilitate a cross-disciplinary dialogue based on Osmer's transversal model (Osmer, 2008:170-172). By borrowing information from different science fields such as Communication Sciences, Psychology and Neuroscience, various elements were discovered

that create a better understanding of what is going on in couples' relationships in the digital age. Simultaneously these study fields added to a better understanding of why these dynamics exist. The next step in this research would be to gain a normative perspective on these discoveries in order to more effectively serve couples' in the digital age. The aim of the next chapter is to formulate this normative perspective on these discoveries from the field of Theology.

# CHAPTER 4: NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES FROM 1 PETER ON RELATIONALITY

## 4.1 Introduction

Thus far the focus of this dissertation has been to study the influence of the digital age on people's perceptions and attitudes towards relationships as well as the influence of this on the quality of couples' relationships.  Chapter 2 created a contextual understanding of relationships in the digital age where chapter 3 sketched a picture of romantic relationships within this context. The results of the study showed that although people are more connected in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there exists an increase in loneliness due to the fact that technological connections do not create the same level of intimacy as face to face interaction (2.2.3). Technology also gives individuals the opportunity to be more in control of their lives including their relationships and their emotions, which in turn encourages people to be less vulnerable and to share less spontaneous emotions with each other (2.5). If romantic partners are not aware of this their relationship depth can easily be compromised and replaced by multiple technological engagements (3.2.1). Together with this the identities of individuals are being shaped differently in the digital age which has a direct impact on couples' relationships with a more prominent existence of narcissism (2.4.3.1). This in its turn creates complications in couples' communication and might offer a more dangerous aspect to conflict management (3.2.3). Except for the fact that the digital age is encouraging a self-absorbed culture it is sex-saturated, raising a generation with confused perspectives concerning healthy sexuality (3.3.3.1). This might serve as one of the main causes for the decrease in the amount of long-term healthy marriages. Except for this the existence of online gaming, cybersex and the easy access to pornography makes marriages more vulnerable to infidelity (3.3.3.3).

These deductions highlight the challenges that the digital age poses to relationality. Due to the theological nature of this study and because of the initial research question the above-mentioned information cannot serve as the conclusion of this study. There still exists a need to present a normative perspective on these discoveries. The focus of chapter 4 as mentioned in 1.5 is to define what normative perspective can pastoral theology offer on relationality in the digital age. This is done in order to determine what ought to be going on in the way people present, position and manage themselves in relationships (Osmer, 2008:4). The normative perspective can be established by applying a theological interpretation, by reflecting on ethical norms and by learning from good practice (Osmer, 2008:130-132). It is important to keep in mind that the normative task needs to be performed with prophetic discernment. The prophetic attitude entails the careful listening to God while consistently bringing meaning into all other knowledge gained. "The prophetic office is the discernment of God's Word to the covenant

people in a particular time and place" (Osmer, 2008:133). Practical theological research finds its measuring rod in normative compliance with God`s standard as it is revealed in Scripture (Wolters, 2005:7). The method used in this chapter is revelation historical exegesis on 1 Peter according to Van Rensburg *et al.* (2015) from the perspectives gained norms will be formulated regarding relationality.

Scripture is seen as God's revelation to mankind. In this chapter the First Letter of Peter is investigated to find norms regarding the renewal of the mind and actions of people in the research on relationality of romantic couples. 1 Peter is characterised as one of the most pastoral books of the New Testament (NT) due to the prominent themes of innocent suffering and hope (Elliott, 2000:151; Schreiner, 2003:45-46) which makes it an ideal source for the normative perspectives of this study. All these tools are combined in order to determine a normative perspective after which conclusions can be made concerning what ought to be going on in couples' relationships in the digital age (Osmer, 2008:4). The next step would then be to determine the implications for pastoral counselling, which will be the focus of chapter 5.

## 4.2 Overview of 1 Peter

One exponent of the Reformation of the 16th century, Martin Luther viewed 1 Peter as one of the prominent books of the New Testament (NT) and that it included almost everything that a Christian needed to know (Elliott, 2000:3; Jobes, 2005:1). It is estimated that this book was written near the end of Peter's life, somewhere between A.D. 60-68 (Davids, 1990:10; Schreiner, 2003:36). This time in Christian history is not signified by physical persecution although believers did experience discrimination and injustice (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2015:153). Being a Christian was not illegal but believers did experience mistreatment because of their faith (Schreiner, 2003:38). It is important to take note that the genre of 1 Peter is a letter, written in order to address specific problems (such as discrimination and injustice) that Peter's audience was facing (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2015:50). Various authors agree that Peter's audience consisted of Christian believers (Elliott, 2000:8; Schreiner, 2003:37; Jobes, 2005:19) who understood and accepted God's grace through Jesus Christ. Furthermore the audience is addressed as "strangers" and "resident aliens" which can have a double meaning. Firstly it might confirm that they did not have local citizenship in the Roman provinces that they inhabited in the area of Asia Minor (Elliott, 2000:84 & 94). Secondly it can have a spiritual meaning, referring to believers as God's people whose home is not earth but heaven (Schreiner, 2003:41) and who are no longer participants in the practices of the Greco-Roman society (Jobes, 2005:6).

When studying the outline of the book of 1 Peter the following extract is taken from Van Rensburg *et al.* (2015:40):

**"LETTER HEADING**

1 Pet 1:1 -2 = Author, addressees and greeting

**LETTER OPENING**

1:3-12 = Praise be to God, who gave us new birth in Christ

**Four exhortations with as basis the rebirth affected by God**

Exhortation 1 – 1:13-25 Set your hope fully on the grace and therefore be holy

Exhortation 2 – 2:1-10 The obligation of a reborn person regarding personal growth and growth with fellow believers

Exhortation 3 – 2:11 – 4:19: Code of conduct for aliens and strangers:

2:11-12        The basic exhortation for all relationships

2:13-17        Relationships with political authorities

2:18-25        Relationships with employers

3:1-7          Relationship with marriage partner

3:8-12         Relationship with neighbours in general

3:13-4:19      Attitude towards and reaction to discrimination

Exhortation 4 – 5:1-11 Code of conduct within the church

**CONCLUSION**

1 Pet. 5:12-14 = Purpose, salutations and letter closing"

**Figure 4-1:        Structural outline of 1 Peter (Van Rensburg et al., 2015:40)**

This presentation of the structure of 1 Peter makes it easier to understand in which pericope the verses chosen for this study occur. Throughout the rest of this chapter figure 4.1 will be referenced in order to explain the structure of the scripture currently being discussed.

1 Peter 1:3 serves as the big indicative of the whole book: "Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (Bible, 1998:1356). This salvation message provides the foundation for the rest of the letter (Elliott, 2000:329). What is written in 1 Peter therefore acts as instructions for believers, instructions based on God's grace and not on the ability of the people (Schreiner, 2003:46). Based on this Peter gives instructions of how the believers should follow Christ's example and how they should act in relation to other people.

While bearing in mind these characteristics of the book of 1 Peter certain verses in this book will receive more extended attention as it supports the focus of this study effectively. Examples of these focussed verses can be connected to certain themes such as holiness (chapter 1:13 – 16); identity (chapter 2: 9); marriage relationships (3:1-7) and having an attitude of love provided in 1 Peter 3:8.

## 4.3 Normative perspectives found in 1 Peter

The main reason for choosing 1 Peter as the source to offer normative perspectives for this study is that God is portrayed in this letter as a relational God. The understanding of God as relational serves as the bases from which the normative perspectives of this study will be determined.

After the opening of this letter (1:1 – 1:12) Peter turns his focus to the believer's new status in a Father-child relationship (Jobes, 2005:108). Based on what Christ did on the cross there now exists the option of entering into a close personal relationship with God. Before the cross this was limited because of sin. Peter also makes use in this letter of relational language when speaking of God as a Father (1:17). This terminology indicates closeness and portrays God as a relational being (Green, 2007:34). When identifying normative perspectives on relationality, it is important to recognise God as the Creator of relationships and as a relational being Himself. Furthermore Peter uses familial language such as "children" (1:14), "brotherly love" (1:22), "new-born babies" (2:2) and "household" (2:5) which also speaks of relationships to which his audience can relate (Green, 2007:34). Based on this one can be assured that this book will provide important normative perspectives concerning Christian life and the fact that not only is God a relational being but He also created humankind to exist within relationships.

## 4.3.1 Holiness (1 Pet. 1:13 – 16)

After opening the letter and celebrating God's grace and the new birth given to man through Christ, Peter starts with the first exhortation – 1:13-25. Based on the redemptive work of Christ Peter exhorts the believers to reflect the character of their divine Father (Jobes, 2005:108). Among others one of the characteristics that Peter encourages his audience to practise is that of holiness. The pericope that will receive special focus concerning this discussion is 1 Peter

1:13 – 16. These three verses form part of the bigger pericope of 'exhortation 1' as mentioned in figure 4.1. The theme of this exhortation is to 'set your hope fully on the grace and thus be holy.'

When 1 Peter 1:13 starts with "therefore" it is based on the information given earlier in the book (1:1-12). As discussed in 4.1.1 the cross, grace, changed the relationship that believers now have with God. Believers now have an inheritance and are living in the fulfilled promises of God, *therefore* Peter can exhort his audience to live a holy life (Schreiner, 2003:76). All this is possible because of God's grace, as explained above.

A central theme for this section in 1 Pet. 1 also adds to the general thought pattern about hope but now focuses more on "behaviour, conduct, or way of life" (Green, 2007:35). The expression following *therefore (prepare your minds for action)* in verse 13 is linked to one's mind-set and how an individual chooses in his/her mind concerning actions and specifically concerning a decision to live holy. Schreiner (2003:76) says that believers will have to "reorient their thinking and live alertly and soberly". A more accurate translation would be to "gird up the loins of your minds" (Bible, 1982). Various authors agree that this refers to one preparing for action or hard work (Davids, 1990:66; Elliott, 2000:356; Schreiner, 2003:78). Davids (1990:66) explains the act effectively in saying that ordinary Israelites wore long flowing garments that reached to the knees or ankles, these garments had to be "tucked up into a belt at the waist to leave the legs free". This was only done when participating in work or war, in the case of rest the garments was not "girded up" or "tucked in". Beare (1970:96) explains it as adopting "a new attitude of mind and heart" which is focused on the grace of God. It can thus be said that Peter was implying if his audience did not work hard at adopting a new mind-set focussed on God's grace, whatever he was going to say next will be impossible to do.

Next Peter exhorts his audience to not conform (*syschematizo*) to previous evil desires but to be holy as He who called you is holy (1:14 – 16). Syschematizo can be translated "to let your life be controlled by"; "to allow yourself to be shaped by"; "to let your behaviour be ruled by" (Abernathy, 2007:36 & 37). The only NT occurrences are here in 1 Peter and in Romans 12:2 (Elliott, 2000:358). In Romans 12:2 Paul states that believers should go through a process of "re-programming" their minds in order to avoid being conformed (*syschematizo*) to the "pattern" or "mould" of this age (Moo, 1996:755-756). This can in its turn be linked to the previous discussion of 1 Peter 1:13 "gird up your loins". Peter is making use of opposites in saying, (protect your minds) to not conform to the culture around you but conform to the God who called you and be holy (Davids, 1990:67-68). "But" (*kata*) introduces a "norm that governs behaviour", the norm that is introduced is to be "holy" (*hagios). Hagios* is not commonly used in the NT although it occurs often in the Old Testament (OT) (Elliott, 2000:359-360). Like the OT authors (Is. 11:9 & Num. 15:40) Peter affirms the need for purity, the call to be holy, because one is in the presence of a holy God (Davids, 1990:68-69). It is evident that Peter is encouraging his

audience that their holiness should correspond to the holiness of the God that called them (Jobes, 2005:112), as quoted from Lev 19:2. Their lifestyles should testify to God's holy character.

In verse 22 the word "purified" can be linked to "holy" which is found in verse 15, (Davids, 1990:76), Elliott (2000:383) states that these two words 'pure' and 'holy' are synonyms. From verse 22 Peter goes further in explaining how his audience became purified and how they can stay holy. Except for the fact that they need to reorient their thinking and constantly focus on grace, they are also purified by obeying the truth (*aletheia*). Abernathy (2007:54) explains *aletheia* as "the gospel and God's Word; words of the prophets spoken by the Spirit of Christ and which leads to new birth". It is evident that the manner in which one can remain holy, and not conform to old ways of living, is by obeying both the Word and the Spirit of God. This is also the manner in which their minds will be transformed. This obedience to the Word and the Spirit will purify their hearts and enable them to love one another sincerely and fervently (Abernathy, 2007:54).

Chapter 2:11 can also be connected to this exhortation concerning holiness. Peter writes that his audience should "abstain from fleshly desires" – they should not conform to previous evil desires. Although 'fleshly' (*sarkikos*) refers to physical/bodily sin such as sexual immorality and idolatry, it is not limited to merely sexual sin but includes various sinful desires (Elliott, 2000:463) and can also speak of human self-centredness (Abernathy, 2007:84).

• Concerning sexuality

All these verses in 1 Peter (1:13-16; 2:11; 4:1-3) can be linked to the theme of holiness contrasting to the old way of life and sinfulness. In 4:3 it reaches a climax as Peter deliberately gives a list of some characteristics of the old Gentile way of living. Davids (1990:151) is of the opinion that this list has close parallels to Jewish sources, also used in Rom.13:13 and Gal. 5:19-21 which might indicate that Peter's audience was familiar with these terms. Interesting is the fact that three out of the six terms have sexual overtones (Davids, 1990:151). Peter is thus exhorting the believers to live with the mind-set that they are done with sin and that they will no longer conform to this former way of living, which was strongly characterised by a lifestyle of sexual immorality.

Two other scriptures strongly connect with this theme, the Holy Spirit as the One who inspired the writings of the Bible were communicating the same message across different scripture verses. These verses are 1 Cor. 7:1 – 16 and 1 Thess. 4:1-8. A brief overview of these two scriptures will be given as they serve as supporting scriptures to the main focus on 1 Peter 1:13-16.

1 Cor. 7: 1- 16 has a general theme: "Counsel for Corinthians in various marital statuses" (Hays, 1997:112). In verse 1 Paul is referring to a question he received from the Corinthians "Is it good for a man to touch a woman." "Touch a woman" can be translated as having sexual intercourse with a woman (Trail, 1995:274). The question can refer to either sexual intercourse in marriage or outside of marriage, it is difficult to understand in which context the question was asked (Thiselton, 2000:500). Then Paul's answer follows: 'yes, but because of sexual immorality (fornication; to fall into temptation; to fall back into sin) let each man have (sexually) his own wife and let each woman have (sexually) her own husband' (Trail, 1995:275). Paul is advising the Corinthians that the purpose of marriage and intimacy in marriage is to "provide an alternative to indiscriminate sexual relations" (Thiselton, 2000:501). It can be concluded that God never intended for people to have multiple sex partners and therefore He created marriage. This is confirmed due to the fact that "his own" and "her own" implies monogamy (Trail, 1995:275).

The second Scripture that serves as supportive to the theme of holiness in 1 Peter is 1 Tess 4:1-8. This pericope forms part of the macro-level structure of 1 Thess. 4:1- 5:22 (Malherbe, 2000:viii) of which the theme is labelled "ethical exhortations" (Martin, 1995:44). In this part of the letter Paul is addressing matters that Timothy brought to him concerning the church in Thessalonians (Fee, 2009:136). It can thus be said that when Paul gives instructions in 1 Thess. 4:3-8 concerning holiness in sexual behaviour and marriage it is based on challenges that the church in Thessalonica was facing. Due to its relevancy on this discussion specific focus will be placed on these verses: 3-8. Fee (2009:142) pairs verse 3-8 together under the heading "avoiding sexual immorality". The connection between 1 Peter and 1 Thessalonians exists in the fact that both of these authors are referring back to Lev. 19:2 'Be holy because God is holy' (1 Pet. 1:16 & 1 Thess. 4:3) (Fee, 2009:145). Furthermore the word "holiness" of which the same primitive (*hagios)* is also evident in both instances (1 Pet. 1:15 – 16 & 1 Thess. 4:7). Because God has called all believers (and specifically the Thessalonians) in holiness (*hagiasmo*) (Malherbe, 2000:234) they should abstain from sexual immorality (*porneia*). *Porneia* is interpreted as fornication, illegitimate sexual behaviour between unmarried persons, incest, immorality and even prostitution (Malherbe, 2000:225; Fee, 2009:145). Paul elaborates further (verse 4 & 5) on what is meant with sexual immorality by encouraging the Thessalonians to rather marry than to "fall prey to sexual immorality" (Malherbe, 2000:228).

From these three scripture references it can be deduced that God intended all sexual engagements to take place within the context of a marriage and even within this context sexuality still needs to testify to God's holiness.

#### 4.3.1.1 Normative perspectives from God's calling to holiness

- The call of God to be holy is grounded in the fact that people have experienced new birth and are in the presence of the Holy God. Therefore Christians' lifestyles should testify of God's holy character.
- Because of the call to be holy Christians must not conform to the culture around them.
- A holy lifestyle will enable them to love one another sincerely and fervently.
- Because God has called Christians to be holy they should abstain from sexual immorality.

#### 4.3.2 Identity in Christ (1 Pet. 2:1 - 10)

Chapter 2:1-10 is paired together under exhortation 2 and is titled: 'The obligation of a reborn person regarding personal growth and growth of fellow believers' (Figure 4.1). Davids (1990:79) does, however, assign a different title for this pericope: "Christian Identity". Various authors link this pericope to the corporate identity of believers (Davids, 1990:91; Elliott, 2000:437; Schreiner, 2003:106; Jobes, 2005:142; Green, 2007:55).

In 2:1-3 Peter once again emphasises that rebirth caused believers to leave behind an old way of living (Davids, 1990:79), now they should desire the milk of God's Word in order to grow into the fullness of their salvation (Abernathy, 2007:65-66). Verses 4–10 further describes what the new identity of his audience consists of based on this rebirth (based on who Christ is and what He did in order for them to experience rebirth) (Jobes, 2005:142). The concept of Christology plays an important part in this section of verses 4–10 (Green, 2007:55) as Peter makes use of an analogy where Christ is the cornerstone of a building and likewise the believers are also stones being built into a spiritual house (*oikos pneumatikos*). After experiencing rebirth one forms part of a 'spiritual house', a community of believers. It is as if an individual gets birthed into a new family. *Oikos pneumatikos* can also imply household or family (Abernathy, 2007:71). The fact that a great deal of an individual's identity is based on his/her background, family and upbringing can imply that through rebirth, all of this can change. Davids (1990:76-77) confirms this in writing about 1 Pet. 1:22. He says that through repentance (rebirth) an inward purification takes place, a transformation of behaviour which qualifies a person to become part of the fellowship of believers. There doesn't exist something like an "isolated believer". God's intention with the cross was that it would qualify all of humankind to enter into the fellowship of believers, never to experience loneliness again.

Furthermore and throughout the rest of this pericope Peter implies, as his audience identified with Christ (through "their response of faith to the gospel"), that they should also share in Christ's rejection by humans and His divine election (Elliott, 2000:407; Green, 2007:60).

Except for being 'living stones' believers are also characterised as being "a holy priesthood" (verse 5). Schreiner (2003:106) says although the emphasis is on the "corporate priesthood" it will definitely have implications for individuals as well. This word used for "priesthood" (*hierateuma*) also occurs in verse 9 (Abernathy, 2007:71 & 78). In verse 9 it serves as one of three descriptions of ancient Israel which can be traced back to Exod. 19:6 where God made a covenant with Israel that they will be His holy people (Elliott, 2000:435-436). Green (2007:61-63) explains that Peter looked to these past titles of Israel (which represents the past engagements of God with Israel) with the purpose of identifying how it might serve his audience in the present. It is in that story of the past and in the current story of Christ "that Christians will find their true identity…" (Green, 2007:63). Jobes (2005:109) confirms this in saying because Peter's readers are Christians they are a "new people with a new identity".

Based on the grace of God through Christ anyone can now be part of the "elected people" as it is no longer only applicable to the Israelites. Peter goes further in the rest of verse 9 by giving three elements of this new identity: a chosen generation (*genos eklekton*); a royal priesthood (*hierateuma*); a holy nation (ethnos hagion) (Elliott, 2000:435 & 437). A chosen people connects Peter's readers to Christ, a royal priesthood implies that they belong to the king (God) and a holy nation speaks of them being set apart for God (Davids, 1990: 91 - 92). This supports the rest of verse 9 and verse 10 which speak about Peter's audience belonging to God. They once were not a people (nobody) but now they are God's people (somebody), "believers have a sense of identity which they previously lacked" (Abernathy, 2007:81). It can be said that a believer's identity is determined by who he/she belongs to. Through Christ a person with no identity becomes the possession of God and receive a new identity as God's chosen people; royal priesthood and holy nation.

### 4.3.2.1  Normative perspectives from identity in Christ

- Rebirth entails that Christians are born into the family of God, where they received a new identity and experience of belonging.

- The new identity implies that Christians must reflect that they are a new generation, a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

### 4.3.3  Marriage relationships (1 Pet 3:1 - 7)

The third exhortation (2:11 – 4:19) found in 1 Peter is titled "Code of conduct for aliens and strangers", and it is still based on the new birth in Christ and it serves as the biggest pericope of the book (Figure 4.1). As mentioned in 4.2 "aliens and strangers" can have a double meaning. Peter's audience probably did not have local citizenship where they were currently staying and the fact that they were believers implies that they were not from this world but their true

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residence was heaven. Therefore Peter exhorts his audience to live accordingly and no longer participate in the sinful acts acceptable to their society. An outflow of the discussion in 4.3.1 concerning holiness, which is maintained by the Spirit and the Word of God, is that it will lead to sincere, fervent love amongst the brethren (1:22). This connects to the discussion in 4.3.2 about the spiritual house and that believers are born again into a new family where they can exist in relationships with others. Taking everything into account that Peter wrote until now, it seems as if it all was a build-up towards a climax: the instructions concerning relationships.

With regards to the third exhortation chapter 2:11 – 12 gives the "basic exhortation for conduct in various relationships" (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2015:222). In these two verses Peter exhorts his audience that they should behave well in all their relationships so that it can be a living testimony to non-believers (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2015:131). Further on in this pericope (2:13 – 3:12) Peter explains how his audience can maintain good relationships by discussing the different types of relationships separately:

2:13 – 17        Relationship to the government

2:18 – 25        Relationship with employers

3:1 – 7          Marriage relationships

3:8 – 12         Relationships with neighbours in general (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2015:131).

Due to the limitation of this study the focus will only be on the instructions given concerning marriage relationships (3:1-7) and relationships with neighbours in general (3:8-12). The focus now turns to the instructions concerning marriage relationships and under 4.3.4 attention will be given to general relational instructions towards one's neighbour.

Various authors agree that in 3:1-7 Peter is giving advice for couples in religiously mixed marriages (Davids, 1990:115-116; Goppelt, 1993:217; Elliott, 2000:558; Green, 2007:94). The fact that Peter writes specifically to married women is noteworthy as it was not customary during those times due to the expectation that women had to follow the religion of their husbands (Davids, 1990:115). Peter starts off this pericope with the same sentence used in his instructions concerning relationships to employees (2:18). Both slaves and wives had to submit and maybe even suffer for the sake of the gospel. Although this comparison does not imply that women's submission would be exactly the same as that of slaves, it should also be done "reverently for the Lord's sake" (Abernathy, 2007:110). Christ's suffering is used as a metaphor, just as He suffered so that humanity can receive salvation Peter's audience should endure suffering so that others may come to salvation.

This is then also the purpose in wives submission (*hypotassomenai*) in this context. That they should submit so that their husbands may come to Christ. Regardless whether the husband is a believer or not, whether he is harsh or kind, the wife submits to him because of her reverence for God (Jobes, 2005:203). *Hypotassomenai* can be interpreted as 'accepting the authority of' and "honouring someone' (Abernathy, 2007:88 & 97). Green (2007:91) firstly states that this submission is done in accordance with one's obedience to God and that it is "an expression of freedom, not of coercion". Secondly this form of submission does not imply one should accept the claims of humans above those of God. It is also important to take note that Paul encourages these women to submit to their own husbands and not to all men in general, this submission is therefore applicable within the marriage relationship (Abernathy, 2007:110).

Submission is, however, not the only manner in which husbands can be "won for the kingdom". Verse 2 says that when husbands see their wives' purity (*hagnen*) they may also be gained for God's kingdom. *Hagnen* is translated as pure or holy, although it is not limited to it also includes moral and sexual purity (Abernathy, 2007:112). Everything mentioned in 4.3.1 concerning sexual purity can also be applicable here. Elliott (2000:560) says that *hagnen* refers to a "quality typically desired for all women" and in 1 Peter it correlates with "holy" in 1:22, emphasising this general theme throughout the book. If Christian women would live in purity their husbands will notice it and it will serve as an encouragement for evangelism.

1 Peter 3:3 & 4 consists of a contrast between "inner and outer adornment" (Green, 2007:97) which explains how women can live purely, not focussing on outward adornments but on that which is precious in God's sight (Elliott, 2000:561). Davids (1990:117) says that the terms Peter use to describe women's outer adornments speaks about "dressing to attract the notice of men" and "competing with other women in the richness of their dress". Contrasting to this, wives should focus on their "inner adornment" or the "hidden person (*anthropos*) of the heart (*kardia*)" (Abernathy, 2007:114). *Anthropos* and *kardia* refer to the character, the inner person, mind, personality of a person (Abernathy, 2007:115). That which is precious to God is not what is on the outside (clothes or jewellery) but rather what is on the inside, a godly character. Schreiner (2003:154) links this verse to 1 Sam. 16:7 that said that God does not look at what man sees but He looks at the heart of the person. Then Peter gives characteristics of what this inner person should reflect: a gentle (*praus*) and quiet (*hesuchios*) spirit which serves as incorruptible qualities, contrasting to the corruptible outward adornments (Schreiner, 2003:154). *Praus* can also be understood as humble or meek and *hesuchios* is calm and peaceful (Abernathy, 2007:115).

In verses 5 and 6 Peter makes use of Old Testament examples such as Sarah, saying that believers should like these "saints" that lived before Christ put their faith and hope in God. Following these women's examples in marriage as they now form part of the "cloud of

witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) the women in Peter's audience will also share in the same inheritance (Goppelt, 1993:223). Jobes (2005:206) agrees with this in saying that Peter is replacing Greek models with the "first lady" (Sarah) of God's covenant. Due to being reborn these Christian women can now participate in Sarah's heritage which places on them the responsibility of protecting their homes against a climate of hostility.

It can be said that Peter instructs wives, if they want to live as pure examples of Christ, they should not seek to be the centre of attention but their attitude should rather reflect humility and peacefulness. Like Sarah they should place their hope in God and create a peaceful atmosphere in their homes.

Peter ends off this pericope concerning marriage relationships with a final instruction to husbands (verse 7). Schreiner (2003:159) says it might be that only one verse is dedicated to the husbands due to the general focus Peter places on those that experience oppression rather than on those that exercise authority. Peter says that the husbands should dwell (*synoikountes*) with their wives with understanding (*gnosis*). *Synoikountes* means '"living together with them" and can be translated as "in your marital relations" (Abernathy, 2007:119). Based on this and the fact that Peter is using a different word (*gunaikeios*) for woman than in the previous verses might imply that the instructions he gives here are not only applicable to their wives, but to all relationships that the husbands have with the women in their households or extended families (Elliott, 2000:575; Green, 2007:99). *Gnosis* implies that the husband should be considerate as to what is appropriate in marriage (and all other relations to women), having knowledge of God and "know" the wives needs and wishes (Abernathy, 2007:120).

This consideration is explained in the following words: by showing honour (*timen*) to your wives as the weaker vessel, who is also joint heirs of the grace of life. *Timen* speaks of respect (Abernathy, 2007:121). 'The weaker vessel' can refer to the lower social status of women in that day (Green, 2007:100). Contradictory to this perceived status Peter then acknowledges that before God man and woman have the same value as they both are heirs of the grace of life (Davids, 1990:123). It can be concluded that husbands are expected to treat their wives (and all women in their households) with respect because of their new identity as co-heirs of Christ. The importance of this issue is confirmed in that the husbands' prayers will be hindered if they refuse to honour their wives in this manner (Schreiner, 2003:159).

#### 4.3.3.1  Normative perspectives from marriage relationships

- Based on obedience to God wives should accept and be submissive/honour the authority of their husbands.

- Wives should portray a Godly character by humbly establishing a calm and peaceful environment in their homes.

- Husbands should have knowledge about God which will enable them to treat their wives with respect and to see their true value as co-heirs of Christ.

### 4.3.4 An attitude of love (1 Pet. 3:8 – 12)

The last pericope to receive attention in this study is in chapter 3:8-12. It still forms part of exhortation three - *Code of conduct for aliens and strangers* (Figure 4.1) but is titled "relationship with neighbours in general" and signifies the start of a conclusion concerning the discussion that started in 2:13 (see 4.3.3) (Green, 2007:101-102). Within this pericope Peter gives instruction about believers' behaviour towards each other (verse 8) and their behaviour towards unbelievers (verse 9), after this (verse 10-12) he refers back to Ps. 34 grounding the instructions just provided in scripture and explaining why this behaviour is expected (Schreiner, 2003:162; Green, 2007:102).

This pericope starts off  (verse 8) with "finally" (*telos*) "all of you" (*pantes*), indicating the conclusion of a thought pattern that Peter was following (2:11-3:7) as well as the change of his focus group in his audience (Schreiner, 2003:162-163). He is no longer giving instruction for specific relationship types, such as marriages but what follows will be applicable to the whole community of believers (Elliott, 2000:606; Schreiner, 2003:162; Jobes, 2005:213; Green, 2007:102). The remaining part of verse 8 entails five adjectives concerning how believers should treat each other (Davids, 1990:124; Elliott, 2000:602), which are important in sustaining community (Jobes, 2005:213). Four out of these five adjectives do not occur in any other place in the NT which makes it unique and which motivates the fact that is deserves more attention (Elliott, 2000:600). Although there exists unique word use in this verse the theme and values are, however, familiar to NT writings, with references to scriptures such as Rom. 12:10-17 (Goppelt, 1993:214). The fact that 'mutual love' (*philadelphoi*) is artfully placed at the centre of all these characteristics can confirm that it serves as an essentially important quality of character (Davids, 1990:124; Green, 2007:102). The focus now turn to these five adjectives which give effective norms for healthy relationality.

- 'be of one mind' (homophrones)

This term implies having a 'common pattern of thought'/'shared heart and mind'/'to agree'/'live in harmony with one another' / 'have the same attitude' (Abernathy, 2007:123; Green, 2007:102). Although a call to unity and harmony is common within the NT this is the only place where this specific word is used (Schreiner, 2003:163). The only manner in which such unity can exist is when the humble attitude of Christ is imitated (Davids, 1990:124), humility being the last

adjective Peter uses in this description is cause for a well-formulated unit to exist in this verse. When Peter encourages his audience to be of one mind, it is likely that he is referring to a common focus of all believers, which should always be Christ (Jobes, 2005:215). Regardless of what was implied, Peter is explicitly teaching his audience that unity amongst believers is of great importance and are maintained by the common belief in Christ and by imitating His character.

- Be sympathetic and compassionate (1 Pet. 3:8)

Sympathy (*sympathies*) and compassion (*eusplagchnoi)* are number 2 and number 4 on the list of adjectives that Peter mentions and due to the close relatedness of the two words they will be discussed together. Some translations use sympathetic instead of compassion and compassion instead of sympathetic or tender-hearted, and this proves just how closely these terms are connected to each other. Both these terms refer to specific emotions (Davids, 1990:124), which may be why they are used interchangeably. Elliott (2000:603-605) also affirms that these two terms are closely related. They can be distinguished from each other in the following manner:

Sympathy (*sympathies*) means to "feel with" and this instance in 1 Peter is the only place in the NT where this specific word is used. Outside the Bible it was sometimes used to refer to spousal sympathy, although it is not only limited to this meaning (Elliott, 2000:603). It can also be translated as "having concern for each other' or 'having the same feelings' (Abernathy, 2007:123). Cleave (1999:94) comments on the term 'sympathetic' by stating that it implies that believers should enter into one another's emotions as if it was their own.

Compassion (*eusplagchnoi*) only occurs again in Eph. 4:32 and it is a combination of "good" and "entrails". It speaks of experiencing emotions in the deep inward part of one's bowels, in one's inner organs (Cleave, 1999:94), referring to 'the feelings of the heart' (Elliott, 2000:605). Furthermore this word speaks of being 'good hearted', 'kind', 'and pitiful' (Abernathy, 2007:123).

Both of these terms encourage feelings of affection towards fellow believers and Peter affirms the importance of these character traits by making use of strong words which emphasise the great level of intimacy and sharing of emotions.

These two words bring to mind what was said in 1 Pet 1:3 and 1 Pet 2:10 concerning mercy. Various authors agree that "mercy" can also be translated as 'compassion' or 'pity' (Elliott, 2000:331; Abernathy, 2007:81). Although these two verses speak about God having shown mercy and having had compassion on humanity it states that because of this 'mercy' humanity can now experience rebirth. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (4.2) this salvation message serves as the foundation of this whole letter. Due to the salvation Peter's audience experienced and due to God having shown them compassion they can now also express this

towards one another. Based on the mercy God has shown to humanity through Christ, believers are now able to experience and are expected to express these intense emotions: sympathy and compassion. Davids (1990:125) confirms this in saying just like Christ had sympathy on humanity, Christians are expected to sympathize with each other, caring deeply "so that the suffering of one becomes the suffering of the other".

- Love as brothers

The third adjective that Peter uses is that of brotherly love (*philadelphoi*) and it is placed at the centre of the five adjectives (Elliott, 2000:604) not paired with any other adjective which might indicate an intend to single out this term. *Philadelphoi* implies 'full of brotherly affection', 'love as brothers' (Abernathy, 2007:123). It is not gender specific but 'brother' refers to the believers as a family of brothers and sisters (Elliott, 2000:604), based on the redemptive work of Christ all believers now form part of the family of God (Clowney, 1994:138). Davids (1990:125) says that all the virtues Peter writes about can be summed up in this one: to love one another, Jesus said that this love amongst the brethren will serve as the mark by which Christians will be recognized (John.13:34-45). Heb. 2:11-14 shows that Jesus was not ashamed to call us brothers, similarly believers need to reflect the same kind of love towards each other (Clowney, 1994:138-139).

- Have humility (3:8)

The term used here; "humble-minded" (*tapeinophrones*), is also used in chapters 5:5 and 6 and is once again unique to the NT (Elliott, 2000:605). It is another character trait that Peter expects to exist in a community that calls itself a "brotherhood" (Perkins, 1995:60) or differently known as a Christian community. This is the one character trait that is most "out of step in the Roman world" (Green, 2007:103). Davids (1990:124) groups this adjective (humble) with the first adjective (united in spirit) as words that both describes how one thinks. This once again connects with what was discussed in 4.3.1 concerning "a different mind-set". People have the ability of self-control even pertaining to their attitudes and mind-sets in life. This includes humility, and the fact that being humble is a choice. Within the Christian community Peter teaches humility as a character trait of people that have discovered and accepted God's grace and salvation.

This word can be understood as not being arrogant but "remaining within one's inherited social status and not seeking to transcend it" (Elliott, 2000:605). Within the Greco-Roman world people were very competitive and a lot of focus was placed on status. As a matter of fact humility was seen as a negative term and used to describe people of low status, ignoble, shameful (Elliott, 2000:605; Green, 2007:103). Here Peter is encouraging his audience, probably slaves, to stay

humble and regardless of the temptation to claim better treatment from their superiors they should follow the example of Christ.

Elliott (2000:605) also connects this humility with that expressed through Christ as described in Phil. 2. Phil. 2:1-4 explains that unity amongst the brethren exists because of humility and verse 5-11 explains how the humility of Christ should be the example followed in order to preserve this unity (Fee, 1995:174 & 191). Paul also urges his audience like Peter to have the same mind-set, that of Christ, making Himself of no reputation but taking on the form of man in order to die for the sins of humanity (Fee, 1995:176). As mentioned earlier 'to be of one mind' is only possible when there is humility amongst the brethren (Davids, 1990:124), the connection between these two terms are evident in the pattern of the five adjectives where 'one mind' is the first mentioned and humility is the last one mentioned. The fact that Peter writes about humility twice emphasizes the value he placed on this character trait, as it is also mentioned in chapter 5:5-7.

Peter brings the four exhortations (figure 4.1) to a close in chapter 5 where he once again writes about humility (5:5-7). Schreiner (2003:238) gives an overview of the pericope in 5:5-7 saying that because God resists the proud, Peter's audience should humble themselves under God's hand in their suffering. Their suffering helps them in staying humble. Further on in chapter 3 verse 20-25 Peter elaborates on Christ suffering and how it serves as an example for his audience, encouraging them to continue in their faith regardless of their suffering.

- Adopting Christ's attitude towards suffering

Schreiner (2003:179) titles this pericope (3:18-22) "Christ's suffering as the pathway to exaltation". Elliott (2000:151) states that 1 Peter is "one of the most sustained reflections on innocent suffering in the entire NT". As mentioned in 4.2 the suffering that Peter writes about does not refer to physical persecution but to discrimination and injustice experienced because of the believer's faith in Christ. Kistemaker (1987:17) states that four out of the five chapters in 1 Peter mentions the persecution of Christians. Although this was not physical persecution it is evident that it was still a big challenge amongst Peter's readers and it permeates the whole letter as an important message to take note of. Suffering serves as a prominent theme throughout 1 Peter, with the verb 'to suffer' occurring eleven times throughout the epistle, together with this Peter wants to encourage his audience with a message of hope (Kistemaker, 1987:20 & 138).

1 Pet. 3:18 Peter gives a reason why Christ had to suffer – for the unrighteous, to make it possible for believers to come to God (Schreiner, 2003:180). This is also confirmed in John 3:16 explaining the motivation for Christ suffering, because God loved the world. In the rest of this

pericope (1 Pet.3: 19-22) does, however, speak about Christ's triumph over evil powers and the main theme is not necessarily imitating Christ, as Schreiner (2003:180-181) rightly says. Therefore this pericope cannot serve as the one instructing imitation concerning Christ's suffering, a more fitting pericope will be 2:20b – 25. Elliott (2000:541) agrees that these verses in chapter 2 serve as instructions concerning the imitation of Christ in suffering. Verse 20b - 21 says that when enduring suffering with patients while doing good, it is commendable before God, because Christ also suffered in the same manner, setting the example for all believers. Although this pericope forms part of the bigger part of 2:18 – 25 entitled 'relationships with employees' (Figure 4.1), it is ultimately applicable to the whole suffering community (Elliott, 2000:540) and also applicable to any believer who experiences suffering.

The interesting thing about these verses is Peter's choice for the word "example" (*hypogrammos*) (verse 21). It does not merely refer to a good example to look up to but it speaks of a copy-book which children used to learn to write. They would exactly trace over every word and letter in the book in order to learn the letters. It therefore implies that believers should follow within the lines that Christ drew for them, they would follow in those exact footsteps until they become like Christ (Davids, 1990:101; Abernathy, 2007:103). Adopting Christ's attitude therefore speaks about acting like Him in each and every situation. It makes sense that the five adjectives that Peter gives concerning instructions for Christian living are only given after he teaches on the example of Christ that needed to be followed. His audience therefore had to persevere in current suffering like Christ did, practicing the characteristics given in 1Pet. 3:8.

### 4.3.4.1  Normative perspectives from an attitude of love

- Believers must reveal an attitude of love and therefore
    - are expected to live in humility in order to maintain unity in the church.
    - should express sympathy and compassion towards each other based on the compassion they received from God.
- The sacrificial love of Christ should always permeate the lives of believers, motivating how they treat everyone they come in contact with.

### 4.4  Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to determine normative perspectives from the First letter of Peter in order to determine what ought to be going on with regards to relationality. Discoveries were made concerning the importance of protecting one's mind and consciously setting it upon the grace received through Christ Jesus. Based on this and the experience of rebirth Peter gave his audience instructions concerning Godly character which also contributes towards healthy

relationality. By obeying the truth of God's word one will be able to obtain a Christ-like worldview and one will be able to live holy in the presence of the holy One through whom grace was received. Included in this teaching to be holy is referrals towards sexual purity which includes the fact that God intended marriage for monogamous relationships.

From the second chapter of 1 Peter normative perspectives were discovered concerning the identity of individuals and the fact that based on Christ's redemptive work God views all believers as part of His family. It became evident that God never intended for believers to experience loneliness but rather intended all to fulfil their priestly role as part of His kingdom. It is within the grace story of Jesus Christ that all believers should find their true identity. Concerning marriage relationships Peter instructs wives to accept and honour their husband's authority, reflecting the character of Christ and cultivating an atmosphere of peace in their homes in order for their unbelieving husbands to come to Christ. In the same manner husbands ought to be considerate of their wives, honouring them as fellow heirs of God's promise.

Concerning an attitude of love (1 Pet. 3:8-12) Peter teaches about the importance of unity amongst believers which is achieved through each individual's humility. Secondly it is important that believers live compassionately and sympathetically with each other, sharing in the intimate interaction that Christ desires to have with his church. Lastly the most important element is that believers will love each other as brothers and sister love each other, once again confirming the familial importance amongst the community of believers.

Bringing the normative perspectives to a close it becomes evident that everything Peter mentioned is portrayed in Christ's sacrificial love towards humanity and that believers should imitate this in order to live in healthy relationships with one another. Green (2007:105) confirms this by saying that Peter's bigger purpose was to encourage believers to be part of a fellowship characterised by a "cruciform love" – "love that takes its content and form from the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross". Jobes (2005:215-216) does, however, say that all these characteristics that Peter attributes to believers speak of a high commitment towards a community, which is something strange to the modern western lifestyle. Based on all these discoveries and the fact that 1 Peter is known as a letter of exhortation and hope, conclusions can be made concerning couples counselling and how the counsellor can support young couples to live in healthy relationality. The question to be answered in the next chapter would then be: how can pastoral counsellors utilise the results of the normative task in supporting couples to practice healthy relationality in a digital age? In order to answer this question effectively the following summary of the normative perspectives gained needs to be kept in mind:

**4.5 Normative perspectives derived from 1 Peter 1:13-3:12**

(1) Christians should live in holiness, love one another and maintain sexual purity.

(2) Christians should reflect through their new identity that they belong to the family of God.

(3) Christian marriages should be characterized by humility and mutual submission to God.

(4) A Christian lifestyle should reflect an attitude of sympathy and compassion.

# CHAPTER 5:    PASTORAL THEOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE COUNSELLING OF COUPLES

## 5.1   Introduction

One of the final steps in the research process of this study would be to determine the pastoral theological implications of the results of the previous chapters. The research question posed to this chapter as stated in 1.2 is to determine how couples living in a digital age can be supported by pastoral counselling. It is important to mention that the focus of this chapter will not be to gain information that will support the counselee but rather to equip the counsellor in more effective ministry towards couples within the digital age (1.3.2). The aim of this chapter would then be to determine what unique pastoral theological guidelines can be given to equip the pastoral counsellor in his/her ministry towards couples living in the digital age.

Due to the complexity of relationships in the digital age this question cannot be answered effectively without taking into account the normative perspectives discovered in chapter 4. Therefore the method followed in this chapter will be based on the guidelines given by Osmer (2008:175-218) when he explains the pragmatic task of theological interpretation. Osmer (2008:176) titled the pragmatic task as 'servant leadership'. This is based on the purpose of this task which is to form and enact "strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable". He states that practical theology can offer "models of practice" to serve as guidelines for leaders concerning ways in which they can perform certain actions in order to achieve a desired goal (Osmer, 2008:176). The aim of this chapter is then also based on this statement by Osmer (2008:176): determining the unique pastoral theological guidelines that surfaced in the results of this practical theological study. Within this chapter results from the literature study will be compared in a hermeneutical interaction to the norms provided by the normative task in order to identify critical elements that can direct counsellor's ministry towards couples in the digital age.

One of the forms of servant leadership that Osmer (2008:177) describes is "transformational leadership" which brings forth deep change. According to Louw (1999:4) deep change together with restoration serves as the final purpose to be achieved by pastoral care. The purpose of this chapter will not be to create a new theory for counselling but rather to add the discovered information to existing theories in order to make these theories more applicable and relevant to the context of the digital age. This chapter will start off by giving an overview of the theory of counselling as described by Daniel Louw. This is necessary in order to bring the norms and results of the previous phases in the practical theological interpretation process into critical dialogue with each other. The theory of Daniel Louw serves as the basis theory to which this

dissertation wants to make a unique contribution within the context of the digital age. The main motivation for this is that Louw's work is South African and most suitable for this study due to its solid grounding in the study field and methodology of Practical Theology. The theological design it offers in terms of basis theory, anthropology, method and therapy, the description of the possible uniqueness of a pastoral contribution that is theological in nature, and the emphasis put on the network system and thinking as a systemic understanding of life issues in a given context will serve this study effectively. Louw has made an exceptional contribution towards the field of Theology in South Africa since 1978 and his recent publication "Network of the human soul" published in 2012 confirms that his contribution is authoritative and still relevant to the discipline of pastoral care. Although the information gathered in this study can also contribute to other theories of counselling it was decided to limit the discussion concerning the contribution to only that of Louw. The theories used are based mainly on two resources by Daniel Louw:

(1)    Pastoraat as vertolking en ontmoeting, published in 1999.

(2)    Network of the human soul which places more focus on the systemic understanding of life issues and was published in 2012.

## 5.2    Pastoral care and counselling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The purpose of this section is to give an overview of the meaning and purpose of pastoral counselling as offered by Louw (1999; 2012) which will be applicable for the use of this chapter. Louw (1999:3 & 36) explains that pastoral care (derived from *cura animarum*) speaks of connecting one's understanding of God with real life situations that people face in order for them to discover meaning in these situations. Furthermore he says that pastoral care takes place by providing healing, support, guidance, reconciliation, protection and interpretation. At the end of the day the goal of pastoral care would be to improve spirituality and maturity of faith through the use of Scripture, prayer and the sacraments, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Louw, 1999:3, 36, 206). Maturity of faith would entail change (based on the redemptive work of Christ), responsible decision-making, growth (in holiness), hope and fellowship. With spirituality Louw (1999:31) refers to the vulnerability that a person experiences when becoming aware of God's presence. The role of the pastor in the process of counselling' is described as the facilitator, agent and communicator of God's compassion and care. Together with this the Holy Spirit fulfils an important role as the initiator in this process as well as the Person that instils hope into the heart of the counselee (Louw, 1999:150). It is not only the role of the Holy Spirit during counselling' but also the different approach to anthropology that makes pastoral care different from the social and human sciences such as Psychology. A pastoral anthropology perceives humanity from a pneumatological perspective with an eschatological view of the future. This in

turn provides a different source from which meaning in life can originate (Louw, 1999:294 - 295).

Within a more recent publication of Louw (2012) *Network of human soul*, Louw does not deny anything mentioned earlier but elaborates on his definition of pastoral care. He uses the same terminology *cura animarum,* the care of souls but he adds two new dynamics: networking and systems thinking. Louw (2012:12) explains "networking" as understanding "the basic characteristics or 'design' of something." He then links this concept of networking with a "systems approach" when he elaborates on theory formation for pastoral care and counselling in the 21st century. The systems approach entails "interactive polarities" that exist within a dynamic organism, affecting and influencing each other. Within this dynamic organism (system) the value and meaning of each part is determined by the position attained within the system. Therefore "the position of each part is more important than the substance of each part" (Louw, 2012:13). When explaining a systems approach in connection to pastoral care, Louw (2012:13) explains the "position" within a system as an individual's attitude and behaviour towards change and adjustment. Position refers to people's activities which displays their acceptance of responsibility for their own reactions, "it implies responsibility, choice, identity and a sense of significance" (Louw, 2012:42-43). It is this "position" of the counselee, the level to which responsibility is accepted, that is of importance for the counsellor within the process of healing as this "position" is often the object of change within the process of pastoral care. Within systems thinking the underlying paradigm is of greater importance than the problem that is faced, in order for change and healing to take place, "the *position* within the networking system" needs to be adjusted (Louw, 2012:17). Furthermore within this systems approach change is never immediate but takes place as a process. Therefore the counsellor cannot forecast the outcome of a situation but can merely guide counselees towards healing by introducing small steps of change within the "position" that the counselee has towards his/her situation.

On a different occasion Louw (2015) also mentioned that within the 21st century everything revolves around network thinking. Taking into account the interconnectedness and interwoveness of the digital age, this systemic-network approach can add a lot of value to pastoral care. In the light of Louw's network - and systems theory this study will aim to build pastoral theological guidelines for couples' counsellors within the digital age. The question that arises from this information would be "what are the implications of this theory for couples' counsellors within the digital age?"

The network-system theory influences the manner in which counsellors perceive counselees. As mentioned above the counsellor's view on anthropology entails a pneumatological and eschatological element. Combining this with the network-system theory counsellors can view counselees and the challenges they bring to the counselling office in light of the salvation of

Christ. The value of each counselee is thus determined by what Christ did on the cross and not by the choices the individuals made (Louw, 1999:187-188). Counsellors within the digital age would need to determine the position of the counselees towards this Christological anthropology. To what extent is the counselee's actions testifying of their acceptance of the work of Christ as well as their responsibility that accompanies this acceptance? Simultaneously the original design, networking, for both humanity and for couples' relationships is found in God's Word. The challenge for couples' counsellors within the digital age would then be to continuously guide counselee's towards this truth concerning their design by influencing their perspective and position towards their situation, life and their relationships Louw (1999:194) confirms this by saying that humanity has the ability to communicate and take up responsibility. Therefore couples' counselling within the digital age should operate from a place of grace, still challenging people to take up responsibility for their actions and their relationship with both God and one another. Simultaneously counsellors need to understand that they are merely fulfilling a role within the bigger process of change. It is thus not the counsellor's responsibility to change a whole system but rather to stimulate the "birth of something new" within a part of the system, within the "norms, values, meaning and ideas" of the counselee (Louw, 2012:13).

It is evident that the purpose of pastoral care is still to instil hope in counselees' lives and encourage them to grow in relationship with God in the midst of challenging circumstances. The manner in which this takes place in the digital age does seem different from the past. Based on this conclusion the remaining part of this chapter will bring the norms discovered (chapter 4) in interaction with the key findings of relationality in the digital age. This will be done in order to determine effective guidelines to counsellors for pastoral care towards couples within the digital age.

## 5.3 Key findings of relationality in the digital age

The following observations are key findings that surfaced in this study concerning relationality in the digital age as well as reasons for why these elements exist. Due to the different focusses/emphasis of chapters 2 and 3 the key findings will be listed under two separate headings: relationships in general and those pertaining to specifically couples' relationships.

### 5.3.1 Key findings of relationships in general

- The digital age defines a time of many connections, still there exists a cycle of loneliness that can be linked to the prominent existence of technology (2.2.3).

- Identity in the digital age can be determined by many influences such as a narcissistic culture, online presentations and online gaming which can create identity confusion (2.4.3), and this can lead to a lack of focus on inward standards and values (2.4.3.3).

- Relationality in the digital age is characterised by shallowness. People share fewer emotions (2.3.2) and have a fear of being vulnerable (2.5) due to the desire to always be in control.

- The digital age represents a time of decrease in (to inability to express) empathy and compassion (2.3.2.2) caused by the effect of technology overuse on the brain (2.3.2.2).

### 5.3.2 Key findings concerning couple's relationships

- Couple relationships in the digital age face the challenge of undivided attention between partners, due to constant connection of digital devices (3.2.1).

- Couples' relationships are also influenced by the narcissistic culture of the digital age which can complicate conflict resolution as conflict usually centres around the issues of power and control (2.4.2) (Hinde, 1996).

- In the digital age individuals have the option of living two lives at once, engaging with "virtual lovers" and participating in sexual relationships. This is made possible because of the existence of online gaming (2.3.4.1).

- Within the digital age people may have multiple sex partners which are encouraged by early exposure of children to sexual content and a lack of healthy education concerning sexuality (3.2.7.1).

- Due to the prominence of cybersex and pornography marriages in the digital age are more vulnerable to infidelity (3.2.7.2) but individuals differ on their opinions as to whether this is positive or negative.

- Social networking can have negative effects on the trust levels in romantic relationships due to its prominence within the digital age and the fact that there often does not exist clear boundaries between partners concerning social media use (3.2.7.2).

- Pornography creates an addiction in the human brain which has devastating effects on marriages (3.3).

### 5.4 Normative perspectives concerning relationality

The following normative perspectives concerning relationality were discovered from 1 Peter as indicated in chapter 4 of this research:

- Christians should live in holiness, love one another sincerely and maintain sexual purity (4.5.1)

- Christians should reflect through their new identity that they belong to the family of God (4.5.2).

- Christian marriages should be characterized by humility and mutual submission to God (4.5.3).

- A Christian's lifestyle should reflect an attitude of empathy and compassion (4.5.4).

## 5.5   Pastoral guidelines for couple's counselling

As mentioned (5.1) the focus of this chapter is to discover pastoral guidelines of this research pertaining to the counsellor and not the counselee. What follows are elements derived from the comparison between 5.3 and 5.4 which can equip the counsellor to more effectively minister to couples within the digital age.

First of all it should be noted that Louw's (2012:17) emphasis on networking is of great importance for this study. Before any counsellor can effectively support couples in the digital age he/she should understand that all contextual and normative elements discovered in this dissertation can be comprehended more deeply when the concept of networking and the systems theory serve as the basis for the counselling. Tan (2011:6-7) also refers to "systemic therapies" as a manner of counselling that takes place in which the interpersonal systems in which the counselee live and function needs to be understood in order for change to take place. Tan (2011:319) confirms that this manner of counselling will become more popular in the future and it is likely that more therapists and counsellors will make use of this approach in the coming decades. It can thus be concluded that the networking and systems theory as an approach towards counselling is very appropriate within the digital age. For the counsellor to offer effective support within the digital age he/she needs to determine each individual's stance towards the challenge that their relationship is facing. This will then guide the counsellor into the direction in which the counselling should take place. After determining each individual's position within the network of life issues that the relationship is facing, the counsellor can continue with the counselling process by making use of the normative guidelines in Scripture in order to bring change into the given situation. The networking and systems theory will serve as the basis for all the other pastoral theological discoveries of this study which will be discussed by comparing the four normative conclusions with the results of chapter 2 and 3.

The conversation model offered by Louw (1999:303-425) will serve as the counselling process within which the given counselling guidelines can be applied. This is motivated by the ideal structure and space that this model provides for these guidelines. In discussing the design of a conversation model for counselling Louw (1999:312) states that conversations within the pastoral atmosphere are unpredictable and cannot be limited by concrete procedures to be

followed as every counselling situation is unique. This is very applicable when bringing the pastoral guidelines of this study into conversation with a counselling process. Within the digital age couple relationships can be confronted with various challenges which need to be dealt with differently according to the couples' unique situation and stance towards their situation. What makes this model even more suitable for the current discussion is the fact that Louw (1999:304) highlights the important role of the Holy Spirit within this "unpredictable atmosphere" of the counselling situation. The Holy Spirit is described as an influential factor within the process of counselling, He  uses the counsellor and his/her given experience and abilities just as it is to address the specific needs of the counselee (Louw, 1999:304). It will then be one of the main aims of this chapter to contribute towards the counsellor's understanding of the digital age, while emphasising the counsellor's dependability upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to effectively serve couples' relationships within the midst of various challenges. It is based upon these two fundamental elements that Louw (1999:408-425) identified 4 basic phases which will likely occur in every counselling scenario, these phases are described as cyclical and it is not a linear process where each phase follows another in a specific order (Louw, 1999:305 & 415). Based on this given information the conversation model of counselling, designed by Louw, is the ideal counselling process in which the following guidelines can be applied.

(1)     Christians should live in holiness, love one another sincerely and maintain sexual purity.

The first normative perspective found in 1 Peter states that 'Christians should live in holiness, love one another sincerely and maintain sexual purity' (4.5.1). Amongst others this study showed that the digital age is encouraging shallowness in relationships (2.3.1 & 3.2.1). From 1 Peter it was evident that this was never God's intent for relationships and that Christians should love one another sincerely. If counsellors keep this in mind it will be possible to recognise shallowness in couples' relationships and give encouragement for growth in intimacy.

Other discoveries in chapter 2 and 3 concerning holiness showed that individuals struggle to maintain sexual purity within a culture that is saturated by technology. The counsellor can benefit from the information revealed in this study by fulfilling a teaching role (Collins, 2007:71) informing couples about the importance of living holy lives and the devastating effects of sexual impurity upon one's mind, health and eventually upon one's romantic relationship. Louw (1999:36) affirms that counselling has got an important preventative responsibility as well, the discoveries of this study can therefore serve as preventative support and not only in dealing with crises in counselling. Even within marriage one's sexual relationship should reflect God's holiness and couples need to realize their responsibility in protecting this element of their relationship, be it to abstaining from pornography or not engaging in virtual relationships, the call to action will be determined by the couples' position towards this challenge. When counsellors can make couples more aware of the high risk of infidelity in marriages within the

digital age, the couple can be more pro-active against this as well as conscious of the new ways in which this can take place.  This is especially true in the case of pre-marital counselling.

The manner in which a man and a women love each other should also reflect God's holiness, which will serve as an effective guideline for counsellors to determine the health of the couples' relationship. As mentioned earlier (3.2.7.2) there exist contradictory opinions concerning the definition of infidelity in the digital age, one of the partners might not recognise his/her actions as negative behaviour towards the other person. Therefore it is important for the counsellor to determine the different positions of the counselees within their network of challenges in order to know how to effectively support the couple. Once the counsellor understands each counselee's position towards infidelity it will be easier to help them understand each other and recognise unhealthy behaviour.

Couples' counsellors within the digital age should therefore be on the lookout for shallowness, sexual impurity and vague definitions of infidelity within couples' relationships. These three challenges can serve as the basis for various relational challenges which couples' face within the digital age. Being aware of these three basic challenges, the counsellor can apply the second phase of the conversation model with more ease. Louw (1999:414) explains this second phase as the time during counselling when the problems are analysed and perspectives on the problem are developed. The counsellor can more effectively support a couple in the process of problem analysis while keeping these three contextual challenges in mind. Secondly the counsellor can guide couples to restore holiness within their relationship by teaching them this first norm as provided in 1 Peter.

(2)    Christians should reflect through their new identity that they belong to the family of God.

Contradictory to this normative perspective is the cycle of loneliness that characterises the digital age. If pastoral counsellors are aware that the overuse of technology can encourage loneliness (2.2.3), they should be on the lookout for this in the lives and habits of counselees. Providing the counselee with the needed information, the counsellor can guide the counselee to think of creative ways in which the cycle of loneliness can be broken. Examples of this might be to encourage participation in activities at their local church and in the broader community instead of only interacting with people via digital devices.

The sense of belonging provided by the family of God offers security within a person's identity which is determined by the stability found in God's word. A pastoral counsellor has the privilege of taking counselees on a journey of growth through the truth provided in the Bible which can serve as concrete factors in one's identity in contrast to the ever-changing influences of the digital age. Adams (1980:304) agrees that an important part of the counsellor's role is to

minister the Word of God to counselees. Louw (1999:429-460) elaborates on this by explaining the importance of the use of Scripture in the process of counselling. Not only does the word of God serve as the basis from which all counselling should take place, but it can especially address the challenge that the digital age poses concerning standards and values of individuals. In 2.4.3.3 it was revealed that the different digital influences on identity lead to a lack of focus on inner standards and values. Louw (2012:26) states that pastoral care should "deal with the moral concerns of people" providing guidelines concerning "norms and values for the development of spiritual maturity". It is thus the responsibility of the counsellor to make use of the principles provided in God's word to guide counselees to a place of truth concerning their identity, values and standards, thus supporting and equipping counselees to be authentic so that their new identity in Christ will reflect their belonging to the family of God.

According to this information given (2) counsellors should encourage couples to invest more time in face-to-face interaction, wherever possible limiting technological communication. Counselees need to be constantly reminded of their true value and identity as determined in God's Word. This can be linked to both phase 3 and 4 as described by Louw (1999:414, 418 - 423). Phase 3 entails responsible behaviour, decision making and goal setting. The counsellor can by means of homework assignments challenge couples to adjust their behaviour towards one another by increasing face to face communication and by setting goals for spending time together without any technological interferences. The aim of phase 4 (Louw, 1999:423) is to implement long-term change, here the counsellor can guide couples to keep each other accountable in living according to their new identity as determined by Christ which will also influence their values and standards maintained in their relationship.

(3)    Christian marriages should be characterized by humility and mutual submission to God

This norm shows that humility should be reflected in marriage (and other romantic relationships) taking up the sacrificial love of Christ towards one another because of submission to God. If this is not applied, conflict can result in violence (2.4.2). Within the digital age, a narcissistic culture is prominent which is in direct opposition to what this norm teaches (2.4.3.1). Counsellors can support couples to put an accountability process in place in order to live a lifestyle of humility and submission to God, eliminating violence during conflict. Furthermore this norm can serve as a guideline for counsellors in determining the health of relationships of counselees. Whenever married couples' enter the counselling office the counsellor can compare the crisis of the marriage to this norm in order to determine where to start with the counselling process.

The counsellor can also offer support by identifying the different conflict styles present in that particular relationship from which effective guidance can be provided in order to encourage humility and mutual submission to God (Collins, 2007:322). Within the context of the digital age

this can only take place effectively when the counsellor has an understanding of the difference between "synchronous" and "asynchronous" communication (3.2.3). Based on this understanding the counsellor can identify blind spots within the couples' communication processes and offer support concerning more effective conflict resolution. As mentioned in 2.4.2 conflict resolution is usually complicated because of people's desire for power and control. The counsellor can however, based on this knowledge, teach a couples to manage conflict in such a way that it always reflects humility and mutual submission to God.

Couple relationships in the digital age face the challenge of undivided attention between partners, due to constant connection of digital devices (3.2.1). Counsellors should be aware of this, guiding couples to spend time with each other without any technological distractions which will increase the levels of intimacy within the relationship. Louw (1983:159-160) confirms that when spouses give each other undivided attention and spend time together it will increase intimacy in the relationship as well as stimulate continual growth. Spouses will need to humble themselves by laying down their own needs for constant connection in the digital age in order to give their undivided attention to each other. Counsellors should emphasize the importance of couples intentionally spending intimate time together, without simultaneously being occupied with technologies such as social media. Crab (1982:151) confirms this by saying that "marriages will not develop the strength or intimacy we desire without serious reflection and effort". Together with this comes the fact that within the digital age it is much easier for partners to stay in contact with each other regularly; this does, however, not always include intimate conversations (2.3.1), which is something that counsellors can teach counselees about.

This norm can be best implemented as described in phase four of the conversation model: by growing to maturity in faith (Louw, 1999:423). This process of growth entails taking up responsibility for areas in one's life where improvement can take place. Accepting the fact that one needs to make personal changes (which might include going through an uncomfortable process) is the first step in growing (Louw, 1999:223) and will cultivate an attitude of humility and mutual submission to God. Counsellors can challenge couples to improve their manner of conflict resolution and problem solving by focussing less on what the other person did wrong and by focussing more on their own behaviour (Louw, 1999:420). Thus each individual is taking up responsibility for his/her own actions and focussing less on the other's mistakes which helps in growing in humility.

(4)    A Christian lifestyle should reflect an attitude of empathy and compassion

In 2.3.2.2 it became evident that the digital age represents a time of decrease in the ability to express empathy and compassion due to the effect of technology overuse on the brain. From this normative perspective it can be concluded that God originally created man to experience

both of these emotions and that Christians are expected to express them towards one another. Once counsellors identify the absence of empathy and compassion in relationships information needs to be gathered concerning the individuals' use of technology. This will probably function as the reason for the decrease in these emotions from where counsellors can encourage counselees to minimize their technological use. This challenge needs to be motivated by teaching the counselees the correlation between the overuse of technology and the inability to experience empathy and compassion. Counselees need to become aware of the important role of these emotions in their relationships as well as the fact that technology might pose a threat to one's ability to experience these emotions.

One of the important functions of empathy and compassion in relationships can be connected to conflict resolution (3.2.1 & 3.2.3). It was previously mentioned that conflict resolution in the digital age can increase in violence (2.4.2). Except for this couples need to be made aware of the importance of empathy and compassion within communication. Coyne *et al.* (2011:159) were referenced in 3.2.3 where it was said that damaging words communicated through technology still have the same emotional impact as when it is communicated without technology. Counsellors need to be informed concerning this, keeping in mind that any conflict taking place via digital devices will have the same emotional impact of the person who receives the message. Simultaneously the counsellor needs to teach this to counselees in order for them to understand that negative conflict resolution has the same effect whether it takes place via digital devices or face to face.

Furthermore counsellors should encourage counselees to share their emotions with each other. It is important for healthy couple relationships that partners be vulnerable in front of each other. In 2.3.2 it was discovered that the digital age discourages emotional vulnerability within relationships. The opposite of this is being taught, through this norm, that Christians should live with an attitude of empathy and compassion towards one another.

Counsellors should teach couples the importance of experiencing empathy and compassion within their relationship, counselees should be encouraged and guided to open up towards one another and share their emotions. In extreme cases the counsellor can also advice counselees to spend less time on technology in order to protect their ability to experiences empathy and compassion.

## 5.6   Conclusion

This chapter compared the critical elements from chapter 2 and 3 with the norms revealed in 1 Peter in order to discover pastoral guidelines based on the counselling theories of Louw (1999 & 2012). These pastoral guidelines can support the counsellor to effectively support couples'

within the digital age. Throughout this chapter it became evident that couples counselling within the digital age does not require a completely new counselling process in order to be effective. Once counsellors understand the context of the digital age existing techniques and counselling processes, such as the conversation model described by Louw (1999:303-425), can still be applied, although the counsellor can improve his/her skills by attaining a clear understanding of the unique challenges that couples face within the digital age. The results of the descriptive and interpretive tasks of this study enable counsellors to recognise the unique challenges that the digital age poses to couples' relationships which can serve the counsellor to more effectively listen and minister to counselees within this context. These results can also be of value in pre-marital counselling where counsellors can give preventative advice as well as guide couples to identify their positions towards these challenges and implement boundaries in order to pro-actively preserve their marital relationship. Simultaneously the norms established in chapter 4 can serve as ideal realities that the counsellor wants to guide couples towards through a process of change in order to encourage healthy romantic relationships.

It can thus be said that the pastoral guidelines discovered through this study can be applicable in various counselling processes as they mainly serve to expand the counsellors' understanding of the context of the digital age in which couples' relationships exist as well as the challenges that accompany this. The next chapter will conclude this study by evaluating whether and to what extent this study succeeded in answering the main research question: 'what unique contribution can a pastoral theological perspective offer towards couples counselling within the digital age?'

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

## 6.1 Introduction

This study researched relationality in the digital age with specific focus on couples' relationships. The main aim of this study was to identify and describe a unique theological contribution towards guidelines for counsellors to support couples' relationships in a digital age from a pastoral theological perspective. The following research question guided the study process: what unique contribution can a pastoral theological perspective offer towards couples counselling within the digital age? This literature study intended to sketch a realistic picture of the context of the digital age. Furthermore unique challenges this context poses towards couples' relationships were identified in order to determine what unique contribution a pastoral theological perspective can offer. The purpose of this process was to discover information that can serve as resources in supporting Christian counsellors to more effectively minister to couples within the digital age (1.3.3).

The results of this study showed that couples' relationships within the digital age are not only facing typical relational challenges but are also confronted with unique challenges due to the context in which these relationships exist. Even though already existing counselling theories can support couples within the digital age, couples counselling can increase in effectiveness when counsellors are informed about the unique challenges and reasons for the existence of these challenges within the digital age.

The aim of this chapter would be to evaluate whether and to what extent the study succeeded in answering its main question and in achieving its central goal. Was a unique pastoral theological contribution discovered through this study and what does this consist of?

## 6.2 Evaluation of the research

Richard Osmer's (2008) approach towards practical theological interpretation served as the guideline for the structure and methods followed in this study. Chapter 1 explained the orientation to this research process which included the aim, objectives and purpose of this research. Within the introduction of this chapter the aim and purpose of the study were mentioned. Next it is important to determine whether the objectives of this study were achieved and whether this process led to the fulfilment of the aim and purpose as described in 1.3.1 and 1.3.3.

The first objective of this study was to explore and describe relationality within the digital age (1.3.2). In **chapter 2** a literature study was done by using both national and international resources in order to determine the main contextual influences of the digital age on relationality. The following discoveries were made:

- The digital age affects everyone regardless of socio-economic circumstances.

- It is greatly influencing people's perceptions about relationships and the way people position and manage themselves in relationships.

- Technology enables people to be more connected with each other yet it creates feelings of anxiety, loneliness and shallowness.

- Although technology offers different ways of dealing with conflict this can have positive or negative effects and people are less vulnerable within relationships.

- Personal identity is faced with unique challenges concerning narcissism and identity play.

- People still prefer face to face interaction above technological connections.

These findings describe relationality in the digital age effectively and therefore the first objective was successfully achieved.

**Chapter 3** addressed the second objective, *an interdisciplinary study on* couples' *relationships within the digital age*, and the third objective, *to study and evaluate why these dynamics exist*, interchangeably. Different study fields such as Communication Sciences, Psychology and Neuroscience were studied in order to derive relevant information to determine unique characteristics and the reason for their existence, in couples' relationships within the digital age. This interdisciplinary study confirmed that the same results from chapter 2 (shallowness, less vulnerability, communication and conflict resolution challenges and identity challenges) are applicable to couples' relationships. Furthermore couples might experience difficulty within their relationships in the areas of infidelity and sexuality which might be caused by a lack of boundaries in the use of technology as well as the existence of pornography.

These findings summarise the unique challenges that couple relationships face within the digital age as well as why these challenges exist and therefore objective 2 and 3 were effectively reached.

In **chapter 4** the book of 1 Peter was studied in order to determine theological norms concerning relationality. This had to take place in order for the fourth objective to be achieved: to study and present a pastoral theological perspective on relationality in the digital age. The

process of revelation historical exegesis was done according to Van Rensburg *et al.* (2015) and concluded with the following four normative perspectives:

(1)    Christians should live in holiness, love one another and maintain sexual purity.

(2)    Christians should reflect through their new identity that they belong to the family of God.

(3)    Christian marriages should be characterized by humility and mutual submission to God.

(4)    A Christian lifestyle should reflect an attitude of sympathy and compassion.

It is evident that the objective was achieved by determining these four normative theological perspectives on relationality.

In order to determine how these results of the study can offer unique pastoral theological guidelines to equip the pastoral counsellor in the counselling of couples, **chapter 5** compared the results from the literature study to the norms discovered in 1 Peter. The following conclusions were made:

- For effective couples' counselling to take place within the digital age the counsellor needs to be aware of shallowness, sexual impurity and vague definitions of infidelity that might exist within couples' relationships. If the counsellor recognises one or more of these elements within a romantic relationship it will support the counsellor to analyse and gain perspective on the couples' issues at hand.

- In all cases counsellors should encourage couples to spend more time in face to face engagement while limiting technological communication within their relationship.

- Challenges concerning identity might exist within the digital age. In these cases counsellors should remind counselees of their true identity in Christ as determined by God's word while offering the needed support in order to encourage healthy romantic relationships.

- Conflict resolution among couples can improved when the counsellor challenges counselees to live and grow in humility and mutual submission to God by focussing less on their own needs and more on the needs of others.

- Counsellors can teach couples to spend more quality time with each other, without any technological distractions, in order to protect their ability to experience empathy and compassion towards one another.

This summary of pastoral guidelines discovered in **chapter 5** confirms that the final objective of this study was met and that unique pastoral guidelines were discovered in order to support

couples' counsellors in the counselling of couples within the digital age. The normative perspectives discussed in chapter 4 also highlight the unique contribution offered by a pastoral theological perspective. Through this discussion it became evident that relationality within the digital age was defined and against that background a pastoral theological perspective on the counselling of couples was offered.

This study succeeded in answering the overarching research question*, what unique contribution can a pastoral theological perspective offer towards* couples' *counselling within the digital age,* by gaining perspective on the challenges couples face within the context of the digital age. The uniqueness of the pastoral theological perspective is based on the overall understanding gained about the network and systems approach towards pastoral care as well as the distinctly theological view on anthropology which entails a pneumatological and eschatological dimension. Furthermore the results of the contextual and normative research were constantly brought into dialogue with each other which proved that the normative perspectives on relationality can serve as effective guidelines and can be communicated to couples within the pastoral context in the digital age. This study did, however, open up avenues for further research and contained some limitations, which will be the focus of the next discussion.

## 6.3   Limitations and Recommendations for future research

The following limitations are evident within this literature study and it also serves as guidelines for further research:

- The review of literature, defining the conceptual nature of this study, can be limiting in terms of describing the empirical context of the digital age, meaning how people in real life experience the influence of the digital age in their relationships. Therefore it is recommended that the results of this study can be further investigated in empirical studies. Such a form of empirical research is amplified within the South African context as there exists a need to investigate the results of this study within couples' relationships in South Africa

- The focus of this literature study was limited to the subject of serious romantic relationships with the potential to grow into marriage. It might thus be further explored what these effects will be on more mature marriages as well as short-term romantic relationships.

- Due to limited information available in the South African context concerning relationality within the digital age information had to be derived from international sources, although this is still applicable to this study a more contextual study could have been done if more South African resources were available.

- It will be interesting to see how the current generation of children will use technology once they are adults. This study was thus limiting due to only being relevant for a certain period of time, as technology keeps on developing and as people grow accustomed to it, the results of this study might be challenged. It also serves as an area for further research, evaluating the relevancy of the results of this study in 10 or 20 years from now.

- There exists research to prove that technology is negatively impacting the following systems in the human brain: the pleasure system, tranquillity system, memory system, learning system, attachment system and spiritual system (Hart & Frejd, 2013:62-71). Theology will benefit from future research done on the influence of technology on the spiritual system of the human brain.

- Huddleston (2015a:9) mentions that internet addiction is being categorized as a public health crisis in some countries. A need exists for a theological, and specifically a pastoral theological, perspective on this public health issue. This is especially true in determining what the role of the local (AFM) church might be in actively addressing this issue. How can churches and counsellors play a role in bringing hope towards this situation and what is currently being taught within churches concerning internet use?

## 6.4    Final conclusions

This study was initiated by an interest in the influence of technology on relationality and specifically couples' relationships. The general aim and purpose were to make a contribution towards pastoral counsellor's understanding of the digital age and the influence and unique challenges it presents to supporting couples' relationships. In order to accomplish this a general understanding of the digital age was necessary after which relational characteristics of the influence of the digital age were discovered. This was compared to normative guidelines taken from 1 Peter in order to establish pastoral guidelines which can support the counsellor in effective ministry towards couples' relationships that exist within the digital age. Throughout the research process this study succeeded in achieving most of its goals and contributed towards the formation of a unique pastoral theological perspective on the counselling of couples within the digital age.

This study confirmed that relationality, the quality of relationships that communicates purpose and distinctiveness, is being influenced by the digital age. If pastoral counsellors are aware of these different influences a unique pastoral theological contribution can be made towards encouraging healthy romantic relationships which will lead to the existence of healthy communities. Except for gaining a proper understanding of the context of the digital age the unique pastoral theological contribution of this study was emphasised by the manner in which

counsellors need to be guided by normative perspectives during counselling. It became evident that there do exist normative perspectives on relationality which will stay the same regardless of a changing society. It is within these normative guidelines that the brokenness of humanity can still experience healing and restoration. Each counsellor is then challenged to offer effective support by bringing the contextual and normative dimensions within couples' counselling into conversation with each while leading the counselee to discover hope, purpose and meaning in life.

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## ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OF PROJECT

Based on approval by the **Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Theology**, the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-IRERC) hereby approves your project as indicated below.  This implies that the NWU-IRERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

| |
|---|
| **Project title:** Relationality in a digital age: A pastoral theological perspective on the counselling of couples. |
| **Project Leaders:  H Yates & BJ de Klerk** <br> **Student:          C Ferriera** |

| Ethics number: | N W U - 0 0 5 0 1 - 1 5 - A 6 |
|---|---|
| | Institution    Project Number    Year    Status |
| | Status:  S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation |

| **Approval date**: 2015/01/-- | **Expiry date**: 2015/12/-- | **Risk:** | **Minimal** |
|---|---|---|---|

Special conditions of the approval (if any): None

General conditions:
*While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:*
- *The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-IRERC:*
  - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project,*
  - *without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form.  Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the NWU-RERC.  Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started.  Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-IRERC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility the NWU-IRERC retains the right to:*
  - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;*
  - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
    - *any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected,*
    - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-IRERC or that information has been false or misrepresented,*
    - *the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,*
    - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*

The IRERC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project.  Please do not hesitate to contact the IRERC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof LA
Du Plessis

Digitally signed by Prof LA Du Plessis
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West University, ou=Campus Rector,
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**Prof Linda du Plessis**
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