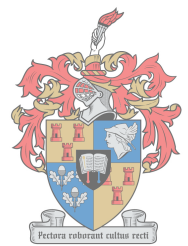


# **“Always being there for each other”: Adolescent Girls’ Experiences of Their Same-sex Friendships in a Western Cape Boarding School**

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## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof, that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research identified same-sex friendships as a protective factor for adolescent girls' mental well-being, while a lack thereof is associated with depression and lower levels of self-esteem among adolescent girls. Yet, adolescent girls' friendships have received scant attention in the South African literature. The majority of research in this field seems to be quantitative in nature and tends to focus on adverse friendship influences and the associated risk factors for adolescent girls. This qualitative study aimed to explore how a group of South African adolescent girls experience their same-sex friendships. Further aims were to investigate the nature of these friendships; possible protective and/or risk factors operating within these friendships; and how the girls negotiated their positions in the friendship group.

Ten, 15 to 16-year-old White middle- to upper-class girls, resident in an all girls' boarding school in the Western Province, South Africa, participated in this study. I collected the data by means of individual in-depth semi-structured interviews and used thematic analysis to analyse the data inductively with ATLAS.ti software. This study was conducted within an interpretivist research paradigm and I used relational-cultural theory as lens to understand the girls' friendship experiences. Ethical approval for this study was provided by Stellenbosch University's Research Ethics Committee, the Western Cape Educational Department, and the school principal involved.

I identified three key themes from the data: (1) The nature of adolescent girls' friendships, (2) idealising the friendship, and (3) friendship as a support system. The participants described how they started to think more about their friendships in adolescence and reflected on how different friendships could meet their personal needs. Emphasis was given to empathy and reciprocity as key to the girls' experiences of feeling supported by their friends. Supportive acts included listening to and providing a friend with advice, humour, and identity validation. Even though adolescence seems to be accompanied with more intimate and satisfying friendships, these girls also noted how boyfriends, jealousy, and a popularity hierarchy, introduced challenges in their friendships. Additionally, due to the demands of "niceness", the girls at times would avoid behaviours that could cause conflict or hurt a friend's feelings, thus devaluing their own experiences for the sake of maintaining an ideal harmonious friendship. Being unable to live up to the demands of being an ideal friend often left the girl

feeling guilty, disappointed, or burdened, created tension in the friendship, and could affect the quality of the friendship.

The findings of this study provide deeper insight into the workings of adolescent girls' same-sex friendships in South Africa. These girls' interpretations of rigid femininity ideals seemingly create barriers to the formation of meaningful friendships and highlights the need to equip girls with skills to effectively deal with conflict and differences amongst friends. On the other hand, this study also illustrates how compassionate, reciprocal, and empathetic friendships could contribute towards psychological resilience. Such friendships create supportive environments in which adolescent girls can work through their personal struggles and the challenges associated with adolescence.

**Keywords:** Adolescent girls, conflict management, empathy, femininity ideals, friendship, mental health, resilience, social support

## OPSOMMING

Vorige navorsing het dieselfde-geslag vriendskappe as 'n beskermende faktor vir tienermeisies se sielkundige welsyn identifiseer, terwyl 'n gebrek daaraan verband hou met depressie en laer vlakke van selfvertroue onder tienermeisies. Tog het tienermeisies se vriendskappe min aandag in die Suid-Afrikaanse literatuur ontvang. Die meeste navorsing in hierdie veld blyk kwantitatief van aard en is geneig om te fokus op nadelige vriendskapsinvloede en die gepaardgaande risikofaktore vir tienermeisies. Hierdie kwalitatiewe studie was daarop gemik om te verken hoe 'n groep Suid-Afrikaanse tienermeisies dieselfde-geslag vriendskappe ervaar. Verdere doelwitte was om die aard van hierdie vriendskappe te ondersoek; moontlike beskermende en / of risikofaktore wat binne hierdie vriendskappe funksioneer; en hoe die meisies hul posisies in die vriendskapsgroep onderhandel het.

Tien, 15 tot 16-jarige Wit middel- tot hoër klas meisies, inwoners van 'n meisieskoshuis in die Wes-Kaap Provinsie, Suid-Afrika, het aan hierdie studie deelgeneem. Ek het die data by wyse van individuele in-diepte semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude versamel en tematiese analise gebruik om die data inductief te analiseer met ATLAS.ti sagteware. Hierdie studie is uitgevoer binne 'n interpretatiewe navorsingsparadigma en ek gebruik *relational-cultural theory* as lens om die meisies se vriendskapservarings te verstaan. Etiese goedkeuring vir hierdie studie is verskaf deur die Universiteit Stellenbosch se Navorsingsetiekkomitee, die Wes-Kaapse Onderwysdepartement, en die betrokke skoolhoof.

Ek het drie sleuteltemas vanuit die data identifiseer: (1) Die aard van tienermeisies se vriendskappe, (2) die idealisering van die vriendskap, en (3) vriendskap as 'n ondersteuningsstelsel. Die deelnemers het beskryf hoe hulle meer begin dink oor hul vriendskappe in adolessensie en het reflekteer hoe verskillende vriendskappe hul persoonlike behoeftes kan bevredig. Klem is gelê op empatie en wederkerigheid as sleutel tot die gevoel dat hulle ondersteun word deur hul vriendinne. Ondersteunende daad was onder andere om na 'n vriendin te luister en haar te voorsien met raad, humor, en identiteits -validering. Alhoewel vriendskappe in adolessensie blyk om meer intiem en bevredigend te wees, het hierdie meisies ook opgemerk hoe kerele, jaloesie, en 'n populariteitshiërargie uitdagings aan hul vriendskappe gestel het. As gevolg van die eise van "ordentlikheid" sou die meisies by tye gedrag vermy wat kon lei tot konflik of 'n vriendin se gevoelens seermaak en sodoende hul

die ervarings devalueer ter wille daarvan om 'n ideale harmonieuse vriendskap te handhaaf. Wanneer meisies nie aan die eise van 'n ideale vriendin kon voldoen nie, het dit die deelnemers dikwels skuldig, teleurgesteld of bedruk laat voel, spanning in die vriendskap geskep, en kon die kwaliteit van die vriendskap beïnvloed.

Die bevindings van hierdie studie bied 'n dieper insig in die dinamika van tienermeisies se dieselfde-geslag vriendskappe in Suid-Afrika. Hierdie meisies se interpretasies van rigiede vroulikheids-ideale skep oënskynlik hindernisse vir die vorming van sinvolle vriendskappe en beklemtoon die behoefte om meisies met vaardighede toe te rus om effektief konflik en verskille tussen vriendinne te hanteer. Aan die ander kant illustreer hierdie studie ook hoe medelydende, wederkerige en empatiese vriendskappe kan bydra tot sielkundige veerkragtigheid. Sulke vriendskappe skep ondersteunende omgewings waarin tienermeisies deur hul persoonlike stryd en die uitdagings van adolessensie kan werk.

**Slutelwoorde:** Tienermeisies, konflikhantering, empatie, vroulikheids-ideale, vriendskap, geestesgesondheid, veerkragtigheid, sosiale ondersteuning

## **STATEMENT REGARDING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

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For many centuries philosophers and social scientists have acknowledged the essential nature of friendships. In the ancient Greek literature, a friend was someone outside of the household that could be relied on in times of hardship and would increase one's own likelihood of survival (Lynch, 2005). Approximately 65 years ago, Sullivan's (1953) early work was the first to spark an interest in the importance and value of friendship in healthy psychological development. Today, friendship as a source of social support is considered a protective factor against negative health outcomes (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1993; Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010; Gecková, Van Dijk, Stewart, Groothoff, & Post, 2003; Klineberg et al., 2006; Meyer, 2011; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006; Uchino, Bowen, Carlisle, & Birmingham, 2012). In addition, the ability to form meaningful friendships is regarded as one of the best diagnostic indicators of future adjustment (LeCroy & Daley, 2001; Roff, 1961). On the other hand, a lack of friendships has been linked to mental health issues including depression, loneliness, psychosomatic illness, and substance abuse (Duck, 1991; Knickmeyer, Sexton, & Nishimura, 2002). Hence, a large body of research has investigated the role of friendship in an individual's mental well-being across the lifespan (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013; Rubin et al., 2006; Thorne, 1993).

Changes in the initiation and maintenance of friendships seem to occur across the lifespan. According to Rubin et al. (2006), friendships typically progress through different stages in early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. In early childhood (3 to 7 years) play-based friendships form and are based on sharing toys and engaging in the same games and activities. Louw and Louw (2014) observed the process of sex segregation within play-based friendships. Sex segregation refers to the tendency of males and females to separate rather than integrate during leisure activities throughout the lifespan (Thorne, 1993). During middle childhood (8 to 11 years), friendships become more selective and psychologically based with key emphasis placed on loyalty and faithfulness. As the child ages, friendships typically become more stable and long-lasting. Adolescents (12 to 18 years) develop a growing awareness of others' needs and desires, steering them towards mutuality and equity in their friendships. Friendships formed during and beyond adolescence, are characterised by

intimacy, self-disclosure, and mutual support (Rubin et al., 2006; Thorne, 1993). During this stage, friendships tend to become less self-centred and more concerned with friends' needs (La Gaipa, 1981). Even though adolescents, compared to children, form fewer bonds with others (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013), friendships in adolescence seem to be more meaningful (Markiewicz & Doyle, 2016; Rowsell, Ciarrochi, Heaven, & Deane, 2014; Sharabany, Gershoni, & Hofman, 1981; Sullivan, 1953).

Various researchers have identified friendship as a salient component in the lives of adolescents (Bokhorst, Sumter, & Westenberg, 2010; Chu et al., 2010; Hendry & Kloep, 2012), especially for late adolescent girls (Apter & Josselson, 1998; Brown, Way, & Duff, 1999; Steenkamp, 2005). Compared to earlier developmental stages, adolescents develop the ability to think and act independently from their parents. As a result, there is a shift away from full-time parental involvement towards a greater influence from friends (LeCroy & Daley, 2001). Late adolescence, referring to individuals aged 16 to 18 years, can be described as a transitional phase of development between childhood and adulthood (Fergusson, Woodward, & Horwood, 1998). A study on the prominence of social support sources indicated that parents and friends were perceived as equally supportive; only for late adolescents did friend support exceed parent support (Bokhorst et al., 2010). In South Africa, adolescents ranked their friendships, compared to other relationships, as highest on companionship measures (De Jager, 2011). Yet, Brown et al. (1999) point out that psychologists know little about the intricacies, nuances, and contexts of girls' friendships and peer relations.

Prior to the 1970s, research on friendship focussed predominantly on male peer groups, which then functioned as a norm against which female friendship experiences were compared (Bernard, 1982; Griffin, 2000). Resultantly, researchers have drawn attention to the differences between same-sex friendships amongst girls and boys. First, boys tend to form a part of larger, more inclusive friendship groups compared to smaller and more exclusive friendship groups amongst girls (McDougall & Hymel, 2007; Thorne, 1993). Furthermore, over the past 20 years, girls consistently rated their friendships to be more intimate and of a higher quality (Brown et al., 1999; Frith, 2004; Oransky & Marecek, 2009; Rose, Smith, Glick, & Schwartz-Mette, 2016). Similarly, South African research found that adolescent girls, compared to boys, rated their friendships with same-sex peers as a higher priority (Alberts, Mbalo, & Ackermann, 2003) and felt more supported by their best friends (De

Jager, 2011). On the other hand, researchers have highlighted the less stable, more fragile nature of girls' friendships (Benenson & Christakos, 2003; Berndt & Hoyle, 1985). Compared to boys' friendships, which are characterised by competitiveness and independence, the focus of girls' friendships seems to be on interdependence, loyalty, and nurturance (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987). This may explain boys' overall preference for organised games with a hierarchical structure, while girls supposedly choose to spend their time talking and sharing secrets (Maccoby, 2002).

The emergence of feminist research in the 1970s sparked a renewed interest in girls' same-sex friendships (Griffin, 2000; Roseneil, 2006). Late adolescent females tend to identify other females, rather than males, as their closest friends with whom they share intimate secrets (Way, Gingold, Rotenberg, & Kuriakose, 2005). Interestingly, in comparing same-sex to cross-sex friendships amongst adolescents, Barry, Chiravalloti, and May (2013) found that same-sex friendships contribute to better psychosocial adjustment. In a similar vein, researchers suggested same-sex friendships are amongst the most important relationships females develop across the lifespan (Crothers, Field, & Kolbert, 2005) and that negative same-sex friendship experiences during adolescence continue to impact on females' relationships in adulthood (Apter & Josselson, 1998).

Due to the importance girls place on their friendships, as well as their need for peer approval (Archard, 2011; Rudolph, 2010), girls tend to be more susceptible to friendship influences (Nielsen, 1996). The positive effects of friendship on adolescent girls' psychological, moral, and cognitive adjustment are well documented in the literature while a lack thereof have been found to be associated with depression, loneliness, and lower levels of self-esteem (Auerbach, Bigda-Peyton, Eberhart, & Webb, 2011; Brendgen et al., 2013; Hartup, 1996; Hendry & Kloep, 2012; Martínez-Hernández, Carceller-Maicas, DiGiacomo, & Ariste, 2016). It is therefore not surprising that female friendships are situated in the literature as critical connections that are vital to women's psychological well-being (Dare, 2009; Gilligan, 1982; Miller & Stiver, 1997; West, 2005). Yet, research on micro-politics and the associated concepts of popularity, competition, and relational aggression are situated as salient concerns in adolescent girls' friendship cliques (Bhana & Pillay, 2011; Thorne, 1993; Van Wyk, 2015).



In South Africa, friendship research is limited and centred on girls' experiences of cross-sex friendships, specifically romantic relationships, reflecting the dominant notion of the compulsory heterosexual culture we live in (e.g., Bhana, 2012; Macleod, 2003, Swart, 2005). Compulsory heterosexuality refers to the assumption that females are both naturally inclined and obligated to eventually find a male partner (Griffin, 2000). In addition, the available South African studies concerning girls' experiences of same-sex friendship were carried out in middle- and low-income communities (Lesch & De Jager, 2014; Van Wyk, 2015) and conducted in the context of deviant behaviour (George & Van den Berg, 2011), risky sexual behaviour, and aggression amongst girls (De Jager, 2011; Kotze & Foster, 2007). Despite the claim made by numerous international researchers that friendship plays a critical role in the lives of adolescent girls, friendship, as a possible protective factor, has received little attention in the South African literature.

### **1.1 Research rationale**

Worldwide, there is a growing concern regarding the oppression of women and girls (United Nations, 2015) and in South Africa, females' well-being is regarded as a priority area in The National Developmental Plan for 2030 (South African Government, 2015). Levine, Lloyd, Greene, and Grown (2008) highlight the need for social scientists to attend to the transition of young females into adulthood. In line with this, the United Nations' State of the World Population Report identified South Africa as one of the countries that must invest more in the youth (United Nations, 2015) as the country's future is dependent thereon (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2014). Yet, Swart (2005) points out that adolescence seems to be an under researched topic in South Africa.

Existing literature provides evidence that supportive friendships could serve as a protective factor for adolescent girls' mental health (Apter & Josselson, 1998; Miller & Stiver, 1997; Morelli, Lee, Arnn, & Zaki, 2015). Hence, designing school-based interventions that foster caring and supportive friendships may serve as a protective factor against developing unfavourable mental health outcomes (e.g., Qualter, 2003). For example, LeCroy and Daley (2001) argue that teaching girls social skills may help them to tap into the potential benefits offered by friendships, while avoiding the problems associated with a lack thereof. Health and social policy focusing on friendships might further be a cost-effective strategy for enhancing well-being at the population level. Such a strategy may be of particular relevance

in developing countries, like South Africa, where the national mental health system is faced with a limited availability of resources and a strained government health budget (Department of Health, South African Government, 2016).

Before designing interventions to be applied in South African schools or communities, however, it is necessary to develop an understanding of the nature of girls' friendships within the South African context. After reviewing the international literature on same-sex friendships amongst girls, I found that the majority of studies are: (1) based primarily on studies of gender differences, (2) quantitative in nature, and (3) lack an in-depth study of girls' perspectives of their own friendship experiences. In a similar vein, Johnson (as cited in Griffin, 2000) criticised feminist scholars for their preoccupation with theorising girls' position in society rather than asking girls to speak for themselves.

I have searched the databases SAepublications, SAGE Journals, and PubMed using the keywords "friendship", "adolescent", "teenager", "youth", "girl", "female", "same-sex", and "lived experience" in various combinations. In my search I found no peer-reviewed South African qualitative studies on adolescent girls' friendship per se. Comparing the current available international and South African literature concerning adolescent friendships, there is an apparent need for South African studies to not only focus on relationships in the context of deviant behaviour, risky sexual behaviour, and violence, but on the friendship quality itself (see also De Jager, 2011). Moreover, Lesch and Furphy (2013) encouraged researchers to explore the range of subjective experiences, including both the positive and negative aspects, within South African adolescent friendships.

Given the paucity of research on adolescent girls' friendships in South Africa, the purpose of this study was therefore to explore adolescent girls' narratives and the meanings they attach to their same-sex friendships in South Africa. This will allow me to understand girls' subjective experiences of the possible challenges and/or protective mechanisms associated with these friendships which in turn will contribute to an understanding of the nature of girls' friendships within a South African context.

## **1.2 Aims and research questions**

The aim of this study was therefore to first explore adolescent girls' lived experiences of their same-sex friendships. Second, I wanted to develop an understanding of the possible protective and/or risk factors associated with these friendships. Lastly, I wished to explore the group dynamics and possible micro-politics within these friendship cliques. In light of this, the proposed study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do adolescent girls describe their same-sex friendships?
2. What are the girls' experiences of their same-sex friendships?
3. How do they negotiate their own and others' positions within a friendship clique?

## **1.3 Outline of the thesis**

This thesis has seven chapters following Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature in the domain of adolescent friendships, with a focus on girls' same-sex friendships. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework I used to make sense of my findings. Chapter 4 describes the methodology that guided the research procedures. I report on and discuss the findings of this study by drawing on existing literature in the field and present these findings as three dominant themes in separate chapters. Chapter 5 describes the nature of these adolescent girls' friendships, Chapter 6 illustrates how an idealised friendship discourse influenced the participants' friendship experiences, and Chapter 7 demonstrates how these girls' friendships could be viewed as social support structures. Chapter 8 concludes with the strengths and limitations of this study and includes recommendations for practice and future research.

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## Chapter 2: Literature Review

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### 2.1 Defining adolescent friendships, groups, networks, and cliques

Psychologists describe friendships as voluntary, horizontal relationships where emphasis is placed on reciprocity and mutuality while friends are perceived as being equal in the relationship (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013; Bukowski, Newcomb, & Bagwell, 1998). Mutuality and reciprocity include expectations regarding receiving and giving support (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Other researchers identified intimacy, a high level of self-disclosure (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1998), and trust (Hall, 2014; Policarpo, 2015) to be defining features of adolescent friendships. Some researchers, however, have questioned the assumption that power is equally distributed in all friendship relationships (Veniegas & Paplau, 1997), while cultural differences led researchers to question the assumption that friendships are always voluntary relationships (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). For this reason, Worthen (2009) stressed the importance of considering culture and gender influences when studying specific friendships. Knickmeyer et al. (2002) reviewed the literature on same-sex friendships amongst females and defined these friendships as “one type of social support characterized by intimacy, self-disclosure, mutual concern, a sharing of resources, equality in power, and ultimately empowering” (p. 38). In a sample of well-educated heterosexual women, Rind’s (2002) qualitative analysis suggested three central characteristics of female friendship, namely a sense of familiarity, a shared history, and an understanding that derives from their emotional empathy and shared history.

Adolescents, on the other hand, tend to struggle to define friendship when asked directly (Fehr, 1996; Policarpo, 2015). Fischer (1982) stated that individuals tend to refer to anyone, who does not have a specific title, are of a similar age, and with whom he or she interacts regularly, as a friend. Resultantly, friendships and peer relationships are often used interchangeably in the literature (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). Even so, researchers noted how adolescents reported to have different “types” of friends and that these friendships seem to exist on a continuum depending on the level of intimacy and amount of time spent together (Cotterell, 2007; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Van Cleemput, 2012). For example, youngsters have categorised their friends as “not so close” to “best” friend (Cotterell, 2007), “causal”,

“good”, or “best” friend (Hartup & Stevens, 1997), “very close friend”, “just friend”, and “person I know” (Van Cleemput, 2012). According to Thorne (1993), adolescents view their friendships to exist on a continuum due to advancements in social reasoning that enable them to move away from categorist thinking.

Dyadic friendships, however, do not occur in isolation and are interconnected in more complex friendship structures, such as groups, ultimately forming a larger adolescent friendship network (Scholte & Van Aken, 2006). Friendship networks and groups are often used interchangeably, but Cotterell (2007) contends that they co-exist as different social entities. Friendship groups are embedded within the network and may overlap so that individuals may form a part of different groups within the same network. Indeed, researchers found that, from early to late adolescence, friendship group boundaries become increasingly fluid (Brown, 2003; Rubin et al., 2006).

The possibility of more fluid group boundaries in adolescence seems to be accompanied by a tendency to engage in more diverse friendships (Van Cleemput, 2012). Additionally, due to improved abilities in abstract reasoning and differentiation of the self and others, Markiewicz and Doyle (2016) noted how adolescents are able to recognise how different friends have the capacity to meet their different social needs. In other words, different friends may play different roles in the adolescent’s social development (Brown & Klute, 2006). For example, Policarpo (2015) described an “intimate friend” as a trustworthy confidant with whom the individual often self-disclosed, while a “good friend” provided unconditional support and advice. Likewise, different friends could fulfil different roles in a friendship group. Gilman (1985) identified three main types of roles individuals usually play in a group context, namely task roles, maintenance roles, and blocking roles. A task role refers to the actions of group members who stimulate others to greater activity by leading them to focus on a specific goal or to make a group decision, while maintenance roles focus on maintaining relationships or friendships within the group. A blocking role is performed when a member’s individual desires and needs are in contrast with the group’s purpose, resultantly causing frustration in the group (Gilman, 1985). Based on adolescents’ tendency to form friendships to meet the social needs of the individual, or the friendship group, Policarpo (2015) concluded that adolescent friendships are self-oriented as friends represent those who are in service of the ego.

Situated within these larger networks and groups, girls tend to form a part of subgroups, namely friendship cliques (Brown & Klute, 2006; Cotterell, 2007). Cliques can be defined as an exclusive group of three to 10 relatively close same-sex friends of a similar age, with whom the adolescent spends most of her time (Brown & Klute, 2006). Cliques are, therefore, considered by some as the most influential source of adolescent development (Conway, Rancourt, Adelman, Burk, & Prinstein, 2011; Witvliet, Van Lier, Cuijpers, & Koot, 2010). For example, even though dyadic friendships can satisfy certain developmental needs (Markiewicz & Doyle, 2016; Policarpo, 2015), Brown and Klute (2006) maintain that social needs such as social integration and group validation can only be satisfied within a group context. Validation of the self seems to play an important role in adolescents' identity formation (Kroger, 2007). On the other hand, researchers commented on a power hierarchy typically operating within adolescent girls' friendship cliques (Adler & Adler, 1995; Brown & Klute, 2006; Wiseman, 2009) where clique leaders, for example, may ridicule or tease other members to keep them in line with group norms (Brown & Klute, 2006).

Shrum and Cheek (1987), however, reported that clique membership declined from Grade 3 to Grade 12, opposing the belief that clique formation is a prominent feature of adolescent friendships. In line with the aforementioned findings (Brown, 2003; Rubin et al., 2006), Shrum and Cheek (1987) concluded that adolescents tend to associate with a larger group in a more diffuse structure, rather than small homogenous cliques, to gain exposure to more diverse ideas, opinions, and worldviews.

## **2.2 Friendship and mental well-being**

According to Newcomb and Bagwell (1998), different aspects of adolescent friendship can be developmental necessities, developmental advantages, or even developmental hindrances. In support of this, a factor analysis revealed how different friendship dimensions can act as a protective factor (e.g., intimacy, loyalty, prosocial behaviour) and/or risk factor (e.g., conflict and competition, inequality) for an adolescent's mental well-being (Berndt & Keefe, 1993). According to the World Health Organization (2014), mental well-being refers to a state in which "every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (p. 1). By definition, factors are called "protective" if they encourage behaviours that could lead to positive mental health outcomes or discourage behaviours that might lead

to negative health outcomes. Likewise, factors are labelled “risk” if they are associated with behaviours that might lead to a negative health outcome (Kirby, 2002). Hussong (2000) argues for a consideration of both these dimensions when investigating the significance, or quality, of adolescent friendships.

### **2.2.1 The protective value of friendships**

The positive effects of friendship on adolescents’ psychological, moral, and cognitive adjustment are well documented in the literature (see Hartup, 1996; Hendry & Kloep, 2012; Knickmeyer et al., 2002; Parker & Asher, 1987, for reviews of this literature). According to theorists, friendships can function as a form of social support to (1) serve as a buffer in times of stress (Cohen & McKay, 1984), (2) foster positive feelings and a sense of self-worth (Cohen & Willis, 1985; Vaux, 1990), and (3) allow individuals to regulate their affect, thoughts, and actions through conversations (Lakey & Orehek, 2011; Thompson, Flood, & Goodvin, 2006). Indeed, social scientists have identified close friendships across different socio-economic classes and cultures as the most satisfying and rewarding of all human relationships (Savin-Williams & Berndt, 1990) and as a profound protective factor especially amongst youth (Husband, 2015; Lester & Cross 2015; Soji, Pretorius, & Bak, 2015; Tao, Dong, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2000). According to Buhrmester (1998), the protective effects of friendship work via the fulfilment of both communal and agentic needs.

#### **2.2.1.1 Communal needs and social support**

Communal needs are based on interpersonal and social motives (Buhrmester, 1998). For example, researchers illustrated the supportive value attached to friendships to act as a protective factor via the provision of intimacy, trust, emotional sensitivity, a mutual understanding amongst friends (Barry et al., 2013), companionship (Sullivan, 1953), optimism and sharing a sense of humour (Fuhr, 2002; Hall, 2012; Weiss, 1974), and reciprocating supportive acts (Hall, 2012). Researchers concurred that companionship and intimacy seem to be the most common social provisions of adolescent friendships (Cotterell, 2007; Furman & Buhrmester, 1992).

Companionship may provide friends with emotional benefits such as relaxation from tension, affection, and humour (Cotterell, 2007). According to the literature, humour in companionship

enhances interpersonal well-being (Hunter, Fox, & Jones, 2016; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010) and was ranked as the most preferred characteristic in an ideal friend amongst adolescents (Weber & Ruch, 2012). More specifically, the use of affiliative humour may facilitate relationships in amusing others with the purpose of reducing their stress (Dyck & Holtzman, 2013; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003) and is further associated with reports of greater relationship satisfaction with support (Campbell, Martin, & Ward, 2008; Martin et al., 2003). Likewise, Fuhr (2002) found adolescent girls to often use humour in their friendships to cope with uncertainty and stress and getting cheered up.

Even though intimacy can be defined in numerous ways (Coterell, 2007), researchers seem to agree that intimacy in adolescent girls' friendships centres on talking, self-disclosing feelings, sharing secrets, and friends' ability to respond in a trustworthy and supportive manner (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Fehr, 2004). Additionally, Monsour (1992) identified physical contact as a defining feature of intimacy in same-sex friendships.

Talk, therefore, seems to be central to females' interactions and researchers have stressed the role of self-disclosure, listening, and giving advice towards fostering intimate and supportive friendships (Apter & Josselson, 1998; Greif & Sharpe, 2010; Harter, 1990). For instance, Rowsell et al. (2014) demonstrated that Australian adolescent girls emphasised talk and emotional sharing when spending time together, while Greif and Sharpe (2010) noted the act of listening and talking to be females' preferred way of helping one another (see also Crick, 1995; Fehr, 2004; Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016). Indeed, Johnson and Aries (1983) showed girls often discussed personal relationships and personal issues to ultimately help each other solve problems. Researchers agree that such emotional support and confiding can strengthen attachment in girls' friendships (Glover, Galliher, & Crowell, 2015) and are amongst the expectations that distinguish high quality friendships from less close ones (Duck, 1991; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Girls, however, seem to be selective when self-disclosing towards friends. For example, Burrows and Johnson (2005) wrote about menstruation as a taboo topic amongst young girls, and described their tendencies to hide signs of menstruation from friends (see also Moore, 1995; Van Wyk, 2015). Despite the seeming significance of discussing serious matters in girls' friendships, Apter and Josselson (1998) remind us that "frivolous" talk may also serve an important role to start and keep a friendship going and could also help to determine whether a person is a good fit for a friend.



In fulfilling friends' companionship and intimacy needs, various researchers identified empathy as a skill necessary to promote the exchange of social support in relationships (Ciarrochi et al., 2017; Ford & Aberdein, 2015; Hojat, Michalec, Veloski, & Tykocinski, 2015). Empathy can be defined as the ability to understand another's emotions and share another's emotions (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). The shift from focussing on the self's needs towards more concern for the needs of friends seems to occur in adolescence (Thorne, 1993). Adolescent girls in Martínez-Hernández et al.'s (2016) study described the benefits of supportive acts as friends who listen to one, display genuine concern for one's well-being, and are willing to place themselves in one's position to understand. Likewise, Morelli et al. (2015) asserted that an adolescent girl will only enhance the well-being of a friend if she is emotionally engaged while providing supportive acts, and Sebanc, Hernandez, and Alvarado (2009) demonstrated how late adolescent Latino girls rated some of their friendships to be of a higher quality based on understanding and identification. Sebanc et al.'s (2009) participants described the role of identification amongst friends as follows: "They know how to relate to me so it just helps. It gives you peace of mind to know there's people like you" (p. 207). Similar to Sebanc et al.'s (2009) findings, Linden-Andersen, Markiewicz, and Doyle (2009) highlighted how girls may infer a mutual understanding based on similarities which may, in turn, create a safe place for self-disclosure.

Like the perception of intimacy and empathy, perceived reciprocity was also associated with more favourable judgements of friendship quality in adolescence (Linden-Andersen et al., 2009) and could deepen the structure of girls' friendships (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Hartup, 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1997). In addition to the need to be cared for, individuals seemingly find meaning in contributing to the well-being of others (Weiss, 1974). In other words, being the provider of social support might be just as beneficial to one's personal well-being as to being on the receiving end of supportive acts (Jordan & Hartling, 2008; Morelli et al., 2015). Consequently, reciprocity in empathy and self-disclosure often lead to more intimate same-sex friendships among females (Diamond & Dubé, 2002; Furman & Robbins, 1985).

### ***2.2.1.2 Agentic needs and empowerment***

Besides satisfying communal needs, agentic needs can also be fulfilled in the context of friendships (Buhrmester, 1998). Agentic needs serve an empowering function and include the need for self-validation (Kroger, 2007), developing self-esteem (Candy, Troll, & Levy,

1981), forming an identity (Hey, 1997), acquiring interpersonal skills, and encouraging agency (Apter & Josselson, 1998; Hall, 2012). According to Buhrmester (1998), developmental changes in the nature and qualities of friendships are an outgrowth of changes in friendship needs. For example, as seen in the previous section, adolescent girls' friendships seem to be marked by an increase in intimacy and self-disclosure (Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016; Rowsell et al., 2014), which may be a reflection of their agentic need for self-clarification and social validation.

First, Candy et al. (1981) studied females (aged between 14 and 80 years) and determined that, besides the provision of intimacy, the provision of recognition and self-esteem was posited as the most important function of female friendships. Moreover, nurturance, encouragement, and reassurance of self worth may promote feelings of personal competence (Erdley, Nangle, Newman, & Carpenter, 2001) and tend to be amongst the strongest predictors of adaptive skills among adolescent girls (Warren, Jackson, & Sifers, 2009). For example, by simply listening to her, attending to what she is doing, and asking her advice, will show the girl that her opinion is valued, and therefore, indirectly contribute to her self-esteem (Carnegie, 2010). Another way for friends to enhance a girl's self-esteem is to affirm, validate, and reinforce her identity (Hall, 2011; Hey, 1997).

Second, according to the literature, close same-sex friendships are important contexts for the co-construction of identities during adolescence (Kerpelman, Pittman, & Lamke, 1997; Morgan & Korobov, 2012; Sullivan, 1953). According to Hey (1997), friendship contexts serve an empowering function by allowing girls to practice and resist different identities. Given the space to share of herself may help the girl to gain deeper self-knowledge as interaction with friends allows her to see herself in novel ways. On the other hand, listening to her friends may increase the girl's capacity to understand the social world of others (Apter & Josselson, 1998). In the context of close girl friends' conversations, Morgan and Korobov (2012) identified validation, encouragement, and social feedback as integral to identity construction (see also Hall, 2011). If friends' social feedback was congruent with the girl's own identity beliefs, it seemed to confirm and strengthen the participant's identity, while other participants seemingly adjusted their identity beliefs to correspond to their friends' social feedback (Morgan & Korobov, 2012). Kroger (2007), on the other hand, argued that adolescents may choose different friends to validate different aspects of the self.

Third, Hendry and Kloep (2012) express the view that friendships provide adolescents with the opportunity to learn and practise various social skills which they can then apply elsewhere in future interpersonal relationships. Apter and Josselson (1998) contend that through their friendships with other girls, the young female may be exposed to ways of dealing with situations different to those experienced in her own home environment. As a result of comparison, girls tend to admire and learn from their friends. Friendships can, for instance, be considered a laboratory for the development of conflict resolution skills (Apter & Josselson, 1998). By experimenting with various conflict management strategies, the friendship context may serve an empowering function in teaching individuals how to deal effectively with future conflict (Sullivan, 1953).

The explosion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) across various countries (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012), including South Africa (Samuels, Brown, Leoschut, Jantjies, & Burton, 2013), allows adolescents to fulfil friends' communal and agentic needs, and maintain existing friendships by staying connected via the use of mobile phones and the internet. Van Cleemput (2012) demonstrated that the higher need for socialisation amongst Belgian adolescents was accompanied with many restrictions, such as rigid class schedules and structured leisure activities. Even though Valkenburg and Peter (2011) proposed that online communication may replace face-to-face interactions and diminish the quality of friendships in adolescence, various researchers suggested that ICTs may create additional opportunities for adolescents to communicate, thereby increasing their feelings of closeness (Davis, 2012; Dolev-Cohen & Barak, 2013; Van Cleemput, 2012) and reaffirming their friendships and sense of belonging regardless of their physical location (Davis, 2013; Van Cleemput, 2012).

In sum, the protective value of adolescent girls' friendships seems to act via the fulfilment of communal needs, including the provision of companionship and intimacy, and agentic needs, such as reassuring self-worth and co-constructing an identity. Given the so-called high levels of intimacy, self-disclosure, and empathy in girls' friendships, it is not surprising that Davidson and Packard's (1981) study illustrated the therapeutic value of female's friendships. Sullivan (1953) and GreyWolf (2013) similarly suggested that intimate friendships may be valuable in creating a supportive atmosphere in which girls can work through their personal struggles, and may therefore possess "psychotherapeutic possibilities". Additionally, friendships may provide a context to improve aspects of well-being that have gone awry in

previous developmental stages, such as the acquisition of conflict management skills (Sullivan, 1953). Although much has been written on the different types of supportive acts, such as providing a friend with companionship or comfort, some researchers pointed out the need to understand and investigate the deeper structure of these social provisions (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016; Warren et al., 2009).

Despite the widely acclaimed protective mechanisms connected to friendships, Bagwell and Schmidt (2013) caution against the belief that simply having a friend is sufficient to act as a protective mechanism against adverse mental health outcomes. Moreover, Frith (2004) warns against a romanticised view of girls' friendships which may obscure the complexities of their relationships. Indeed, in some circumstances, having a so-called friend may act as a risk factor for negative mental health outcomes (Brown et al., 1999; Wiseman, 2009). In her book *Queen Bees and Wannabees*, Wiseman (2009) situates friendships amongst girls as a “a double edged sword – they're key to surviving adolescence, yet they can be the biggest threat to her survival as well” (p. 3).

### **2.2.2 The dark side of friendship**

The potentially hostile processes and influences associated with friendships have received increasing attention over the past 10 to 15 years and are currently the focus of contemporary researchers in the field of adolescent peer relations (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013; Gonick, 2004; Letendre & Smith, 2011; Rose, Schwartz-Mette, Glick, Smith, & Luebbe, 2014).

Researchers have shed light on possible linkages between close relationships during adolescence and maladjustment and psychopathology later in life (Cook, Heinze, Miller, & Zimmerman, 2016; Dishion, Spracklen, Andrews, & Patterson, 1996). For example, a recent study demonstrated that girls' tendency to co-ruminate within their friendship groups might be linked to the development of depressive symptoms (Rose et al., 2014). In the section below, I first attend to research on micro-politics and the associated concepts of popularity, competition, and relational aggression as salient concerns in girls' friendship cliques. Second, I discuss how same-sex friendships tend to become a source of hurt, confusion, and struggle when girls entering adolescence start to negotiate dominant cultural views of femininity and gender relations within these friendships (Brown et al., 1999).

### ***2.2.2.1 Friendship, popularity, & competition***

Merten (1997; 2004) tries to explain the central role of popularity within friendships by suggesting that popularity endows girls with power and status in a specific social context. For girls, power often involves the authority to exclude (Hey, 1997). Merten (2004) distinguishes popularity from friendship, suggesting that popularity is grounded in and produces a feminine image that emphasises the male gaze. Conversely, friendship seems to be grounded in a feminine image that nurtures, values, and respects the other's experience. Even so, in studying girls' friendship groups, Eder (1985) asserts that popularity, rather than forming close friendships, has become increasingly important and is evident in the hierarchical structures of girls' friendships. LeCroy and Daley (2001) further noted that the desire to be popular could become a source of friction in adolescent girls' friendships.

Related to popularity, girls' level of physical attractiveness may influence their status in the school context (Bleske-Rechek & Lighthall, 2010). According to Jones and Crawford (2006), adolescent girls tend to create an appearance culture with their peers, which is modelled on ideal beauty norms in society. Consequently, appearance and self-presentation tend to be a central topic in girls' conversations (Webb, Zimmer-Gembeck, & Donovan, 2014; Young, Gabriel, & Schlager, 2014) while the pressure to meet beauty norms can have a direct impact on body satisfaction and eating pathology amongst adolescent girls (Basow, Foran, & Bookwala, 2007).

Researchers proposed that girls' focus on appearance is to gain attention from boys (Bleske-Rechek & Lighthall, 2010), while the centrality of boys in their talk is often situated as a means to obtain advice for their mate-seeking endeavours (Bleske & Buss, 2000; Tesser, Pilkington, & McIntosh, 1989; Webb et al., 2014). Bleske-Rechek and Lighthall (2010) found that girls preferred friends who were on a similar level of attractiveness or "prettiness", because choosing friends who are too attractive would be perceived as competition, while less attractive friends might prevent the friendship group from attracting attention from males.

Researchers further illustrated how competition for boys' attention often negatively affected girls' friendships (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses, & Seekings, 2010; Thorne, 1993; Van Wyk, 2015). Numerous studies also indicated that boys, alongside gossiping, trust and

distrust issues, seem to be common sources of conflict in girls' friendships (Casper & Card, 2010; Crothers et al., 2005; Huntley & Owens, 2013; Van Wyk, 2015; Way et al., 2005). A qualitative investigation of South African adolescent girls' friendships revealed a tendency to tell stories about competition and conflict, as opposed to friendship intimacy (Van Wyk, 2015). Van Wyk continues to explain how these girls used relational aggression strategies, such as gossiping, to regulate normative femininity concerning acceptable self-presentation. In turn, these strategies helped them to become the preferred objects of boys' attention.

Due to this seeming competition amongst girls for popularity and boys' attention, girls tend to employ relational aggressive strategies (Field, Crothers, & Kolbert, 2006). Relational aggression, defined as the manipulation of peer relationships with the intent to inflict harm, can be viewed as a social power needed to climb the hierarchy in schoolgirls' cliques (Grotperter & Crick, 1996). Relational aggression, as opposed to direct aggression, is often considered a more socially acceptable way for females to express their anger (Hunter et al., 2016). International (Field et al., 2006), as well as South African (Bhana & Pillay, 2011) research, illustrate that relational aggression, such as gossiping and social exclusion, may be a painful and threatening experience for many girls. Relational aggression could be a risk factor for a host of adjustment problems including victimisation, loneliness, anti-social behaviour, delinquency, and other mental health problems (see Burton & Leoschut, 2013 for evidence of relational aggression in South Africa). According to Casper and Card (2010), girls may have a heightened vulnerability to betrayal and feelings of exclusion due to the higher level of intimacy and self-disclosure in adolescent girls' friendships.

Even though relational aggression continues throughout the lifespan (Werner & Crick, 1999), multiple age comparison studies point out that social and relational aggression seems to peak in early adolescence (Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Cairns, Cairns, Neckerman, Ferguson, & Garipey, 1989; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Russell & Owens, 1999). Most research on relational aggression, however, is descriptive and fails to explain the age differences in these studies (Mazur, 2008). One possible explanation is that, due to advances in cognitive reasoning and developing the ability to self-reflect, late adolescents may think more deeply about their friendships and explore alternative conflict management strategies (Shain & Farber, 1989). Additionally, according to Crothers et al. (2005), some late adolescent girls identify with non-traditional gender roles and are more likely to voice their opinions and react directly towards conflict.

Besides a so-called appearance culture influencing girls' friendships, Hepworth et al. (2016) argued that friends' drinking behaviour in social settings could promote adolescents' acceptance of a drinking culture. Brown et al. (1999) contends that social drinking is often portrayed in the media as a marker of successful relationships and may, therefore, encourage girls to experiment with alcohol. It is acknowledged worldwide that adolescence is a high-risk period for experimentation with health-compromising behaviour such as alcohol use (Brown et al., 1999; Gilvarry, 2000; Madu & Matla, 2003). In South Africa, substance misuse among adolescents is a major concern (Morojele & Ramsoomar, 2016) and adolescents indicated that they mostly drink alcohol at weekend parties with friends, while the average age for first alcohol consumption was 15.3 years (Grade 9) (Madu & Matla, 2003).

### ***2.2.2.2 Femininity ideologies and girls' friendships***

Recently there has been an increased focus on contextual understandings of women's experiences (O'Connor, 1998; Policarpo, 2015). Willenreiter (2010) examined adolescents' perceptions of social interaction and suggested gender roles to be the most important factor shaping social processes in an American school cafeteria. Other researchers agree that adolescent girls' friendships may function as a space where gender ideology is enacted on a regular basis and where girls could "do gender" while engaging with their friends (Felmlee, Sweet, & Sinclair, 2012; Glasser, 2012). A femininity ideology refers to a set of beliefs shared by a specific culture on how women and girls ought to act, behave, and express their emotions and desires (Gergen, 1985). In other words, norms and ideals amongst girl friends are learned in the friendship group context, situated within larger societal ideas on how girls' ought to be (O'Connor; 1998). O'Conner illustrated how the internalisation of dominant femininity ideologies could be detrimental to girls' mental well-being. Further, Glasser (2012) suggests that girls in same-sex schools, compared to co-ed schools, may internalise such femininity ideals more strongly.

As girls enter late adolescence and womanhood, they tend to experience socialisation pressures to conform to the *good girl* stereotype. This good girl stereotype refers to social constructions of femininity that dictates how women should act, such as prioritising social connectedness and valuing the needs and desires of others ahead of one's own (Brown & Gilligan, 1993). Due to the high value placed on relationships and the tendency to define

oneself in relation to others (Gilligan, 1982), perceived friendship quality seems to be a strong predictor of self-esteem, especially for adolescent girls (Thomas & Daubman, 2001). It is therefore not surprising that girls, compared to boys, present with more mature social skills (Nielsen, 1996). Indeed, Gilligan (1982) states that girls are superior to boys in the sense that girls generally approach their relationships from a more empathetic, less self-focussed viewpoint. Other researchers, however, are critical of this statement, contending that focussing less on the self, girls tend to avoid behaviours that may threaten their friendships, such as voicing thoughts that may cause conflict, hurt, or anger others, and thus risk devaluing their own experience in the process (Jack, 1999; Tolman, Davis, & Bowman, 2015).

Research has highlighted how dominant femininity discourses may inhibit adolescent girls' ability to act and express themselves in a manner consistent with their inwardly experienced desires, values, and emotions (Lesch & Furphy, 2013; Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006). Young women may experience an inner conflict when they have to choose between abandoning their true selves and maintaining socially acceptable relationships versus staying authentic and risking the abandonment of their peers (Pipher, 1994). For example, Rind (2002) demonstrated how females felt discomfort when faced with conflict in their close friendships since fighting does not fit societal expectations of female friendships as harmonious and supportive. Likewise, Crothers et al. (2005) found that a sample of White 15-year-old girls avoided conflict in their friendships due to a fear of invoking negative emotions in others that might lead to disconnection from a friend (see also Field et al., 2006; Hazler & Mellin, 2004). Various researchers have cautioned against such tendencies by establishing links between inauthenticity and anxiety, depression, and negative evaluations of self-worth (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastelic, 1998; Jack, 1999; Schrick, Sharp, Zvonkovic, & Reifman, 2012; Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson, 2012). On the other hand, as seen above, girls may employ relational aggressive strategies as an alternative for direct aggression (Closson, 2009). For example, Hunter et al. (2016) found that adolescent girls also use humour to make fun of others as a strategy to express aggression in their friendships in a socially acceptable way.

According to researchers, behaviour in girls' friendships seems to be guided by rules that, if broken, can lead to tension in the relationship and possibly the dissolution of the friendships (Wiseman, 2009; Wright & Patterson, 2006). Friendship expectations can function as social



rules in the friendship and can be defined as prescriptive normative behaviours and highly valued qualities in ideal same-sex friendships (Hall, 2011). Researchers have cited help, support, and the ability to trust and confide in a friend as the major rules of girls' friendship (Fehr, 2004; Monsour 1992). After conducting an exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, Hall (2012) found a six-factor model for friendship expectations amongst adolescents. The factors included symmetrical reciprocity, agency, enjoyment, instrumental aid, similarity, and communion. Likewise, in a qualitative investigation, Policarpo (2015) explored young individuals' understanding of friendship and found the qualities unconditional support, being there in the good and bad times, and trust, emerged as rules that draw the boundaries of friendship. Interestingly, compared to males, females had particularly high expectations regarding symmetrical reciprocity, which entails trust, loyalty, and commitment to the friendship (Hall, 2012). Similarly, Hey (1997) stated that girls' friendships are governed by ethical rules referring to reliability, loyalty, reciprocity, commitment, confidentiality, trust and sharing. Studying the characteristics of ideal friends amongst Chinese adolescents, Cheng, Bond, and Chan (1995) attributed girls' focus on supportiveness and niceness as stereotypes that encourage females to develop nurturing skills. Since our knowledge about adolescent girls' friendships relies mainly on quantitative studies (Policarpo, 2014) and tends to centre on romantic relationships (Hall, 2014), researchers recommend that we need to better understand the ideals and norms of girls' friendships in specific contexts.

In line with international findings (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Cheng et al., 1995; Hall, 2012), Lesch and Furphy (2013) noted that in South Africa, beliefs about relationship expectations are influenced and shaped by femininity ideals. Ross (2015) noted that South African females participate in a discourse of "ordentlikheid". Also referred to as respectable femininity (Frith, 2004), being "ordentlik" involves being decent and caring for others. Exploring adolescent girls' experiences of their intimate relationships in the Western Cape, Lesch and Furphy (2013) found these girls tended to minimise conflict, mirroring their view that intimate relationships should not have serious conflict.

Wiseman (2009) posits that these rules and expectations may be problematic as girls often assume, rather than articulate, such rules in their same-sex friendships. Adolescents tend to use this ideal standard to evaluate themselves in the friendship (Fletcher & Simpson, 2001) while basing their friendship satisfaction on the extent to which expectations regarding these

qualities were met (Policarpo, 2015). As a result, expectations regarding supporting a friend in times of distress, might lead the girl to take on a friend's emotional distress as her own. Smith and Rose (2011) termed this phenomenon amongst girl friends as "empathetic distress" or the "cost of caring". Hall (2014), therefore, cautions against having too high and fixed standards for friends as higher standards can lead to more experiences of disappointment and is negatively associated with friendship satisfaction (see also Cheng et al., 1995; Flannagan, Marsh, & Furham, 2005)

Moreover, due to categorist/essentialist thinking during adolescence, Policarpo (2015) noted a tendency amongst adolescents to develop an idealised view on their friendships and have a low tolerance of unmet expectations. Compared to an older sample (65 years and older), adolescents expected their friends to "always be there" and to "trust them with one's life". Apter and Josselson (1998) similarly asserted that girls generally do not learn how to deal with differences and therefore have a low tolerance for differences in their friendships. Due to the merging of identities in adolescence, the emergence of differences could further feel like the betrayal of the friendship (Apter & Josselson, 1998).

In sum, both the aforementioned positive and negative facets of friendship contribute to adolescent adjustment and collectively determine the quality of friendships (Hussong, 2000). Newcomb and Bagwell (1998) state that high quality friendships may at times have negative consequences while lower quality friendships may also provide some protective mechanisms. Furthermore, quality depends on whether a friend can fulfil communal and agentic needs (Buhrmester, 1998) and is, therefore, largely a function of the individual's perception (Bukowski et al., 1998). Despite the vast number of quantitative instruments designed to assess friendship quality (e.g., Berndt's Friendship Inventory, Network of Relationships Inventory, Friendship Qualities Scale), Wilkinson (2008) identified a gap in the literature regarding the development of a psychometrically sound measure (see Furman, 1996 for a review). Evidently, there is a need for qualitative research to explore the nature and perceived quality of girls' friendships.

### **2.3 Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed the literature on adolescent friendships and highlighted the complexities of girls' same-sex friendships. First, I defined adolescent girls' friendships

including friendship networks, groups, and cliques. Thereafter I reviewed the literature on adolescent friendships and mental well-being. Whereas the close bonds and supportive nature of female friends have been consistently recognised, conversely, these friendships have also been portrayed as hierarchical cliques plagued by micro politics and relational aggression over status, popularity, and boys. Additionally, in adolescence, girls may start to negotiate dominant cultural views of femininity in their same-sex friendships, introducing further challenges in their friendships.

In sum, much is written on the “what” of friendship. For example, *what* are the protective and risk factors associated with girls’ friendships and *what* makes them different from boys’ friendships. There is a clear need to pay attention to the “why” and “how” of friendships. For example, *how* do friends deal with competition related to popularity and status and *why* do they continue to be friends despite the risks associated with it? These questions speak to the ongoing processes and interactions that occur within girls’ friendship cliques and how these determine the significance, and quality, of their relationships.

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## Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

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Since there seems to be no single unified theory of friendships, researchers have made use of relevant theories in social, personality, and developmental psychology to guide and explain discoveries about friendship (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). A comprehensive discussion of all these theories is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I will first provide a brief overview of some relevant social, personality, and developmental psychology to help us understand the formation and development of girls' friendships. Thereafter, I will discuss relational-cultural theory (RCT), which highlights the idea that connection, and therefore friendships, is integral to mental well-being. Compared to the aforementioned theories, which focus on the formation and development of friendships, I will use RCT to make sense of how friendships contribute to, or could impede, adolescent girls' mental well-being.

### 3.1 Social psychology and friendship

Social psychology, among others, studies interpersonal and intergroup relationships. Social psychological research has focussed on the formation of friendship bonds while research on group dynamics can also be applied to the friendship group context (Gilman, 1985).

Some social psychology theories explain why friendship bonds form between or amongst certain girls. For example, theories on the propinquity effect (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950), the mere exposure effect (Zajonc, 2001), and the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) are based on the central tenet that creating spaces for contact amongst individuals increases the likelihood that they will interact. These theories posit that over time close proximity may lead to mutual liking, reduction of potential stereotypes, and ultimately the formation of friendships. For example, researchers found that living in the same neighbourhood and attending the same school increased the likelihood for adolescents to become friends (Crosnoe, 2000; Epstein, 1983).

According to Allport (1954) contact will be most effective for friendship formation under certain optimal conditions. These include cooperation on common goals, equal status amongst participants, and institutional support for contact to occur. Roommates, for example,

share a common goal of maintaining a mutually satisfactory living environment (Nesdale & Todd, 1998; Van Laar, Levin, Sinclair, & Sidanius, 2005), and therefore hold the possibility for friendship formation.

The social identity theory (SIT) has been developed to make sense of intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). I will explain SIT by applying it to relations amongst girls' friendship groups. An individual's social identity refers to that portion of one's self-concept that is based on one's perceived group membership. As girls form a part of various social groups, they form multiple social identities based on gender, race, class, etc. Girls who form a part of a certain friendship clique may internalise the perspectives and values of this clique, which will comprise yet another group identity. In order to increase their feelings of self-worth, girls tend to focus on enhancing the status of the group to which they belong (i.e., their in-group). Such efforts may involve seeking negative aspects or holding prejudiced views against the out-group (i.e., the friendship clique one does not form a part of). Conversely, girls will focus on complying with what they consider the strengths of the in-group are.

### **3.2 Personality psychology and friendship**

Compared to other relationships, friendships are unique in that individuals typically choose their friends (Bagwell & Schmidt, 2013). For this reason, researchers have investigated patterns in the personality type pairing of friends. Theories including the repulsion hypothesis (Rosenbaum, 1986) and similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1971) are based on the central tenet that the more similar a girl's attitudes and beliefs are to those of another, the more likely it is for her to be attracted to, and befriend the other girl. A large body of research points towards the notion that individuals choose their friends based on similar personality traits (Akers, Jones, & Coyl, 1998; Linden-Andersen et al., 2009; Sebanc et al., 2009) and similar levels of attractiveness (Bleske-Rechek & Lighthall, 2010). Choosing friends similar to the self may reduce the possibility of disagreement and conflict (Huntley & Owens, 2013) and could be important in establishing a connection (Sebanc et al., 2009) and a mutual understanding between friends (Linden-Andersen et al., 2009). Like Sebanc et al. (2009), Corio (2015) suggested that by discovering similarities and mutual interests through talking, studying, and eating together, roommates are likely to become affiliated.

Concerns regarding causality effects between similar personalities and friendship choices, however, arise when studying the work of Giles (1979). In his communication accommodation theory, Giles (1979) argues that individuals may adjust their manner of interacting with others in order to accommodate the other person, reduce the social distance, and to ease communication between them. In support of this, researchers determined that adolescents are socialised by their friends to adopt similar values (Meyer, 2011) and friends' characteristics and behaviours tend to converge over time (Berndt, 1982; Van Zalk, Kerr, Branje, Stattin, & Meeus, 2010).

Conversely, the model of complementarity suggests that it is exactly those differences (temperament, mode, or personality), which drive interpersonal attraction (Forsyth, 2010; Nowicki & Manheim, 1991). Indeed, girls may seek friends that complement their preferred styles of behaviour, encouraging them to choose friends that differ from themselves regarding personality traits.

### **3.3 Developmental psychology and friendship**

For developmental psychology, when and why friendship formation occurs, and how these friendships may differ across the lifespan, are important areas of study. Such theories also aim to explain the role friendships play in an individual's movement through the various developmental stages. Hence, I will provide a brief overview of the work by developmental theorists Piaget (1971), Kohut (1985), Erikson (1959), and Josselson (1987).

Piaget (1971) studied the interplay between children and adolescents' cognitive development and their social interactions. As children enter adolescence, significant changes occur in their brain structure and function as they move into more advanced cognitive stages. Piaget (1971) termed this the *formal operational thinking stage*, when adolescents should display the ability to empathise with others, be tolerant of their opinions, and interpret behaviour from different viewpoints. According to Nielsen (1996), social cognition or social reasoning refers to the manner in which cognitive skills are applied to human interactions. It is therefore expected of adolescent girls to have developed the social cognition necessary to establish meaningful and reciprocal friendships.

Kohut (1985) (self psychology theories) highlighted the power of early interactions between the infant and primary caregiver and how these experiences may shape one's friendships later in life. From a self psychology perspective, social interactions between the infant and primary caregiver(s) will be described as interactions between the infant's *self* and his or her *self-objects*. Observing the connection with one's self-objects is central to the theory of self psychology. Kohut (1985) suggested that self-objects are inner representations of external objects or people. These external objects or people, therefore, form a part of an individual's sense of self and are necessary for normal interpersonal functioning. According to Kohut (1985), a healthy sense of self will only develop once the needs for mirroring (i.e., admiration for qualities and accomplishments), idealisation (i.e., being a part of another's admirable qualities), and twinship (i.e., mutuality in a relationship) are met. When applying Kohut's (1985) theory to adolescent girls, the young female may be unable to incorporate reliable and self-assuring self-objects into her sense of self if the primary caregiver fails to meet these self-object needs. Consequently, she will become overly dependent on others, such as her friends, to provide her with those functions.

Other developmental psychologists, including Erikson (1959) and Josselson (1987), focussed on the role friendships play in assisting the adolescent in forming an identity. A woman's identity may serve as a guiding principle for her sense of self, her priorities, and decision-making processes (Josselson, 1987). According to Erikson's (1959) psychosocial theory of development, development refers to the continuous adaptation to society's demands and challenges. The challenge for adolescents is to form a self-identity that is independent from their parents but in line with the ideals and expectations of their peer group. The inability to establish an identity may lead to role confusion and feelings of uncertainty, resulting in a reduced ability to achieve the challenges of late adolescence and early adulthood – i.e., achieving real intimacy and forming close friendships. Erikson (1959), however, suggested that the formation of close friendships may precede identity formation in adolescent girls. In other words, a girl will only be able to define herself in relation to others. Yet there is much critique of this view (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Sorell & Montgomery, 2001).

In accordance with Erikson's (1959) early work, Josselson's (1987) theory of identity development also stresses the importance of peer groups in shaping young women's identities. The peer group provides a context in which adolescent girls can experiment with alternative selves, and experience an "identity crisis", before committing to certain beliefs

about the self. Josselson (1987) named adolescent girls in this phase of identity formation as the moratoriums or searchers. In a similar vein, Maccoby (2002) noted that the activities and interactions within all-girls friendship groups influence gendered identities. Hence, how adolescent girls perceive and experience their friendships may inform their sense of self and could therefore play a critical role in their mental well-being.

Girls, compared to boys, are more likely to foreclose their identities. Gilligan (1982) elaborates on this stance by stating that girls tend to place others' expectations ahead of their own personal needs and interests, often preventing them from exploring the self and other options. In her groundbreaking work, *Toward a new psychology of women*, Miller's (1976) writings on her experience of conducting interviews with diverse women echoes the findings of Gilligan (1982) that "women's reality is rooted in the encouragement to form themselves into the person who will be of benefit to others" (p. 72). Hence, these authors argue that identity formation in females takes place in the context of relationships – her sense of self may be organised around her ability to initiate and maintain affiliations and relationships with family members, romantic partners, significant others, and friends. Miller (1976) therefore reasons that girls' friendships with other girls may be centred on an inner goal – receiving affirmation and confirmation. This supposed inner goal seems to align with what Kohut (1985) termed the self-object need for mirroring. This process of identity formation may explain why the majority of adolescent girls place great value on their friendships (Alberts et al., 2003; De Jager, 2011) and express a loss of sense of self when they lose a friend (Cannon, Hammer, Reicherzer, & Gilliam, 2012).

### **3.4 Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT)**

How and when girls form relationships, and the role these connections play in female development, are key components of RCT. RCT is grounded in a feminist perspective as it emerged from the notion that traditional theories of development do not account for the unique experiences of females as a part of the human experience (Miller, 1976). To date, psychological theory-building has focussed primarily on White European male perspectives and tend to emphasise autonomy and independence, rather than relational, aspects in development (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, 2008).



RCT is based on the initial writings of Jean Baker Miller, refined by the efforts of female psychologists Judith Jordan, Alexandra Kaplan, Irene Stiver, and Janet Surrey, and continues to evolve within a diverse network of women. Lerner (as cited in Jordan, 2016) considers RCT to represent “the most significant shift in psychodynamic thinking since Freud, moving us toward a more accurate, compassionate, and multi-layered understanding of women and human relationships” (p. 1).

In addition to its feminist underpinnings, RCT has roots in developmental and evolutionary psychology, both of which emphasise the importance of relationships throughout the lifespan. Experiences of interpersonal relationships have been linked to brain development (Siegel, 1999), identity formation (Erikson, 1959; Josselson, 1987; Kohut, 1985), and are fundamental to survival and reproduction (Lewis, Al-Shawaf, Russell, & Buss, 2013).

**Central tenets of RCT.** In developing her theory, Miller (1976) attempted to answer two fundamental questions: (1) What kinds of relationships foster psychological development and (2) what factors within relationships could result in “pathology”. In addition, she also considered the role of a specific cultural or socio-economic context in shaping relationships.

Fundamentally, RCT suggests that “all growth occurs in connection, that all people yearn for connection, and that growth-fostering relationships are created through mutual empathy and mutual empowerment” (Miller & Stiver, 1997, p. 8). A core focus here is a movement toward mutuality within a relationship. People do not only have a need to be cared for and to be treated with respect, but need to give and find meaning in contributing to the well-being of others. The importance of relationships lies within the provision of social support and the opportunity to participate – this constitutes a growth-fostering relationship (Jordan & Hartling, 2008).

Central to RCT is the term “relational resilience”, defined as the capacity to form or to move back into growth-fostering connections in times of stress. In contrast to traditional definitions of resilience as the ability to be autonomous and self-reliant when coping with psychological pressures, RCT principles assert that an individual’s engagement in mutually empathetic and responsive relationships functions as the source of resilience (Jordan & Hartling, 2008). In support of this stance, various researchers asserted that females preferred relational coping

styles such as talking and sharing personal distress with friends (Crick, 1995; Fehr, 2004; Greif & Sharpe, 2010).

Miller (1986) highlighted five outcomes of growth fostering relationships, which is known as *the five good things*. These include: (1) a sense of zest, (2) clarity about oneself, the other and the relationship, (3) a sense of personal worth, (4) the capacity to be creative and productive, and (5) the desire for more connection. Jordan (2002) further explains how connection to others contributes to psychological and relational development on the basis of seven core principles of RCT:

1. Individuals grow through and toward relationships throughout the life span.
2. Movement towards mutuality rather than separation marks mature functioning.
3. Psychological growth is characterised by the ability to engage in increasingly complex and diversified relational networks.
4. Mutual empowerment and mutual empathy are at the heart of growth-fostering relationships.
5. Authenticity is a prerequisite for growth-fostering relationships.
6. Individuals grow by participating and contributing to the development of growth fostering relationships.
7. The goal of development is to realise and increase relational competence over the lifespan.

### 3.4.1 Key terms in RCT

**Relational movement.** Relational movement is based on the assumption that every relationship will move through periods of connections and disconnections. Whereas connectedness with others is viewed as the primary source of psychological well-being, being disconnected from others is considered the primary source of suffering and pain (Jordan, 2008). For example, Comstock et al. (2008) state that in their friendships, girls could experience isolation, fear, shame, humiliation, mistrust, oppression, marginalisation, and micro-aggressions. Even though these experiences are considered a natural occurrence in most relationships at some point in time; they could lead to disconnections from the relationship.

Jordan and Dooley (2001) described the experience of prolonged disconnection in relationships as simply the opposite of *the five good things*. These include a decreased sense of energy and feeling unable to act constructively in many aspects of one's life. Confusion regarding oneself and others and a general sense of decreased self-worth may prompt girls to turn away from relationships in general.

In an attempt to survive the emotional distress associated with being disconnected from others, individuals may develop specific strategies. These strategies are called *strategies of disconnection*, which include denying large parts of the lived experience or relating inauthentically (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Such strategies are often the result of a heightened sense of vulnerability and deep yearning for connection and involve a desperate effort to reconnect with others. Needless to say, this type of reconnection results in non-mutual relationships which are not growth-fostering, but in fact lead to further disconnection. This phenomenon, where individuals' attempts to reconnect results in further disconnection, is referred to as the *central relational paradox* (Miller, 1976).

Cannon et al. (2012) emphasise that although moments of disconnection are by their nature painful, these moments are often fertile processes within friendship. Moments of disconnection elucidate underlying dysfunctional relational patterns and provide girls with the opportunity to name and understand what is truly happening within their friendships. Working through these disconnections may contribute to girls' resilience and build their relational competence. Relational competence is linked to the idea of relational resilience and is defined as the ability to determine which friendships are healthy and thriving and which friendships need repair or need to be ended (Cannon et al., 2012). If, however, an individual is unable to move past shame-based and mistrustful interpersonal experiences and disconnections, he/she runs the risk of experiencing feelings of condemned isolation.

**Chronic disconnections and condemned isolation.** Chronic disconnection differs from the aforementioned acute disconnections. According to Jordan (2010), acute disconnections, such as misunderstandings and rejections, commonly occur in all relationships. Chronic disconnection, on the other hand, may result from experiencing the adverse effects of unequal power dynamics, such as the oppression of females, or being continually exposed to profound non-empathetic responses, such as emotional abuse (Jordan, 2010). Stated otherwise, chronic disconnection may occur on an interpersonal or societal level. Whereas acute disconnection

serves an important signal for change in a relationship and contributes to building relational competence, individuals in a state of chronic disconnection may feel powerless and become alienated from self and others (Jordan, 2010). Resultantly, chronic disconnection may ultimately force individuals into a state of condemned isolation.

Jordan (2010) considers condemned isolation to be the ultimate point of disconnection – i.e., where one feels shut out from the human community. The experience of condemned isolation is marked by feelings of self-blame, loneliness, and hopelessness. To avoid such feelings, individuals will engage in aforementioned *strategies of disconnection* – and the cycle continues.

**Power and control.** As situated in the central tenets of RCT, subordination and authenticity are incompatible. In other words, growth-fostering and authentic relationships are not possible if one is in a position of subordination (Jordan, 2002). Conflict within a relationship, therefore, plays a crucial role to avoid being subordinated and silenced. Experiencing anger might be a reflection of hurt or injustice within a relationship and is an important signal in a relationship for a shift or change in the relationship (Cannon et al., 2012). However, pressures to conform to societal stereotypes are often problematic. For example, if girls are not able or allowed to express their true feelings in a relationship because girls are expected to be nice (Hey, 1997), relational injustices could occur, and girls could silence themselves and follow a path to isolation.

Jordan (2002) used a RCT framework to explain how members of the dominant culture may hold power over the relational images of the subordinates. Relational images, like Kohut's (1985) self-objects, serve as an inner framework to make sense of relations with others, are influenced by past experiences, and could influence future expectations of relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997). For example, females often internalise the dominant relational image, resultantly viewing themselves as subordinate to males and someone who will be of benefit to others (Miller, 1976). Not only do they develop distorted images of self, but they tend to apply this view to other females as well, hence distorting their images of relational possibilities.

The domination-subordination model is not only applicable to gender inequality and racism on a societal level, but may also be applied to the dynamics within or amongst girls'

friendship cliques. Within the school context, the popular friendship clique may take on the role of the dominant culture. In turn, these dominant figures may hold controlling images that influence the views and expectations of the less popular girls' friendship cliques. In sum, power and controlling images may have an influence on how girls view and interact with their girl friends.

### **3.5 Summary**

Each of the aforementioned theoretical perspectives provides valuable insight into the formation and maintenance of adolescent friendships. In my study of adolescent friendships, I have chosen to take on a broader view to gain a clearer understanding of adolescent friendships.

By drawing on theories from personality, social, and developmental theories of friendship, I have attempted to answer the question: How and why are adolescent girls' friendships formed and maintained? I used a social and personality psychology perspective to understand how and why girls choose their specific friends and affiliate with specific friendship groups. Piaget (1971) believes that adolescents' more advanced cognitive skills, and therefore social reasoning abilities, enable them to form meaningful and reciprocal friendships for the first time. Kohut (1985) noted that how girls relate to friends in adolescence might be influenced by earlier stages in their development. Faced with the opportunity to interact with their peers, adolescents may seek friends who will fulfil their attachment or self-object needs that could not be met by their early relationships with primary caregivers. On the other hand, Erikson (1959) and Josselson (1987) suggest that friendships assist the adolescent girl in reaching a developmental milestone, namely forming an identity.

Shifting towards a more in-depth focus on RCT, my aim was to develop an understanding of the role same-sex friendships play in the mental well-being of adolescent girls. According to RCT, real and meaningful connections are not always harmonious and comfortable; girls will at times experience shame, fear, and anger within their friendships. Such moments of disconnection may create tension inherent in moving away from others or hiding in protective inauthenticity. Following these strategies of disconnection may move one towards the path to chronic disconnection and condemned isolation, having adverse effects on mental health. Developing a relational awareness of one's movement through the cycle of connection and

disconnection toward mutuality in friendships, may contribute to the development of relational competence and resilience. According to RCT, it is exactly this process of strengthening relational resilience that is at the core of girls' mental well-being.

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## Chapter 4: Methodology

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This chapter focusses on the methodology I followed in conducting this study. First, I restate my research aims and explain how these, along with my research paradigm, informed my methodology. I then describe the participants and their social context, followed by the sampling strategies and procedures used. Further, I elaborate on procedures followed to collect and analyse the data and to ensure trustworthiness of this study. I reflect on my role as the researcher in this study and conclude this section with a discussion on ethical considerations.

### 4.1 Research aims

The aim of this study was first to explore adolescent girls' lived experiences of their same-sex friendships. Second, I wanted to develop an understanding of the possible protective and/or risk factors associated with these friendships. Lastly, I wished to explore the group dynamics and possible micro-politics within friendship cliques. In light of this, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do adolescent girls describe their same-sex friendships?
2. What are the girls' experiences of their same-sex friendships?
3. How do they negotiate their own and others' positions within a friendship clique?

### 4.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm refers to the philosophical perspective from which the researcher approaches the research design, collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. Every paradigm is defined by its unique combination of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Cresswell, 2013). I conducted my research within an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretive research aims to describe people's first-hand experiences and to understand and interpret their words within a certain personal and societal context (Terreblanche, Kelly, & Painter, 2006).

The interpretivist ontological underpinning of my research was to capture the individual's experience of her friendships rather than searching for a single, objective truth. I acknowledged the existence of multiple realities as girls in the same friendship group can construct different, even contradictory, realities and attach different meanings to their friendships (Charmaz, 2006). How individuals make sense of their relational experiences are, however, often influenced by wider contextual ideological beliefs that guide and shape thoughts, actions, and expectations (Cavanagh, 2007). More specifically, Lorber (2001) argues that gender is a culturally specific organising principle and therefore plays an integral role in how people interact and create meaning of their lives. In this study I aimed to describe and understand the girls' experiences of their friendships in a specific context.

An interpretivist epistemological stance situates the researcher as the primary instrument who listens and observes carefully to make sense of people's experiences and words. In interpretive research, subjectivity is considered a necessary component as it enables the researcher to understand personal and social realities empathetically (Terreblanche et al., 2006). Transparency and self-reflexivity were, therefore, important aspects of my research to show how I, as the researcher, influenced the analysis of the data.

The aforementioned ontological and epistemological assumptions informed the methodology of my research. This study was located within an exploratory, qualitative research design. Qualitative methods refer to a broad class of empirical procedures concerned with the understanding of meanings and intentions that underlie human interactions and how these experiences are described in words (Silverman, 2010). The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the girls' subjective experiences of their friendship, rather than a focus on generalisations, and a qualitative approach was therefore deemed acceptable. Furthermore, the study was exploratory as little research has been done on adolescent girls' friendships in South Africa and the purpose of this study was to gain insight and familiarity for later investigation (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013).



## 4.3 Sampling

### 4.3.1 The participants and their social contexts

The sample for this study consisted of 10 late adolescent girls who had same-sex friendships and were resident in an all girls' boarding house in the Western Cape. The girls were all in the 10th grade and aged between 15 and 16 years. All the girls were White, spoke Afrikaans as their home language, and came from middle- to high-income households. Since level of education is strongly correlated with income level, I used the parents' highest level of education to predict their income class (Gregorio & Lee, 2002; Van Wyk, 2015). For all the girls, at least one parent received a tertiary education (obtained a diploma or degree), and could therefore be considered to come from middle- to high-income households.

For the purpose of maintaining anonymity, I refer to the school involved as School X in this thesis. School X is a prestigious Afrikaans medium all girls school with a rich history and tradition in the Western Cape. Approximately 700 girls (Grade 8 to 12) go to School X which is widely known for outstanding academic, cultural, and sport achievements. The school teachers, along with involved parents, seemingly cultivate an atmosphere of academic success and motivation amongst the girls. The school is further based on Christian principles, which form an active part of daily school life. These principles centre on a goal of living in harmony together which require having sympathy, respect, kindness, and compassion towards others, staying humble, and forgiving others for their wrongdoings.

Girls coming from various areas in the Western Cape reside in the boarding house of School X. Whilst attending events at the boarding house, I observed a focus amongst the girls on camaraderie and community and they often referred to the girls living in the boarding house as their "family". During these events, the girls appeared to spend a lot of time on their cell phones and taking photos. Furthermore, there seemed to be a rigid structure and strict rules in the boarding house which, for example, limited their free time to go into town.

Although the participants' descriptions of their friendships often aligned with the definition of "friendship cliques" provided in Chapter 2, I found that the word "clique" had negative connotations for the girls. For this reason, I used the terms "friendship group" or "friendship

circle” rather than “friendship clique” when discussing the participants’ friendship experiences.

### **4.3.2 Sampling strategy**

I employed a convenience intensity sampling strategy to recruit the participants from an all girls’ boarding house in the Western Cape. An intensity sampling procedure is a type of non-probability purposive sampling strategy and refers to searching for a rich, but not severe or deviant, example of the phenomenon of interest (Silverman, 2010). In purposive sampling, participants are considered knowledgeable informants and are selected based on specific purposes associated with answering a research question (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Furthermore, convenience sampling was employed since the participants were selected from the target population based on their willingness and availability (Bless et al., 2013).

After consulting 14 experts in the field of qualitative research, Baker, Edwards, and Doidge (2012) concluded that there is no rule of thumb when deciding on how many qualitative interviews are enough. Sample sizes in qualitative studies have ranged from 1 to 350 cases (Baker et al., 2012). According to Brannen (cited in Baker et al., 2012), deciding on a sample size should primarily be determined by the purpose of the research. In qualitative research and this specific study, the focus is not to make predictions, establish correlations, or to generalise findings to the larger population, but rather to attain an in-depth understanding of this group of adolescent girls’ friendships. As such, the use of a relatively small sample of 10 girls was appropriate (Marshall, 1996). Additionally, the school psychologist, boarding house matron and principal provided collateral information to further my understanding of these girls’ friendships.

Bowen (2010) advises qualitative researchers to recruit participants and expand their sample size until data saturation is reached. I followed Bowen’s (2010) guideline to recruit an initial sample size of approximately 10 cases. The tenth interview seemingly offered no new theoretical insights and, according to Bless et al. (2013), this point in the research process marks data saturation.

### 4.3.3 Sampling procedures

First, I contacted the school psychologist to arrange a meeting at School X. I informed her about the research I wanted to conduct and she gave me some insight into her experiences with the girls' friendships at School X. She suggested that I approach the girls living in the boarding house as participants for my study as this would ease logistics surrounding an interview setting and interview times. The school psychologist introduced me to the school principal and the boarding house matron. After meeting with the boarding house matron and informing her about my study, I inquired about events at the boarding house which I would be able to attend or volunteer at. Having regular contact with these individuals and spending time at the school and the boarding house, I familiarised myself with the girls' social context which later proved to be integral to contextualising and understanding the participants' experiences (Anney, 2014). Furthermore, being present assisted me in building a trust relationship with the girls while observing their interactions with friends from an early stage in the research process. According to Dundon and Ryan (2008), building rapport with participants may ease them into sharing their honest thoughts and feelings, in turn providing one with rich and insightful data.

I then arranged a time with the boarding house matron to meet with all the Grade 10 girls living in the boarding house. I met with 40 Afrikaans speaking girls in a comfortable lounge area in the boarding house. I introduced myself and briefly discussed the aims and purpose of my research project. I discussed ethical concerns and how I would deal with the confidentiality and anonymity of the data to be collected. This session was informal and interactive, and the girls seemed curious about me as the researcher. I answered all their questions, but when questions were raised around why I specifically chose to work with adolescent girls, the group shouted out answers such as, "Because all the action happens there" and "Because your identity forms then". Additionally, when they asked why I chose to work with girls, rather than boys, one girl in the group shouted out, "Because boys' friendships are boring!". When I prompted her to explain her statement, she replied: "Because they all like each other". The girls in this group, therefore, did not only demonstrate an understanding of the importance of friendships during adolescence, but were also able to identify what they considered to be a difference between girls' and boys' friendships.

Towards the end of the session I asked the girls to give me their names and contact numbers if they would like to participate in the study. Twenty girls volunteered to participate. From this list, the school psychologist helped me to identify 10 participants who would be able to provide me with rich data and examples from different friendships to prevent a bias of only one type of friendship. Besides having knowledge of the internal workings of specific friendships and individuals, the school psychologist also taught and coached sport through which she became an observant of the dynamics amongst different friendship groups. Drawing from my experience with the school girls, some of the personnel, and school psychologist herself, I considered her to be someone the majority of the girls could trust and confide in. For these reasons, I valued her as a helpful source and informant to identify rich case examples.

The girls suggested WhatsApp Messenger as their preferred form of communication and I created a WhatsApp group in which we could organise interview times and dates that would suit them. The boarding house matron also formed a part of this group which enabled her to know exactly when and where I would interview which girl. I invited the remaining 10 girls who volunteered to participate, but whom I did not interview, to attend an informal focus group on their music preferences and their thoughts and feelings while listening to this music.

#### **4.4 Data collection**

I collected data by means of in-depth individual semi-structured interviews. In this section, I discuss this method of collecting data and highlight possible limitations of a semi-structured interview. Thereafter I provide a description of the interview setting and elaborate on the data collecting strategies I employed as the primary research instrument.

##### **4.4.1 The semi-structured interview**

I conducted individual semi-structured, open-ended interviews to elicit a comprehensive and rich narrative that could be analysed qualitatively (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). All the interviews were conducted in the girls' home language, Afrikaans, and ranged between 42 and 81 minutes in duration while the average interview was 64 minutes. According to qualitative researchers, the interview is one of the most powerful ways to gain in-depth information of an individual's experiences, ideas, and the meanings he or she attaches to certain phenomena or

social processes (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Hugh-Jones, 2011). An interview with less structure, like a semi-structured interview, allows interviewees to give complex subjective accounts and to talk about friendship experiences that are relevant to them (Bless et al., 2013; Hugh-Jones, 2011; Sommer & Sommer, 1980). In line with this principle, my interview schedule relied on open-ended questions. Further, as the research instrument, I used various qualitative interviewing strategies to facilitate the interview process and to ensure that I collected thick descriptions from the girls. I discuss these strategies in a following section.

Although the semi-structured interview may be an effective way of collecting information, it has some limitations. One limitation relevant to my study was that the girls' speech was shaped, to some degree, by the questions they were asked and by what they thought the interviewer wanted (Hammersley & Gomm, 2008). In other words, the interviewee might present a socially desirable response that could be inconsistent with their actual reality. Nevertheless, I tried to avoid such biases by, for example, exploring both negative and positive friendship experiences in the interview and reporting on different types of narratives. Additionally, I avoided directive and leading questions.

#### **4.4.2 The interview setting**

Seidman (2006) talks about the importance of a research setting that should put the participant at ease and provide enough privacy to ensure that she is comfortable to give honest answers. The girls and boarding house matron agreed that a private, secure lounge in the boarding house would be suitable for this purpose. The lounge was a welcoming and cosy room while the chair was positioned at an angle, so the participant was not sitting directly opposite me. All the interviews were conducted after school hours and took place between 17h00 and 21h00 during a time that suited the girl best.

#### **4.4.3 The research instrument**

As the interviewer, and therefore the primary data collecting instrument, I was aware that my way of being and interacting with participants was central to the quality of the data that was to be collected. First, in building rapport at the start of the interview, I aimed to convey the message that I was truly interested and excited to learn from my participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. I encouraged them to be open and spontaneous when answering the

questions, assured them that there are no right or wrong answers, and that any information they shared I regarded as valuable for my study. Thereafter, I informed the participant of my reasons for conducting the research and clearly stated my objectives. I gave participants the opportunity to ask questions, whereafter I invited them to sign the consent forms and to complete a short biographic questionnaire (Appendix B).

At the beginning of the interview, I asked a more general question, such as asking the participant to talk about her home town or her interests. This made the participant feel at ease which prompted her to share and talk about her experiences in a comfortable manner. Starting off with an open-ended question, like asking her to tell me about her friendships, gave her the freedom to raise issues that were relevant to her friendships. My subsequent questions were guided by an interview schedule (Appendix C), which served as a catalyst to deepen the discussion. The ordering of questions was responsive to her developing narrative. Sensitive questions, such as questions regarding possible challenges amongst friends, were introduced at a later stage.

During the interview, I focussed on asking open-ended questions to learn about the participant's experiences of her friendships and the group dynamics involved. I listened actively and used relevant, appropriate probes, reflections, restatements, and paraphrases to gain insight (Seidman, 2006). Reflecting on their personal experiences during the interview seemingly made the girl feel understood, which in turn encouraged her to elaborate on the story being told, thereby eliciting thick descriptions that could be used for analysis (Pawlikowska, Leach, Lavalley, Charlton, & Piercy, 2007). Probes and paraphrases helped me to gain clarity and make sense of ambiguities in the girls' speech. At times, when my summaries were inaccurate, the girls corrected me which helped to produce clear versions of their narratives for later analysis. I carefully guided the interviewee back to the focus of the study whenever she went off track.

Furthermore, during the interview I observed not only verbal, but also non-verbal behaviour and incongruity in the interviewee's speech (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Kvale (2007) pointed out that it is exactly those experiences which arise either spontaneously, or are not mentioned at all during the interview, that may offer insightful data. During the interview, I made field notes of these observations to later accompany my analysis (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004). This flexible design allowed me to explore the participant's responses and

discrepancies and to obtain rich narratives of her unique experiences regarding her friendships.

Likewise, I was aware of my own non-verbal communication as these interactions communicated my perceptions and experiences of the participants to them (Sommer & Sommer, 1980). In line with Sommer and Sommer's (1980) guidelines, I interacted with an accepting and open body language, made appropriate eye contact, and respected the participant's personal space in positioning the chair with a slight angle towards the interviewee. All together, I conveyed my interest in the girls' stories and my openness to receive the stories they wanted to share with me. The following extracts provide examples of how the girls seemingly felt safe to share their stories during the interview. I asked Rachel, Lisa, and Jane what it was like talking about their friendships.

***Rachel: It was really like, it was really nice just to like have someone you can tell it [friendship stories] to and stuff. I like talk to my mother many times and well, but yes... I do not want to... let's say... tell my mom the bad things about them [friends], because next time you ask, "But can I go visit her? ", then my mom knows everything.***

*Rachel: Dit was regtig soos, dit was regtig soos lekker eintlik soos net om soos iemand te hê vir wie jy dit [stories oor vriendskappe] kan sê en goeters. Ek praat soos baie keer met my ma daaroor en goed, maar ja... ek wil nou ook nie te... kom ons sê... die slegte goed ook van hulle [vriendinne] sê nie, want dan is jy nou weer vra: "Maar kan ek by haar gaan kuier?", dan weet my ma nou alles.*

***Lisa: It was very nice, like it was like... half I can say... the most that I would open up towards someone here. Uhm, yes... it's nice to talk about it [friendships] because I think I then understand half better too. You have to talk about it sometimes.***

*Lisa: Dit was baie lekker, soos dit is soos... half kan ek sê... die meeste wat ek sal oopmaak teenoor iemand hier. Uhm, ja... dis lekker om oor dit te praat, want ek dink dan verstaan ek ook half beter. Mens moet partykeer oor dit praat.*

***Jane: This was nice. It's nice to talk to someone about it, I cannot always talk to my friends. Because you do not know anyone, it's half like... okay, I'm talking uhm, yes, but I cannot go to Rebecca now and say, "Listen here, this one is doing this and this and this"... because I will not gossip at all, because that does not work for me.***

*Jane: Dit was lekker. Dit is lekker om met iemand te praat daaroor, ek kan dit nie altyd met my vriendinne praat nie. Omdat jy niemand ken nie, is dit soos half... okay ek praat uhm, ja, maar ek kan nou nie by Rebecca gaan sit en sê: "Hoor hier die een doen dit en dit en dit"... want ek sal ook gladnie soos skinder nie, want dit werk nie vir my nie.*

To close off the interview, I thanked the participant for sharing her experiences and providing me with valuable information for my study. I asked her how she felt while talking about her friendships, if there was anything else she wanted to share with me, or if she felt there was a specific question I should have asked her. After every interview, I made field notes to reflect on my personal reactions towards the participant, identified ways to improve my interviewing technique in subsequent interviews, and to record ideas for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

#### **4.5 Data management**

I audio taped all the interviews, whereafter I transcribed them verbatim. By personally transcribing the interviews my familiarity with the data was enhanced and I became more involved in the social world of the participant (Kvale, 2007). I agree with Polsky (1998) in that the researcher's ability to look, listen, think, and feel with the participants is vital to the quality of the research. Merely attending to what has been said in the interview or simply reading transcripts would have limited my attentiveness to these other aspects of empirical observation. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) transcription guidelines, I included non-verbal expressions such as laughter, cutting in, and pauses in my transcripts (Appendix A).

I stored the transcriptions on a password protected computer to which only my supervisor and I had access. To facilitate the organisation and systematic analysis of the data, I uploaded all the transcripts and memos into ATLAS.ti, a computer aided qualitative data analysis programme (Friese, 2012).

In presenting my findings, I removed all potentially identifying information from the findings (Bless et al., 2013). I analysed and interpreted the data in its original format, Afrikaans, and translated the presented quotations to English at a later stage.

#### **4.6 Data analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis is not a linear process, but runs concurrently with the process of data collection. According to researchers, this cyclical and recurrent approach facilitates reflection and interpretation and enhances our understanding of the issue at hand



(Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tesch, 1990). For example, I used the field notes and memos I made during data collection to supplement my analysis of the data.

I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of inductive thematic content analysis to categorise and analyse the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that thematic analysis is a flexible method which may be applied within any research paradigm, provided it is made explicit. As mentioned afore, I employed an interpretivist framework. Thematic analysis involves a process of constantly reviewing and refining the data into meaningful categories, subthemes, and themes. I took an inductive approach, also known as a bottom-up strategy, as I generated themes that were grounded in the data rather than trying to fit them into an existing frame. I identified themes on a semantic and latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2012). On a semantic level, I identified themes which described the content of the data, while on a latent level, I explored meanings beneath the surface of the data to identify the underlying assumptions informing the girls' experiences. Although I present the steps in a linear fashion below, during my process of analysis I followed a cyclical route by constantly reviewing and refining the themes.

- 1. Open coding.** While transcribing the interviews, I immersed myself in the data and developed an awareness of the patterns or contradictions raised by the participants. I familiarised myself and developed a good understanding of the data by listening to the recordings, reading the transcripts several times, and actively engaging with the data. Thereafter I could systematically identify key issues mentioned by the participants to generate initial codes.
- 2. Selective coding.** Based on their content, I categorised and labelled phrases or statements containing key issues. These phrases or statements represented codes in the data, often referred to as the building blocks of qualitative data analysis. I coded each transcript line-by-line to compile a list of codes from the data. I then used comparative analysis where I continuously compared the raw data to my newly identified codes and subsequently applied codes from the existing code list or generated new codes where necessary. Those segments that carried significance, but where I could not immediately think of an appropriate code name, I coded as "code later" and returned to them at a later stage to link to a suitable code. This process helped to ensure consistency in coding the transcripts. During the coding procedure, I tried to capture the code in the smallest quotation, but showing sufficient contextual information. Furthermore, I documented ideas and initial thoughts on the data extracts as to how

these codes might answer my research questions. After multiple readings of the transcripts and linking all data segments to as many codes I could think of, I used ATLAS.ti to create an output of all my codes and associated quotations. By carefully examining my output (589 pages), I first considered the internal coherence of my codes, in other words, whether the quotations corresponded with the single code I had linked them to. Second, I split some codes into more specific sub-codes and merged others into a single code. For example, after studying all the quotations I linked to the code “intimacy”, I split this code into “intimacy: physical” and “intimacy: talk” for a more detailed analysis. On the other hand, I found that the codes “binding factor: values”, “binding factor: worldview”, “binding factor: way of being” could be merged into a single code “binding factor: personalities” to ease my analysis process. Third, codes and quotations that were not related to the central research idea were discarded. I proceeded my analysis process with a total of 210 codes. Every transcript was coded between 189 to 381 times.

- 3. Searching for themes.** During this phase, I collated codes into categories by identifying similarities and differences in the phrases that were labelled. I used ATLAS.ti in this process as I could create families by combining codes. For example, I created a code family “talk topics” by grouping the codes “talk about boys”, “talk about family”, “talk about health”, and “talk about academics”. Thereafter I grouped some of the categories into subthemes, which captured a facet of the broader theme. I made diagrams to assist me in creating themes that were organised around a central concept in the data. A single theme therefore contained a variety of ideas, aspects, or codes that relate to a central organising concept. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert that the researcher plays an active role in deciding which themes are relevant to be included in the findings of the study.
- 4. Reviewing the themes.** During this phase, I revisited the transcripts to ensure that the chosen themes accurately represent the data set as a whole. Additionally, I checked whether the content of the data extracts for each theme was coherent and whether there were clear boundaries among the themes (Tesch, 1990).
- 5. Defining and naming the themes.** During this phase I developed clear definitions and names for the themes to define the specifics of each theme and how it is related to the overall research question. Refer to Table 4.1 for an example of how the different categories and subthemes reflect different aspects of the broader theme: Friendship as a support system.

**6. Presenting the findings.** Finally, I presented my results on the interpretations and implications of the chosen themes, situating them within available literature. When presenting my participants' voices, I aimed towards a balance between descriptive and analytical commentary and data extracts. I selected individual quotations that best represented the girls' experiences in each theme.

Table 4.1

*Thematic map: Friendship as a Support System*

| Subtheme                         | Category  |
|----------------------------------|---|
| She builds me up                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends as a moodlifter</li> <li>• Friendship as a source of validation, nurturance, and comfort</li> <li>• Listening and giving advice</li> </ul> |
| She <i>knows how</i> to be there | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding and relating</li> <li>• Reciprocity vs. one-way friendships</li> </ul>   |

#### 4.7 Increasing the trustworthiness of this study

Qualitative research is concerned with the trustworthiness, rather than repeatability, of the research results (Silverman, 2010). The trustworthiness of the collected data informed the quality of this study and was evaluated on the basis of four concepts, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Anney 2014; Bless et al., 2013).

**Credibility.** To ensure credibility, i.e., appropriateness and internal logic of the research design and process, I employed strategies such as methodological and investigator triangulation, and methodological verification (Bless et al., 2013). Anney (2014) recommends the use of at least two methods of triangulation to present high quality qualitative research. I used methodological triangulation by supplementing and comparing my interview data with direct observations as well as second-hand information obtained from the school psychologist

and boarding house matron. I attended various events at the boarding house where my study was conducted to familiarise myself with the school culture and to observe interactions amongst the girls. The contribution of my supervisor, who is an expert in the field of qualitative research and adolescent girls, built in a level of investigator triangulation. Methodological verification refers to the process by which more experienced researchers verify the logic and implementation of each step in the methodology. For example, my supervisor listened to the recordings of the interviews, checked the accuracy of my transcriptions, and inspected the internal coherence of the key themes and selected codes I identified. In addition, I discussed my research process and findings with fellow psychology masters students who challenged or confirmed my understanding and interpretations. In this way I minimised researcher bias when interpreting and analysing research results (Anney, 2014).

**Transferability.** Transferability in qualitative research refers to the degree to which results can be applied to other, similar, contexts (Bless et al., 2013). I presented detailed descriptions of the sample, context, researcher, and my relationship with the girls to increase the transferability of the data. I also included a theoretical framework in Chapter 3 to inform the reader of the lens through which I interpreted my findings. Keeping in mind that qualitative findings emerge from specific contexts, future researchers will be able to assess and compare my findings to their own.

**Dependability.** Dependability can be compared to the concept of reliability in quantitative research, i.e., whether the study findings would be the same if the research is replicated. To verify that my findings are consistent with the raw data collected, I attended to the dependability of this study by following a thoughtful, systematic research process and carefully documenting and providing examples for every step of the process. I conducted a thorough audit trail by keeping documents, such as the raw data (interviews) and observation notes from the field, for cross-checking the inquiry process (Anney, 2014). Qualitative research assumes that every researcher brings a unique perspective to data analysis (Anney 2014; Rice, 2009). For this reason, I have included a section on researcher reflexivity.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability of qualitative data refers to the degree to which other researchers could verify my obtained results (Bless et al., 2013). I ensured high confirmability by presenting a critical evaluation of the methodology I used, for others to be

able to replicate, or elaborate, on this study (Bless et al., 2013). As the primary data collecting instrument I played an active role in presenting and analysing the findings, which according to Anney (2014), makes investigator bias inescapable. To make it clear for the reader that I derived my interpretations from the data rather than them being figments of my own imagination and preconceptions, I first included many verbatim quotations from the raw interview data in writing this thesis. Second, I strived to put aside or “bracket” my own experiences, biases, and preconceived notions in order to understand the girls’ friendship experiences from their viewpoint (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Methods that assisted me in this bracketing process included the use of a reflective journal to record my thoughts, feelings, and reflections about my research process to constantly be aware of how my own preconceptions and biases could possibly influence my research process and findings. Additionally, I discussed my reflections with my supervisor and fellow students.

In a following section, researcher reflexivity, I include particulars regarding my background, and my own memories of same-sex friendship experiences in my adolescent years. In this way, I hope to disclose how my own assumptions might have shaped the interpretation of the data (Anney, 2014; Rice, 2009).

#### **4.8 Researcher – reflexivity**

In this section I reflect on and disclose personal factors that may have influenced my approach and analysis of this research. I am a 24-year-old White Afrikaans speaking female who grew up in a middle-income household in the Western Cape. It is well-acknowledged that dynamics of gender, race, and class may influence the interviewer-interviewee relationship (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Davis, Couper, Janz, Caldwell, & Resnicow, 2009). As noted previously, my participants were all young White Afrikaans speaking females, 15 to 16 years of age, from middle- to upper-class income households and attending a school in the Western Cape. I agree with Sawyer et al. (1995) in that the overlap between my major social characteristics and that of my interviewees enabled me to elicit rich narratives. Moreover, sharing Afrikaans as a home language made it easier for me to pick up on the finer nuances and figurative expressions in their speech. Braun and Clarke (2012) assert that the participant tends to feel more comfortable disclosing information to someone that seems broadly similar to them. For example, during the interviews, it seemed as if the girls could relate and identify with me as they often used phrases like, “You know what it is like when...” and “you

understand”. Even though this similarity seemed to have a facilitating role in the interviews, at times, the girls assumed that we had similar worldviews and accordingly I was perceived to have the same expectations they had of their friends and of themselves. For example, some girls laughed nervously and portrayed self-conscious body language when they told me about friendship experiences which seemingly were not in line with traditional notions of young White Afrikaans females. Power differentials inherent to my status as the researcher might have intensified their seeming desire to impress or not disappoint me. I provide examples of such instances in Chapter 6.

Listening to the participants’ stories often evoked memories of my own same-sex friendships during adolescence. Such memories and experiences possibly partly shaped my expectations and understanding of my participants’ friendship experiences. My adolescent friendships were an important focus in my high school life and I enjoyed spending time with my friendship group and having a feeling of belonging somewhere. Growing up in a somewhat restrictive home, my friendships were an important factor in my individualisation process as they offered me the opportunity to broaden my way of thinking and to explore different possibilities of being. Even though I developed different worldviews from my friends at that time, I remember feeling uncomfortable sharing these in my friendship group due to a fear of rejection. This fear was exacerbated when observing others being “excluded” from friendship groups if not conforming to the ideas and values of the group. Instead, I made friends with different individuals from various friendship groups where I could openly share a different part of myself and be accepted. Crossing friendship boundaries, however, was considered by some as “betrayal”. Feeling pressured to conform to the norms in the group and not being able to fully express all aspects of myself in a single friendship, I often perceived my adolescent friendships as inauthentic. Observing how my friends would pretend to like another girl in the group or simply agree on matters out of fear of causing tension in the friendship group, I now imagine them to have had similar experiences of inauthenticity in their friendships.

Comparing my adolescent friendships with those I formed in early adulthood, I consider my current friendships to be more meaningful and supportive as I strive towards authenticity in my relationships. Reflecting on my own friendships, along with my reflections on the adolescent girls’ friendships in this study, taught me the value of having deep and meaningful relationships. During the course of this research process, I have developed a more profound

appreciation for my existing friendships and am therefore invested in and committed to these friendships.

At the time of this study, my highest qualification obtained was an Honours Degree in Psychology. Working with adolescent girls in community settings drew my attention to their need to feel supported and accepted by their peers. Interacting with these girls, and completing a basic counselling course, I broadened my view on girls' friendships and acquired some helpful interviewing skills.

In sum, I brought to this research process: (1) An educational background in psychology, (2) personal experience and related understanding of same-sex friendships in adolescence, (3) an appreciation of my own friendships in adolescence combined with an awareness of how some friendship experiences can be detrimental for mental well-being, (4) skills acquired through working with adolescent girls in community settings and completing a basic counselling course, (5) a critical view on available South African literature focussing on girls' friendships in deviant contexts, and (6) a desire to better understand the inner workings and dynamics of these girls' friendships and the possible protective factors operating within them. I acknowledge that my personal history, educational background, and theoretical orientation influenced my approach in this research study and the interpretations of my findings. A different researcher would likely have interpreted and presented the data differently. I believe that by constantly self-reflecting, bracketing my own experiences and preconceptions, and being transparent in articulating these, I limited the possible deleterious effect I could have had on the research process and output (Tuffman & Newman, 2010).

#### **4.9 Ethical considerations**

Since qualitative research inevitably involves contact with human subjects, ethical considerations are imperative to protect the dignity and safety of research participants (Silverman, 2010). Prior to collecting data, I obtained ethical approval from the Psychology Department's Ethical Screening Committee (DESC), the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee (REC) (Appendix D), the Western Cape Educational Department (Appendix E) and the principal of School X (Appendix F). Only those individuals who signed the assent forms (Appendix G) and whose parents gave written consent (Appendix H) to participate were interviewed. At the beginning of the interviews, I informed the participants

of my reasons for conducting the research as well as the research process. Since I had direct contact with the girls, complete anonymity was not possible. However, I ensured the participants that pseudonyms will be used during the writing up process to protect their identities. Furthermore, confidentiality was maintained by storing the audio-recordings and transcribed interviews on a password protected computer to which only my supervisor and I had access. I informed the participant that participation is completely voluntary and that she may withdraw from the interview process at any point without consequences. Written informed consent and permission to record the conversation were obtained prior to the start of the interview. The informed consent form also stated potential benefits and risks for the participant (Appendix G & H). Participants did not receive payment for participation, but light refreshments were provided at the beginning of the interview. I also informed the participant that if she needed psychological help during or after the completion of the interviews, I would refer her to the school psychologist or Welgevallen Community Psychology Clinic. However, none of the participants requested counselling services following the interview. Lastly, I strived towards equity in the interviewee-interviewer relationship by interacting with the participant on her level by avoiding any technical terms (Seidman, 2006). At the end of the interview, I thanked the girl for her participation in this study.

#### **4.10 Summary**

In this chapter I discussed the methodological framework of this study and how it aligned with my research aims and an interpretivist research paradigm. I described the participants and their social contexts and gave a detailed account of my sampling strategies and procedures. Data were collected by means of 10 individual semi-structured interviews and ATLAS.ti was used to ease data management. I described the various steps of thematic content analysis to analyse and interpret my data as well as methods employed to increase the trustworthiness of my study. I reflected on my role as the researcher in this study and concluded this chapter with a section on ethical considerations.

In the next section, I discuss the theme, subthemes, and categories that I identified from the data (refer to Table 4.2 for a summary). I will present these themes as separate chapters. Due to the dynamic nature of the girls' narratives, however, some themes are interwoven and may overlap. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the nature of girls' friendships, in Chapter 6 I will



illustrate how the girls' talk was situated in an idealised friendship discourse, and in Chapter 7 I will discuss the girls' experiences of their friendships as social support systems.

Table 4.2

*Summary of Themes, Subthemes, and Categories*

| <b>Theme</b>                                | <b>Subtheme</b>                           | <b>Category</b>   |
|---|---|---|
| The nature of adolescent girls' friendships | When do you classify someone as a friend? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquaintances, friends, and confidants</li> <li>• Being "together" all the time</li> </ul>   |
|   | Friendship formation                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity as a binding factor</li> <li>• Perceived similarity as a binding factor</li> <li>• Perceived differences and complementarity as binding factors</li> </ul> |
|   | Friendship quality in adolescence         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being more mature and going deeper</li> <li>• Different friends meet different needs</li> <li>• When "other" things come into play</li> </ul>                        |
| Idealising the friendship                   | The ideal friend                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expectations of the ideal friend</li> <li>• Keeping up appearances</li> </ul>  |
|   | Challenges to the ideal friend image      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict as small, stupid, petty things</li> <li>• Shut up and be nice</li> <li>• Dealing with conflict: The contra-voice</li> </ul>                                 |
| Friendship as a support system              | She builds me up                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friends as a moodlifter</li> <li>• Friendship as a source of validation, nurturance, and comfort</li> <li>• Listening and giving advice</li> </ul>                   |
|   | She <i>knows how</i> to be there          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding and relating</li> <li>• Reciprocity vs. one-way friendships</li> </ul>   |

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## Chapter 5: The Nature of Adolescent Girls' Friendships

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The findings of this study suggest that the nature of adolescent girls' friendships is complex and unique to the individual's experience. Listening to the girls' reflections about their friendships with other girls, I noticed how their friendships seemingly evoked a range of feelings; they described their friendships as a major source of joy mixed with instances of frustration, irritation, and anger. The girls seemed to experience their friendships as supportive, yet awkward, and at times even burdening.

Despite this ambiguous nature of friendships, the girls acknowledged the importance of their friendships in adolescence. Rebecca told me about the time she moved away from her primary school friends and had to adjust to her new high school environment where she had not yet formed new friendships.

***Rebecca: [...] I hated it [transition period to high school]. I cried like every single evening. And like after roll call<sup>1</sup>, then I would walk alone up here and then I would cry because I do not want to be here, because what am I doing here?***

*Rebecca: [...] Ek het dit [oorgangstydperk na hoërskool] gehaat. Ek het soos elke lieue aand gehuil. En soos na kontrole, dan sal ek nou alleen hierso opstap en dan sal ek huil want ek wil nie hierso wees nie, want wat doen ek hierso?*

Friendships tend to play an important role in creating meaning in the lives of these adolescent girls. Rebecca seemed to capture a sense of loneliness and meaninglessness when she reflected on a time without friends. Indeed, much has been written on female friendships as a powerful determinant of mental well-being (Dare, 2009; Gilligan, 1982; Miller & Stiver, 1997; West, 2005). According to Apter and Josselson (1998), adolescent girls' friendships may engender feelings of belongingness and acceptance, which in turn may reinforce girls' identity and enhance their self-esteem.

In the following section, I describe the nature of these girls' friendships using three subthemes. Table 5.1 presents a thematic map for these subthemes and categories.

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<sup>1</sup> Roll call is a way of taking attendance to check whether all the girls are in the boarding house before bedtime.

Table 5.1

*Thematic Map: The Nature of Adolescent Girls' Friendships*

| <b>Subtheme</b>                                      | <b>Category</b>                                     |
|--|---|
| <b>5.1</b> When do you classify someone as a friend? | <b>5.1.1</b> Acquaintances, friends, and confidants |
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First, I will elucidate the participants' understanding of the construct of a “friend” by illustrating how they distinguished between their different types of friendships as well as the seemingly important role communication technologies played in maintaining these friendships. Second, I will focus on the process of friendship formation amongst these girls and those factors that attracted and bound them to one another. Lastly, I describe the unique quality of these girls' friendships in adolescence; and why friendships seem to be particularly salient for them in this developmental stage.

### **5.1 When do you classify someone as a friend?**

In the interviews, similarities between girls or spending much time with someone did not seem to forge deep friendships. In this section, I will first show that the defining feature of a friend seemed to be someone one invites into one's private space and spends time with outside of the school context. Furthermore, the participants seemed to distinguish their friendships on a continuum, ranging from knowing someone who is a classmate, being friendly with someone, having a “half friend” to having a “close friend”. Second, I will illustrate how the girls, when spending time together, emphasised how communication

technologies enabled friends to be constantly engaged in conversation and therefore “together” all the time.

### 5.1.1 Acquaintances, friends, and confidants

The participants seemed to struggle to answer my question when I asked them what makes an acquaintance a friend. Below, Brenda illustrates her dilemma of how she tries to make sense of whom to classify as a friend or not.

*Zelda: So when then is someone a friend?*

*Brenda: Yes, because it's like... I do not really know if people say... I really do not know when you say you're friends... because you're talking a lot with someone and you know a lot about them and you talk a lot and so. But I do not really know when you classify that as friends because everyone in the boarding house is friendly to each other and then... if you can then say that someone is friends, then everyone in school are friends because everyone is half like: "Hello how is it going?" or something... so... and maybe they are sitting with you during the break... or in class they sit next to each other because you do the same subjects and then you talk.*

*Zelda: So wanneer is iemand dan 'n vriendin?*

*Brenda: Ja, want dit is soos... ek weet nie regtig of mense sê... ek weet nie regtig wanneer mens sê jy is vriende nie... want jy praat dalk baie met iemand en jy weet baie van hulle en jy gesels baie en so. Maar ek weet nie regtig wanneer klassifiseer mens dit as vriendinne nie, want almal in die koshuis is vriendelik met mekaar en dan... as jy dan kan sê iemand is vriende, dan is almal in die skool vriende want almal is half soos: "Hallo hoe gaan dit?" of iets... so... en dalk sit hulle by jou pouse en so... of in die klas sit hulle langs mekaar want julle doen dieselfde vakke en dan praat julle.*

Later in the interview, Brenda illustrated how despite sharing certain qualities with an acquaintance, such as sharing a sense of humour, often engaging in conversations, even admiring Miriam (e.g., “She really is a cool person... you have to talk to Miriam... Miriam will just... she is just really, like really cool”), she did not speak of Miriam as a friend. In the extracts below, Brenda and Lydia describe how and when they labelled someone as a “friend”.

*Zelda: Wow, but okay, are you two not friends?*

*Brenda: Like, she does not invite me to her home or so, but we can... we talk a lot... or like when we see each other during the break or something, she will come and sit with me and talk and so [...] I do not think that she will invite me to her home and I will not invite her to my house.*

*Zelda: Sjoë maar okay, is julle twee nie vriendinne nie?*

*Brenda: Soos sy nooi my nie na haar huis toe of so nie, maar ons kan... ons praat baie... of soos as ons mekaar sien pouse of iets, sal sy by my kom sit en ons praat en so [...] Ek dink nie sy sal my na haar huis toe nooi nie en ek sal haar nie na my huis toe nooi nie.*

***Lydia: I have... I have... good friends... like I have friends at school, but it's not like people I will invite over to my home or spend alone time with. They are half friends because they are in my class or I know them so... but my actual like CLOSE friends are almost everyone in the boarding house and we are nine... nine of us. Yes, I do not have many close friends outside of my friendship circle... it's just like half MY circle of friends. Some others are half friends, but not really... as close close. [...] Like most of the people in our school, everybody is friendly, but if I think about considering a friend then I would say you invite them to your home or they invite you or so.***

*Lydia: Ek het... ek het... goeie vriende... soos ek het vriende by die skool, maar dis nie soos mense wat ek na my huis toe sal oornooi of alleentyd so... sommer sal spandeer nie. Hulle is half vriende, want hulle is in my klas of ek ken hulle so... maar my actual soos CLOSE vriendinne is omtrent almal in die koshuis en ons is nege... nege van ons. Ja, ek het nie baie soos close vriende uit my vriendekring uit nie... dis net soos half MY vriendekring. 'n Paar ander is half maatjies, maar nie regtig... soos close close nie.[...] Soos meeste van die mense in ons skool is almal vriendlik met mekaar, maar as ek nou dink om 'n vriendin te beskou dan sou ek sê jy nooi hulle na jou huis toe of hulle nooi jou of so.*

Fischer (1982) noted that “friend” tends to be a residual label, applied to anyone who does not have a specific title and oriented towards individuals of the same age with whom one interacts regularly. Conversely, according to the participants, a friendly acquaintance at school was not regarded as a friend. From the extracts above, it seemed that a friend was someone who was allowed to enter the girls’ private spaces. The girls defined a friend as someone one invites over to one’s home or with whom one spends time outside of the school context.

Some researchers noted that, similar to the girls in my study, adolescents struggle to define friendship when asked directly (Fehr, 1996; Policarpo, 2015). Despite the seemingly simple friend definition given by the participants, other qualities like reciprocity, loyalty, trust, and supportiveness emerged as rules for the boundaries of their friendships. Researchers have distinguished between friends and acquaintances on the basis of characteristics such as equality, reciprocity, intimacy, a high level of self-disclosure (Bukowski et al., 1998; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1998) and trust (Hall, 2014; Policarpo, 2015). Perhaps the girls’ conception of a friend as someone one invites into one’s private space is related to intimacy

expectations. I will comment on and provide examples of the girls' expectations of their friendships in Chapter 6.

In Lydia's extract above we also noted how she seemingly "categorised" her friends based on degrees of "closeness". For example, Lydia spoke about "half friends", "close friends", and "close close friends". The other participants similarly referred to a "half friend" versus "head friend", "close friend" versus "not so close friend", a "true friend" versus a friend who is "not really a friend". In the extracts below, we can see how the degree of "closeness" between friends was based on the amount of intimate self-disclosure or secrets shared in their friendships.

***Heather: Yes, she [Natalie] is also friends with them [Rachel and Rebecca], but she is not as close to them as I am, but yes they are also mates [...] During the holidays, she [Natalie] and I do not talk as much as Rebecca and I talk, but we're still pretty close. Because I share lots of things with her and she also shares many things with me.***

*Heather: Ja, sy [Natalie] is ook vriende met hulle [Rachel and Rebecca], maar sy is nie so close met hulle soos wat ek is nie, maar ja hulle is ook pelle [...] Deur die vakansie sal ek en sy [Natalie] nou nie so baie praat soos wat ek en Rebecca praat nie, maar ons is nogsteeds soos redelik close. Soos ek deel ook baie goeters met haar en sy deel ook baie goeters met my.*

***Lisa: Okay, I had one, like a real good friend and we visited each other a lot and so. Two actually, but the one is no longer that... or she was never really like one of my close close friends. Like I would not tell her a secret, so if I had a secret, I'd rather tell Fiona.***

*Lisa: Okay, ek het een, soos rêrige goeie vriendin gehad en ons het baie by mekaar gekuier en so. Twee eintlik, maar die een is nou nie meer so... of sy was nooit regtig soos een van my close close vriendinne nie. Soos ek sou nou nie vir haar 'n geheim vertel het nie, so as ek nou 'n geheim gehad het, dan sou ek dit eerder vir Fiona vertel het.*

In line with the findings of this study, Hartup and Stevens (1997) described how youngsters categorise their friends, based on intimacy and time spent together, as "causal friend", "good friend", or "best friend". Van Cleemput (2012) also distinguished between different friendship ties: "very close friend", "just friend", and "person I know". As Lydia illustrated in the above extract, the girls seemingly placed their friends on a continuum based on different degrees of closeness, such as "relatively close friend" and "close, close friend". According to Thorne (1993), advancements in social reasoning enable the adolescent to move away from

categorist thinking and to view friendships to exist on a continuum, like the “closeness” continuum described by the participants in this study (see also Cotterell, 2007).

The degree of “closeness” appeared to be dependent on the amount of “sharing stuff” and “telling secrets” in the friendship. Consistent with Policarpo’s (2015) description of an “intimate friend”, the girls also described a “close friend” as a trustworthy confidant with whom they often self-disclosed.

### 5.1.2 Being “together” all the time

As mentioned earlier, spending time together on weekends or holidays cemented their friendships and contributed to the establishment of a friendship group. During these times, the girls reported that they listened to music together, watched movies, slept over at a friend’s house, went to the mall or to social events or parties (“kuiers”). The constant factor across all of these activities, however, was their engagement in conversations, which was facilitated by communication technologies. For the participants, spending time with their friends mostly revolved around chatting in one of the boarding house sleeping rooms, the classroom, during recess on the school grounds, over weekends on a sleepover, or via their cell phones on Whatsapp Messenger<sup>2</sup>. Their experiences of online conversations were a recurring theme among the girls.

Below, Heather and Lisa explain how cell phones and WhatsApp made it possible for them to constantly converse and to maintain their friendships. Another participant, Melissa, stopped me in the middle of the interview to respond to a message on her friendship WhatsApp group by stating, “*Wait, I actually think it is the group sending a message now*”.

***Heather: We have a group for our room [on Whatsapp] and then we will, all the time through the day, like quickly, “Where are you now?” or quickly send a photo or things like that or if someone... or if their boyfriends did something, then they will send that and so... but we are just together ALL the time. [...] And that is just where we mention the stories or serious news, or if you quickly need help, then you put it there.***

*Heather: Ons het 'n kamer group [op WhatsApp] ook en dan sal ons heeltyd deur die dag soos vining: "Waar is jy nou?" of 'n foto vinnig stuur of sulke goedjies of as iemand nou vir jou... of as hulle ouens nou iets doen, dan stuur hulle dit of so... so ons is maar HEELTYD*

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<sup>2</sup> WhatsApp Messenger is an instant messaging application with group chat features that allows smartphone users to exchange text, image, video and audio messages.



*bymekaar. [...] En dis maar waarop ons die stories en ernstige nuus of as jy vinnig hulp kort, dan sit jy dit daar.*

***Lisa: And she [Fiona] told me this afternoon [on Whatsapp] that she misses me and that we should do something over this long weekend and then I said, “Yes, I miss you too”. So she would often send me such messages. So yes, it is still a relatively good friendship, even if we do not see each other that often.***

*Lisa: En sy [Fiona] het vanmiddag vir my gesê [op WhatAspp] sy mis my en ons moet iets doen hierdie langnaweek en ek het het gesê: “Ja, ek mis jou ook”. So sy sal gereeld vir my sulke boodskappe stuur. So ja, dis nog redelik 'n goeie vriendskap, al sien ons mekaar nie meer baie nie.*

Regarding the relationship between the use of communication technologies and friendship quality, Valkenburg and Peter (2011) proposed that online communication may replace face-to-face interactions, thereby diminishing the quality of friendships. In contrast, the current findings and those of various other researchers suggest that communication technologies create additional opportunities to communicate and thereby increase the girls' feelings of closeness (Davis, 2012; Dolev-Cohen & Barak, 2013; Van Cleemput, 2012). For example, Heather described this constant communication with her friends as “being together all the time”.

Given that the participants were staying in a boarding school, it seemed as if they had limited permission to go out and plan their own social get togethers. Even so, Whatsapp Messenger tended to ensure a constant connection between and amongst friends. This seems to resonate with other researchers' findings that communication technologies can function as a tool to constantly reaffirm friendships and a sense of belonging regardless of their physical location (Davis, 2013; Van Cleemput, 2012). Lisa explained how Whatsapp Messenger enabled her to maintain a “good friendship” despite having few face-to-face interactions.

## **5.2 Friendship Formation**

In line with the girls' uncertainties regarding their definition of a friend, the process of friendship formation seemed to be another puzzling experience for the girls. In the following extract, Emily and Brenda illustrate the complexity associated with choosing a friend. Emily examines the reasons for and against joining one of two different friendship groups while Brenda tries to identify that “thing” that determines whether two girls will be friends or not.

**Emily:** *But with them I feel so... I do not know... it's going to sound weird now... I've got mixed feelings about them. Because uhm... I always feel so stupid if I think this. Like, they are not popular and you still want people to like you, so sometimes I feel like I do not really want to be with them... uhm... because they are a little awkward and so. But then other times they are so sweet and they make me laugh and everything, but ahh... I do not know... (laughs) I feel so bad when I do this, because they are like the sweetest people ever... I feel so selfish because then I just think again, "But they are not popular. Why do I want to be friends with such people?", but then yes... like then... then... I know they are... I know they have good personalities.*

*Emily:* Maar met hulle voel ek so... ek weet nie... dit gaan nou weird klink... ek het soos mixed feelings oor hulle. Want uhm... ek voel altyd so dom as ek dit dink. Soos hulle is nie populêr nie en mens wil tog hê mense moet van jou hou, so soms dan voel ek soos ek wil nie regtig met hulle vriende wees nie... uhm... want hulle is soos bietjie awkward en so. Maar dan ander kere is hulle weer so oulik en hulle maak my lag en alles, maar ahh... ek weet nie... (lag) ek voel so sleg as ek dit doen, want hulle is soos die oulikste mense ooit... ek voel so selfsugtig, want dan dink ek net soos weer: "Maar hulle is nie populêr nie. Hoekom wil ek vriende wees met sulke mense?", maar dan ja... soos dan... dan... ek weet hulle is... ek weet hulle het goeie persoonlikhede.

**Brenda:** *I think you just have to... you must've just clicked with the people in the first... in grade eight.*

**Zelda:** *Hmm... so what is there that initially makes people click in grade eight?*

**Brenda:** *Well, you must've bonded about something. I do not know if it's when you... when we had the introduction<sup>3</sup>period, maybe you just really liked the person or maybe this one person invited you to a social event and now you like her and then... I actually think everybody can be friends because there must be something you both like but there's just something that would make you... that will make you say you'd like her to be your friend and not just like me and you have a lot in common... there's just something that attracts you to the person [...] Yes, there is something else, but I do not really know what it is. But like... I really see it like... everyone is interested in... like there's something to talk about with someone, there's something that both of you like or what you can do together, but there's just that something that is going to make friends or not. Like real friends... but I do not know what it is.*

**Brenda:** *Ek dink jy moet net... jy moet net saam met die mense geclick het in die eerste... in graad ag.*

**Zelda:** *Hmm... so wat is daar wat mense initially laat click in graad ag?*

**Brenda:** *Wel, jy moes oor iets gebond het. Ek weet nie of dit is as jy nou... toe ons ontgroening gehad het, dalk het jy net regtig van die persoon gehou of dalk het hierdie een persoon jou nou na 'n kuier toe genooi en nou hou jy van haar en toe... ek dink almal kan eintlik vriende wees, want daar moet iets wees waarvan julle hou, maar daar is net 'n sekere iets wat jy sou... wat jou sal maak sê jy wil graag hê sy moet jou vriendin wees, nie net van ek en jy het baie in gemeen nie... daar is net iets wat jou dalk trek na die*

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<sup>3</sup> During the introduction period ("doop") the Grade 8 girls are instructed by the senior pupils to perform certain initiation rituals and activities to be accepted into the School X community.

*persoon[...] Ja, daar is nog iets, maar ek weet nie regtig wat dit is nie. Maar soos... ek sien dit regtig soos... almal stel... soos daar is iets as jy met iemand gaan praat, daar is iets waaroor altwee van julle sal hou of wat julle eintlik kan saamdoen, maar daar is net nog iets wat julle gaan maak vriende wees of nie. Soos regtig vriendinne wees... maar ek weet nie wat dit is nie.*

The process of friendship formation for these girls seemed to be fraught with much ambiguity as they considered various factors. On the one hand, Emily would like to be with the “popular” group as this would endow her with a higher popularity status and, therefore, possibly contribute to a more positive self-image. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), a portion of Emily’s sense of self will be derived from her group membership, possibly explaining her motivation to associate with the “popular” group. Alternatively, she could stay with her “awkward” friends who provide her with humour and companionship, have “good personalities”, but are “not popular”. Emily stated that she felt selfish and guilty for thinking about leaving her current friendship group. Emily’s thoughts about leaving her current friends may not have been aligned with societal expectations of females as “nice” and caring (Hey, 1997), possibly leading Emily to internalise guilt feelings. In addition to such thought processes and ambivalent feelings accompanying the girls’ process of friendship formation, according to Brenda, intuition may also play a role when selecting one’s friends.

Even though Brenda was seemingly unable to directly respond to my question, of why she chose her specific friends, in all the interviews factors like proximity, perceived similarity and perceived complementarity seemed to attract the girls to one another and functioned as the glue of the friendship. I collectively named these factors “binding factors”. Below, I elaborate on these factors with examples from the transcripts.

### **5.2.1 Proximity as binding factor**

For the girls, being placed in proximity to another girl seemed to carry a lot of weight in choosing a friend. Being in the same boarding school, being placed in the same room or coming from the same primary school were often regarded as the reason for the initiation of friendships. Proximity as a binding factor was linked to a chance event (“toevallig”), as the girls had no initial control over their roommate selection. The extracts below present the girls’ responses to my question of how their friendships started.

**Zelda:** *So you say you are one of the groups. So do you want to tell me more, what are the other groups like? Or how does it work?*

**Nicole:** *Uhm, there... it's like... I'm good friends with like other people but it's like... I do not know... they were like... I do not know how to explain... That's quite weird but it's like how you were placed with your roommate in grade eight and that's half how your friendships, I'll say, almost formed. Just like your roommate and half around that. [...] But I think it's just the roommate thing that brought us a little closer and then I like half... yes... the... yes... the... or not me, but like we established the friendship circle.*

**Zelda:** *So jy sê julle is een van die groepies. So wil jy my meer vertel dalk, hoe is die ander groepies? Of hoe werk dit?*

**Nicole:** *Uhm, daar... dis soos... ek is goeie vriendinne met soos ander mense, maar dis ook weer soos... ek weet nie... hulle was soos... ek weet nie hoe om te verduidelik nie... dis nogal weird, maar dis soos hoe jy met jou kamermaats maar ingedeel was in graad ag en dis half hoe jou vriende, sal ek nou maar sê, amper gevorm het... soos nou maar met jou kamermaats en so half om dit. [...] Maar ek dink dis maar net die kamermaat ding wat ons nou bietjie closer gebring het en toe het ek nou soos half... ja... die... ja... die... of nie ek nie, maar soos ons die vriendekring gevestig.*

**Lydia:** *That's because I know them and I've heard from Carla somewhere, because she was friends with my primary school friends and so. So it was half children I knew, I just stucked to.*

**Zelda:** *Okay, that's interesting...*

**Lydia:** *And it was also with stuff for the introduction period, like say we were divided into groups to do some small assignments and so on. Then I will stay with those people. And yes, that's how we half came together.*

**Lydia:** *Dis omdat ek ken vir hulle en ek het al van Carla gehoor iewers, want sy was vriende met my laerskool vriende gewees en so. So dit was half kinders wat ek geken het, het ek maar net soos gestick mee.*

**Zelda:** *Okay, dis interessant...*

**Lydia:** *En dis ook sê nou maar goed vir die doop is ons in groepies gedeel vir sê nou maar takies en so. Dan sal ek met daai mense bly. En ja, dis hoe ons half saam gekom het.*

**Brenda:** *Well, we four are actually just this year in a group actually because we were together in a room [...] Because you see them literally every second of the day. Yes, school as well... then you see them when you brush your teeth, when you go to sleep, when you are done showering, so it is literally like you just have to be friends.*

**Brenda:** *Wel ons vier nou is eintlik net hierdie jaar in 'n groepie actually omdat ons saam in 'n kamer is [...] Want jy sien hulle letterlik elke sekonde van die dag. Ja, skool ook... dan sien jy hulle as jy tande borsel, as jy gaan slaap, as jy klaar gestort het, so dis letterlik van soos jy moet net vriende wees.*

**Zelda:** [...] *What do you think attracted you to her [Rebecca] as a friend?*

**Rachel:** *Rebecca... I just by accident, I didn't really have a choice you know... I was forced to be with her and it just worked out by chance... so it was just by chance I would almost say.*

**Zelda:** [...] *Wat dink jy het jou aangetrek na haar [Rebecca] toe as 'n vriendin?*

**Rachel:** *Rebecca... ek het nou maar net toevallig, ek het nie regtig 'n keuse gehad nie, verstaan... ek was forseer om met haar te wees en dit het toevallig uitgewerk, verstaan... so dit is nou maar toeval wil ek amper sê.*

According to Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, prolonged contact between individuals can lead to an increased liking of each other, which in turn increases the likelihood of friendship formation [see also mere exposure effect (Zajonc, 2001) and propinquity effect (Festinger et al., 1950)]. Corio (2015) noted that roommates generally share a wide range of activities such as talking, studying, and eating, which are likely to provide them with the prospect to discover similarities, mutual interests, and generate affective ties. For example, Nicole explained that being placed in the same room enabled girls to get “closer” and to ultimately form a friendship group. Lydia similarly illustrated how she “sticked” to the girls she was more familiar with and those girls she was instructed to interact with. Other researchers also found that living in the same neighbourhood and attending the same school increased the likelihood for adolescents to become friends (Crosnoe, 2000; Epstein, 1983).

According to Allport (1954), individuals sharing a common goal is an optimal condition for contact to be most effective for friendship formation. Roommates, for example, share a common goal of maintaining a mutually satisfactory living environment (Nesdale & Todd, 1998; Van Laar et al., 2005). It seemed that the girls in this study, for their own well-being, “just had to” learn to adapt and to cooperate with their roommates, since not getting along could possibly lead to a hostile living environment. In Chapter 6, I will comment on the girls' tendency to avoid conflict for the sake of maintaining harmony in their friendships. This observation aligns with Giles' (1979) communication accommodation theory, which states that individuals may adjust their manner of interacting with others to reduce the social distance between them. Brenda described how she saw her roommates “every second of the day” and therefore “just had to be” friends with them. For Rachel, being “forced” to share a room with Rebecca, she “had no choice” but to befriend Rebecca.

### 5.2.2 Perceived similarity as binding factor

The more similar the girl's interests, attitudes, and beliefs were to those of another, the more likely it was for her to be attracted to, and to become friends, with the other girl. Resultantly, many different friendship groups seemed to form on the basis of similarity and the girls referred to such groups as the “academic”, “arty”, “weird”, “sporty”, “party/wild”, “koshuis” versus “dorpie”, “popular/pretty”, and “not so popular” group. Below, Lydia explains how similarity in terms of interests, sense of humour, and popularity status led to the formation of dyadic friendships within her friendship group, while similar experiences forged a “special bond” between her and Christine. Emily and Lisa also accentuate how the girls seemingly emphasised similarity in popularity status and perceived level of attractiveness as a binding factor in their friendships.

*Lydia: Like Louise and Susan are both very musical, they both sing in the choir and they are both good at music, so obviously they would go together. And Mia and Maria are both like funny and full of energy and jokey and like lalala, they run together, and they have been roommates since grade eight so then the two of them go together again. And Christine and Nicola are both on the RCL [Representative council of leaders], the popular ones in the friendship circle, so they come together [...] We [Christine and I] are just... we half have a more special bond... because when we were both in grade eight... the boarding house was a VERY big adjustment and she struggled a lot with things like depression and stuff like that, because it was very difficult for her to move to a completely different part of the country and stuff and I have also had that experience because I've also been through a very difficult time from grade seven to grade nine. So the two of us just half moved through the difficult times together and we were just always there for each other. That is why we, say like... bond.*

*Lydia: Soos Louise en Susan is altwee baie musikaal, hulle sing altwee in die koor en hulle is altwee goed in musiek, so obviously gaan hulle twee nou saam gaan. En Mia en Maria is altwee soos snaaks en vol lewe en grapperig en soos lalalala, hol hulle saam, en hulle is al van graad ag af kamermaats so hulle twee gaan weer saam. En Christine en Nicole is altwee op die VRL [Verenigde raad van leerders], die popular enes in die vriendekring, so hulle kom weer saam.[...] Ons [Ek en Christine] is net... ons het half meer 'n spesiale band... toe ons altwee in graad agt was... was die koshuis vir ons 'n BAIE groot aanpassing gewees en sy het baie gesukkel met goed soos depressie en sulke goed in graad agt, want dit was vir haar baie moeilik om heeltemal oor die land te trek en goed en ek het al daai ervaring gehad want ek het ook deur 'n baie moeilike tyd gegaan van graad sewe tot omtrent graad nege. So ons twee het half deur die moeilike tye saamgekom en ons is maar altyd daar vir mekaar. Dis hoekom ons se nou maar... bond.*

*Emily: And then she will want to be friends with people like her – so the pretty people. So I also think that what you look like, uhm, determines which friends you will have. And uhm, it also gives you confidence to be pretty and to be friends with everyone and*

*so it gives you confidence and confidence I think also give... it plays a big role in popularity [...] Like I think there are popular people, non-popular people and things like that. I also think that if you are popular, then you will have popular friends and if you are not popular you will have non-popular friends. [...] Uhm, and I think that all of them are on that same level. Uhm, so all of them, uhm... yes... the more quiet people... the... well more... that do not have as many friends, I think those type of people gravitate towards each other. Yes...*

*Emily: En dan sal sy weer vriende wil wees met mense soos sy - so die mooi mense. So ek dink ook dat hoe jy lyk, uhm, gee aanleiding na watter vriende jy sal hê. En uhm, dit gee ook vir jou confidence soos om mooi te wees en vriende te wees met almal en so gee dit vir jou confidence en confidence dink ek ook gee... dit speel n groot rol in populariteit [...] Soos ek dink daar is die populêre mense, die nie-populêre mense en sulke goeters. En ek dink ook dat as jy populêr is gaan jy populêre viende hê en as jy nie populêr is, gaan jy nie-populêre vriende hê. [...] Uhm, en ek dink hulle almal is op daai selfde vlak. Uhm, so hulle is almal, uhm... ja... die stiller mense... die... wel meer... wat nie so baie vriende het nie en ek dink daai tipe mense wat soos dryf na mekaar toe. Ja...*

*Lisa: I think it's just about your views in life. Like I would choose my friendship circle... half choose them based on how our views are the same. Or how we feel about situations. So I would say that, and then obviously your family and your background and how you grew up.*

*Zelda: And how do you know if someone has the same views as you? How do you realise that?*

*Lisa: Through entering conversations with them and like asking questions and how the person acts and so.*

*Zelda: Hmm... so how did you realise that, let's say, Cate... if you have the same views?*

*Lisa: Okay, look... you get your cool group and then your less cool group. And it is actually also... I actually realised it the other day... its half where we half agree very strongly. And it is... what I wanted to say, uhm... oh, the cool group... like social media really plays a big role. So the cool group or the cool kids... cool is a now a very weird word, but like the popular group who has a lot of Instagram<sup>4</sup> followers and gets a lot of likes, they would NEVER take a photo with you... who do not get as many likes and followers, they would never post a photo with you, because you do not do their status well. And that is what Cate and I also talked about once. And that is what we have very similar views on. Yes...*

*Lisa: Ek dink dit gaan maar soos oor jou sienings in die lewe. Soos ek sal my vriendekring kies... half kies ek oor hoe ons soos sienings dieselfde is. Of hoe ons voel oor situasies. So ek sal sê dit, en dan obviously jou huisgesin en jou agtergrond en hoe jy groot geword het.*

*Zelda: En hoe weet jy of iemand dieselfde siening as jy het? Hoe kom jy dit agter?*

*Lisa: Deur gesprekke te voer met hulle en soos vrae te vra en hoe die persoon optree en so.*

*Zelda: Hmm... so hoe het jy nou besef, kom ons sê nou, Cate... of julle nou dieselfde siening het?*

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<sup>4</sup> Instagram is an online photo-sharing mobile application and social network platform.

*Lisa: Okay, kyk... jy kry jou cool groepie en jou minder cool groepie. En dis eintlik ook... ek het dit nou die dag eintlik besef... dis half waar ons soos half baie sterk oor saamstem. En dit is... wat wou ek nou gesê het, uhm... oh, die cool groepie... soos sosiale media speel regtig 'n groot rol. So die cool groepie of die cool kinders... cool is nou 'n baie vreemde woord, maar soos die populêre groepie wat nou baie Instagram followers het en baie likes kry, hulle sal NOOIT 'n foto saam met jou... wat nou nie so baie likes en baie followers het, sal hulle nou nooit 'n foto saam met jou post nie, want jy doen nie hulle status goed nie. En dis waaroor ek en Cate ook eenkeer gepraat het. En dis waaroor ons baie dieselfde siening het. Ja...*

From the above, it is evident how Lydia, Emily, and Lisa are drawn to girls who are perceived to be similar to themselves regarding interests, values, and popularity status. This finding is consistent with previous studies noting that adolescents tend to be friends with those who have similar personalities, values, and interests (Akers et al., 1998; Linden-Andersen et al., 2009) and similar levels of attractiveness (Bleske-Reчек & Lighthall, 2010). All together, these results support the repulsion hypothesis (Rosenbaum, 1986) and similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1971). Analogous to the findings of Sebanc et al. (2009), similarity seemed to be important for the girls in this study to establish a connection. For example, we saw how a “special bond” seemingly formed between Lydia and Christine as they shared similar experiences and could relate to each other’s thoughts and feelings. Additionally, the girls might have chosen friends similar to themselves as this would reduce the possibility of disagreement and conflict in the friendship (Huntley & Owens, 2013; Linden-Andersen et al., 2009).

Similarity in worldviews, attitudes, and interests could, however, be the result, rather than the cause, of these girls becoming friends. According to Kohut (1985), the self-object twinship need, referring to individuals’ need to feel a sense of likeness with others, might have motivated the girls to strive towards similarity in their friendship. Other researchers support Kohut’s (1985) hypothesis in showing that friends’ characteristics and behaviours converge over time (Berndt, 1982; Van Zalk et al., 2010) and that adolescents are socialised by their friends to adopt similar values (Meyer, 2011).

From the above extracts, an interesting focus seemed to be that girls with similar levels of “prettiness” and popularity status “packed together”. In line with this finding, Eder (1985) found that popularity gains significance in girls’ friendships. Emily explained that being popular starts with one’s physical appearance which then predicts one’s choice of friends. Being pretty and popular also seemed to be associated with having more self-confidence.



According to Jones and Crawford (2006), adolescent girls tend to create an appearance culture with their peers which is modelled on ideal beauty norms in society. Bleske-Rechek and Lighthall (2010) proposed that girls' focus on appearance is to gain attention from boys and found that girls, like the girls in this study, preferred friends who were on a similar level of attractiveness or "prettiness". Bleske-Rechek and Lighthall (2010) explain this tendency in proposing that choosing friends who are too attractive would be perceived as competition, while less attractive friends might prevent the friendship group from attracting attention from males.

Interestingly, Emily and Lisa noted how friendship groups could be categorised as "popular/cool and pretty" or "less popular/cool and not so pretty" which seemingly created strict boundaries between groups. Since popularity seems to endow girls with a higher status (Merten, 1997, 2004), LeCroy and Daley (2001) demonstrated how the desire to be popular may cause division amongst girls' friendships. For example, Lisa stated that a popular girl would "never" post a photo of herself together with a less-popular girl on social media (see also Hey, 1997). Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the popular girl has a group identity which, according to Emily, is largely based on "prettiness". For a popular girl to be seen with less-popular girls might put her at risk to develop a less-popular group identity, or as Lisa stated, would "not do her status well".

### **5.2.3 Perceived differences and complementarity as binding factors**

At times it seemed that differences, rather than similarities, attracted the girls to each other. In the extracts below, the girls illustrate how they were attracted to individuals who seemingly complemented their own personality and how diversity in the friendship group was associated with a more enjoyable atmosphere and created opportunities to observe and learn from friends.

*Emily: Isabella and I... my mom once told me (laughs) that she doesn't know if my friendship with Isabella is that good, because Isabella is a very dominating person. She knows who she is and she is so confident and stuff, but I am not yet sure about myself and I am also... so I do not feel so good about... or I do not yet know who I am that well... and she thinks... or she did not say it pertinent, but I got that from the conversation and I could also see that uhm... I need someone to take the lead while Isabella again... or it's... it's nice for me have someone who takes the lead in the*

**relationship while for Isabella it is nice to have someone who is not so out-going like her other friends and who is not like... who like... is more calm and would listen to her.**

*Emily: Ek en Isabella... my ma het eenkeer vir my gesê (lag) sy weet nie of my vriendskap met Isabella so goed is nie, want Isabella is 'n baie dominerende persoon. Sy weet wie sy is en sy is confident en so, maar ek is nog nie seker oor myself nie en ek is weer... so ek voel nie so goed oor... of ek weet nog nie lekker wie ek is nie... en sy dink... of sy het dit nie gesê pertinent nie, maar ek kan dit aflei en ek kan dit ook sien dat uhm... ek het half iemand nodig om leiding te neem terwyl Isabella weer... of dis... dis vir my lekker om iemand te hê wat leiding neem in die verhouding en vir Isabella is dit weer lekker om iemand te hê wat nie so out-going is soos haar ander vriende nie wat nie soos... wat soos vir haar... meer rustig is en vir haar sal lustier.*

**Heather: Uhm, Rebecca, I think she... she is completely, half, I don't know, she is a different type of person. Or like, yes, the small things, uhm, bother her again. Like, she would get tense, or not tense, but like angry... or she would start stressing if she forgets things, because it worries her if she forgets things, because she wants to do everything on the right time. Like plan well and be organised. I don't know, and I also like that, and it teaches me to be organised as well. Like I have learned a lot from her. Like my Biology mark was very poor for me and she is like third in our grade, then she helped me a lot like how... but she goes to more social events than me! (laughs) Okay, but yes I know I did not work that hard (laughs). I just don't know how she gets everything done. Then she helped me with how she prioritises her things and I now also tried that and it is actually not that bad. It is nice like that and then on Sundays you are half free. And yes, I don't know, she helped me in that regard. And I think she, if she gets half tensed, I always try to calm her a bit, "It is not that bad, you do not have to stress, if that happens, it will be fine", and so.**

*Heather: Uhm, Rebecca, ek dink sy... sy is heeltemal, half, ek weet nie, sy's 'n ander tipe mens. Of, soos ja, die klein goedjies, uhm, pla haar nou weer. Soos, sy sal opgewerk, of nie opgewerk word nie, maar soos kwaai... of sy sal begin stres as sy goedjies vergeet, want dit maak haar bekommerd as sy goeters vergeet, want sy wil alles op die regte tyd gedoen hê. Soos mooi beplan en georganiseerd wees. Ek weet nie, en ek hou ook daarvan, en dit leer my om ook georganiseerd te wees. Soos ek het nou al baie by haar geleer. Soos my Biologie punte was baie swak vir my en sy staan soos derde in ons graad, toe het sy my baie gehelp soos hoe... maar sy gaan na meer kuiers toe as ek! (lag) Okay, maar ja ek weet ek het nou nie so hard gewerk nie (lag). Ek weet net nie hoe sy alles gedoen kry nie. Toe het sy my nou gehelp met hoe sy haar goeters soos prioritiseer en ek het nou so probeer doen en dit is eintlik nie so erg nie. Dit is lekker so en dan soos Sondag is jy dan half vry. En ja, ek weet nie, sy het my gehelp in daai opsig. En ek dink sy, as sy so half opgestres word, ek probeer haar altyd net so bietjie kalmeer: "Dit is nie so erg nie, jy hoef nie so te stres nie, as dit nou gebeur, soos dit sal fine wees", of so.*

**Zelda: Uhm... and you say you... you think the thing that brought you together was your personalities?**

**Nicole: Yes.**

**Zelda: So, tell me a bit more about how the personalities in your group...**

*Nicole: I don't know, I think we... our personalities are very different too, it's not like we are all the same person, but uhm... ja... we gell very well together.*

*Zelda: Okay, and tell me, in your friendship circle... is there a leader?*

*Nicole: Uhm, I don't know. I am not really sure. Uhm I think it's kinda... I think everyone is half... has an important, has an important role in the friendship circle. Like if one person is gone, then you would miss them. So I do not think there is one person... if that person is gone, then the whole friendship circle would fall apart. So yes, I don't think there is a leader or so.*

*Zelda: Okay, but you think there are roles in your friendship circle?*

*Nicole: Yes, yes.*

*Zelda: Okay do you want to tell me a bit more about that? Who are they and what are their roles?*

*Nicole: Uhm, I don't know. I will say Mia is like the competitive one, she is very sporty and she likes challenges and stuff and she is kinda always the one who brings like competition into the friendship circle... but like friendly competition and stuff. And then Isabella, she one who irritates me, she is the mother figure I would say... or I don't know, they call her mother goose... yes... and uhm, there are a lot of car- like people with caring roles, I do not know how to explain it... who would like cheer people up and so...*

*Zelda: Okay almost like that motherly...*

*Nicole: Yes, yes. And I think I am many times like the one who is just calm... like, "Just calm down a bit". And then there are some of them who are very crazy all the time and like jump on one another and stuff and then I am like, "You, stop that now!" (laughs). But I don't know, I think our roles are just a bit different in a way.*

*Zelda: Uhm... en jy sê julle... jy dink die ding wat julle so by mekaar gebring het, is julle persoonlikhede?*

*Nicole: Ja.*

*Zelda: So, vertel my bietjie meer hoe is die persoonlikhede in julle groep...*

*Nicole: Ek weet nie, ek dink ons... ons persoonlikhede is baie anders ook, dis nou nie asof ons almal dieselfde persoon is nie, maar uhm... ja... ons jel baie goed saam.*

*Zelda: Okay, en sê vir my in julle vriendekring... is daar 'n leier?*

*Nicole: Uhm, ek weet nie. Ek is nie eintlik seker nie. Uhm ek dink dis nogals... ek dink almal is half... het soos 'n belangrike, het soos 'n belangrike rol in die vriendekring. Soos as een persoon weg is, dan is dit soos jy mis hulle. So ek dink nie dit is nou soos as een persoon... as daai persoon weg is, dan val die hele vriendekring plat nie. So ja, ek dink nie daar is nou soos 'n leier of so nie.*

*Zelda: Okay, maar jy dink daar is rolle in julle vriendekring?*

*Nicole: Ja, ja.*

*Zelda: Okay wil jy my bietjie meer vertel daarvan? Wie is hulle en wat is hulle rolle?*

*Nicole: Uhm, ek weet nie. Ek sal sê Mia is soos die kompeterende een, sy is baie sportief en sy hou van uitdagings en goed en sy is nogal altyd een wat soos kompetisie half in die vriendekring... maar soos vriendelike kompetisie en goed. En dan Isabella, die een wat my*

*so iriteer, sy is die moederfiguur sal ek sê... of ek weet nie, hulle noem haar mother goose... ja... en uhm, daar is maar baie soos omg- soos mense wat omgee rolle het, ek weet nie hoe om dit te verduidelik nie... wat mense sal opbeur en so.*

*Zelda: Ook amper soos daai motherly...*

*Nicole: Ja, ja. En ek dink ek is baie keer soos die een wat net soos rustig... soos: "Julle word net gou bietjie rustig". En dan is daar van hulle wat baie soos mal is heelyd en soos spring op mekaar en goed en dan is ek net soos: "Julle hou nou op!" (lag). Maar ek weet nie, ek dink ons rolle is maar bietjie anders op 'n manier.*

The similarity-complementarity debate has been controversial in the friendship literature (Cheng et al., 1995). From the findings of this study, it seems that both similarity and complementarity influenced the girls' friendship choices. In this category, consistent with the model of complementarity (Forsyth, 2010; Nowicki & Manheim, 1991), differences in temperament or personality seemed to foster interpersonal attraction amongst the girls. The girls in this study, at times, chose friends who differed from themselves, which seemingly held various advantages for the girls.

First, befriending someone different from the self seemed to complement the girl's preferred style of behaviour. According to Emily, Isabella's sense of dominance in the friendship complemented Emily's more submissive style. In the interviews, the girls described this phenomenon as friends who "balance each other out". Second, this social diversity within the friendship or friendship group seemingly increased the girl's exposure to different ways of living, being, or dealing with situations (see also Apter & Josselson, 1998; Hendry & Kloep, 2012). In turn, girls were able to learn from each other's differences and applied those aspects in a friend that they found admirable. Heather explained how she observed Rebecca's good organisational skills, and how she applied this. In turn, Heather appeared to have a calming effect on Rebecca who seemed to worry often. Third, the combination of dissimilar personalities in the friendship group seemingly produced an entertaining and pleasurable atmosphere as the girls took on different roles in the group. Nicole started off by explaining that the personalities in her friendship group combine or "gell well together" and asserted that it was these differences in personality that brought them together as a group. Later in the interview, she elaborated on the specific roles of her friends. Gilman (1985) identified three main types of roles individuals usually play in a group context, namely task roles, maintenance roles, and blocking roles. Nicole described Mia as the challenging one who "brings friendly competition" into the group and Gilman (1985) refers to this as the task role

of “the energizer” who stimulates the group to greater activity. Nicole described Isabella as the “mother goose” due to her nurturing and encouraging role while she described herself as the one who aims to maintain harmony and peace in the group by telling everyone to “calm down”. According to Gilman (1985), both Isabella and Nicole, therefore, played a maintenance role in the group by focussing on maintaining the friendships.

Contrary to previous research (Adler & Adler, 1995; Brown & Klute, 2006; Wiseman, 2009), the friendship group interactions in this study seemingly were not dominated by one girl as the “leader” of the friendship group. Instead, as Nicole stated, the combination of aforementioned roles seemed to form part of the leadership process in these girls’ friendship groups.

### **5.3 Friendship quality in adolescence**

In the girls’ narratives, they distinguished between their current and past friendships when they were younger. Interestingly, they described Grade 9 (age 15) as an “emotional year”, which seemed to mark a significant milestone regarding their growth. For the purpose of this section, I will use the term “earlier friendships” to refer to friendships prior to Grade 9. While their earlier friendships were marked by superficial interactions and less diversity, they described their current friendships along a breadth and depth dimension. First, changes evolved around thinking more about friendships, engaging on a deeper level, and utilising more mature conflict management strategies. Second, the girls seemed to be forming friendships with more, diverse individuals, thereby expanding their friendship groups in the process. The need for a variety of friendships of greater depth seemed to be implicated in the girls’ search for an identity. In addition, the girls illustrated how advances in emotional and sexual maturity shaped the nature of their social interactions.

#### **5.3.1 Being more mature and going deeper**

In all the interviews, the girls contrasted their earlier friendships with their current friendships, and spoke about how they started reflecting on themselves, their behaviours, and their friendships. Their earlier friendships tended to be more superficial, while their later friendships seemed to be based on a maturing need for more meaningful friendships.

The girls described the time during and prior to Grade 9 as a period of intense fighting amongst girl friends (“verskriklike bakleiers”). Some shared their negative experiences of earlier friendships and contrasted these against their current friendships. Melissa and Heather noted how relational aggression, such as gossiping and badmouthing friends, was a popular conflict management strategy in their past friendships.

***Melissa: Like I went through grade eight and nine and thought I had my group, but then that also fell apart or so. Because it is... the reason why we fell apart was because of stories that spread about the one person, but then it was not actually true, but the whole boarding house... like the whole hallway now kind of knows about the story and then they also added some stuff to the story and then it got like bad and then our friendship circle fell apart [...] Like the friendship group I have now, I am so blessed to have them, because you would not just like betray someone through gossip or something. Yes, you have those times, yes, these two are now angry for those two, but we all get back together again... so it's okay.***

*Melissa: Soos ek het graad agt en nege deurgegaan en gedink ek het my groep, maar toe val dit ook weer uitmekaar uit of so. Want dit is... die rede waarom ons uitmekaar uitgeval het was soos stories wat nou versprei het oor die een persoon, maar dan is dit nie eintlik waar nie, maar die hele koshuis... soos jou hele gang weet nou half van die storie en dan las hulle ook goedjies by en las 'n stertjie aan en toe raak dit soos erg en toe val ons vriendekring uitmekaar uit [...] Soos my vriendekring wat ek nou het, ek is so blessed om vir hulle te hê, maar jy sal nie meer sommer iemand in die rug gaan steek deur te gaan skinder of iets nie. Ja, jy het daai tye, ja, die twee is nou kwaad vir die twee, maar ons kom almal soos weer terug bymekaar... so dis okay.*

***Heather: Uhm, or not even in grade five or six, did we half begin... or like I now felt she said like bad things behind my back and uhm, yes, and she talked mean to me and she did not act the same way towards me anymore [...] and let's say we would talk to each other NOW, then we would tell each other like, yes uhm, like, she once told me on my birthday like, "Can you imagine that we fought that badly?" and then we just laugh about it and yes, I don't know, then we talk about it.***

*Heather: Uhm, of nie eers in graad 5 of 6 het ons half begin... of soos ek het nou gevoel sy sê soos slegte goed agter my rug en uhm, ja, en sy het lelik ook gepraat met my en nie meer dieselfde teenoor my opgetree nie [...] en sê nou maar ons sal NOU met mekaar praat, dan sal ons mekaar soos, ja uhm, soos, sy het die eenkeer vir my op my verjaarsdag gesê soos: "Kan jy dink dat ons so erg baklei het?" en dan soos lag ons daaroor en ja, ek weet nie, dan praat ons daaroor.*

Both Melissa and Heather reflected on their past friendships and highlighted how, over time, they developed more mature friendships marked by less relational aggression. In the extract below, Melissa continues to point out how her Grade 9 experience was significant in shaping her current friendships. She explains how maturation and getting to know her true self, and

the true selves of others, influenced her choice of friends. During her interview, Emily mentioned that she started having “mixed feelings” about the friends she made in Grade 8. In the extract below, Emily, like Melissa and Heather, illustrates how during Grade 9 and 10 there seemed to be an inward journey among girls and that they became more self-reflexive.

*Melissa: The personalities definitely changed in grade nine... definitely... and the one did not like laugh for the other one anymore and this one got angry more quickly with that one [...] In grade nine it was first your emotional year and second you... I strongly believe that your personality develops in grade nine, because your friendships are kind of formed then as well and then you feel very mature when you get to grade ten. [...] There is just something that happens, I do not know what it is, and with the boys as well... there is just something that happens (laughs). You are just suddenly more mature [...] Like in grade nine I must say, is an emotional year, I do not know what your grade nine year was like? (laughs) [...] The true colours come through then, at the beginning of grade eight you do not really know who you are... like I said... you... you are scared of everything, then you get to know yourself and then in grade ten... definitely then everyone is mature and then you are the real you at that moment [...] It is easier to have... more mature, deep discussions with someone. Ahh yes... it is actually just... you can go deeper and then actually... like you... actually like you... you are not that childish anymore.*

*Melissa: Die persoonlikhede het definitief in graad nege verander... definitief... en die een het nie meer soos gelag vir die een en die een het vinniger kwaad geraak vir die een. [...] In graad nege was dit eerstens jou emosionele jaar en tweedens jou... ek glo vas jou persoonlikheid ontwikkel in graad nege, want jou vriendekring word dan ook eintlik bepaal daarso en dan voel jy ook baie volwasse as jy in graad tien kom. [...] Daar is iets wat gebeur, ek weet nie wat nie, en by die seuns ook... daar is net iets wat gebeur (lag). Jy is net ewe skielik volwasseriger [...] Soos graad nege moet ek sê is ‘n emosionele jaar, weet nie hoe jou graad nege jaar was nie? (lag) [...] Die ware kleure kom deur, aan die begin in graad ag dan is jy maar soos jy weet nie eintlik wie jy is nie... soos ek mos gesê het... jy... jy is maar bang vir alles, dan begin jy jouself ken en dan graad nege [...] So ja, dan in graad nege dan begin die ware kleure eintlik uitkom en dan graad 10... definitief dan is almal volwasse en dan is jy jou regte jy op die oomblik [...] Jy kan baie makliker... baie meer volwasse, diep gesprek hê met iemand. Ahh ja... dis maar eintlik... jy kan dieper gaan en net dan actually... soos jy... actually soos jy... jy is nie meer so kinderlik nie.*

*Zelda: So when did that [“mixed feelings” about friends you made in grade eight] start to bother you?*

*Emily: Uhm (long pause) it was pretty... I think... uhm last year, start of this year. Yes. Like the last two quarters of grade nine, but mostly this year. I do not know why it is like that. Uhm (long pause).*

*Zelda: So if you can think... what maybe happened that made you feel like that?*

*Emily Uhm...(pause)*

*Zelda: Or is this now a really difficult question? (laughs)*

*Emily: (laughs) It is a difficult question, yes, but there is an answer. Uhm (long pause) ugh... I think I just started thinking more if that makes sense. Like with my religion as well, I started questioning it and I stopped going to church and I started to doubt and that's because I argue with myself about how is that possible. Uhm, so I just think I questioned myself in terms of my friendships as well and uhm... my relationships and other people's relationships with other people and so.*

*Zelda: So wanneer het dit ["mixed feelings" oor vriendinne in graad 8] jou begin pla?*

*Emily: Uhm (lang pouse). Dis redelik... ek dink... uhm verlede jaar, begin hierdie jaar. Ja. Soos die laaste twee kwartale van graad 9, maar hoofsaaklik hierdie jaar. Ek weet nie hoekom dit so is nie. Uhm... (lang pouse).*

*Zelda: So as jy kan dink... wat het miskien gebeur wat jou so laat voel het?*

*Emily: Uhm... (pouse).*

*Zelda: Of is dit nou n baie moeilike vraag? (lag)*

*Emily: (lag) Dit is 'n moeilike vraag ja, maar daar is 'n antwoord. Uhm (lang pouse)... ugh... ek dink ek het net meer begin dink as dit sin maak. Soos met my geloof ook het ek dit begin bevraagteken en ek het ophou kerk toe gaan en ek twyfel en dis omdat ek met myself stry oor hoe is dit moontlik. Uhm, so ek dink ek het net myself begin bevraagteken in terme van my vriendskappe ook en uhm... en my verhoudings en ander mense se verhoudings met ander mense en so.*

The girls contrasted their current friendships against their earlier friendships, positioning the use of relational aggression strategies (“telling stories”, “saying ugly things behind my back”) as distinctive to their earlier friendships. Multiple age comparison studies point out that relational aggression seems to peak in early adolescence (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992; Cairns et al., 1989; Galen & Underwood, 1997; Russell & Owens, 1999). Even though relational aggression continues to be used throughout the lifespan (Werner & Crick, 1999), friendships typically become more intimate and supportive from early to late adolescence (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Sharabany et al., 1981). To date, the majority of research on relational aggression has been mostly descriptive and fails to explain the age differences found in these studies (Mazur, 2008). One possible explanation could be that as girls age, they are faced with advances in cognitive reasoning and develop the ability to self reflect, allowing them to think more deeply about their friendships and to find alternative conflict management strategies (see also Shain & Farber, 1989). In Chapter 6 I will discuss how these girls dealt with conflict within their current friendships.

Being in Grade 9 seemed to mark a significant turning point towards a more mature, satisfying friendship. One can speculate that Grade 8 functions as a transition period between primary and high school during which the girls were trying to adjust to the new system by



conforming to fit in. One participant, Lisa, noted, “*In grade eight you are half unsure... so you just fall in, you kinda half fall around*”. Once the girls adjusted to the new system and got to know who their peers were, there seemed to be an inward journey amongst the girls in Grade 9. This time is characterised by seeming confusion, questioning, and reflection.

Emily’s use of long pauses could be indicative of how she seemingly struggled to make sense of her process. As they became more aware of their own needs, there seems to be a longing for more connection, authenticity, and depth in their friendships. For example, according to Melissa, “feeling more mature” and “getting to know the true you” enabled her to engage with friends on a deeper level.

The process of forming an identity or “getting to know the true you” seemed to be closely linked to the girls’ friendship experiences. For example, we see how Melissa suggested “personality development” to determine one’s friendship group. Additionally, Emily explains how the process of reflecting on her own religious beliefs was linked to questioning herself in terms of her friendships. Various researchers note the saliency of peer groups, like the girls’ friendships in this study, to provide young females with a sense of clarity about themselves and their friendships, and to continually shape their identities (Erikson, 1959; Josselson, 1987; Morgan & Korobov, 2012). Consistent with relational-cultural theory, identity formation in these girls seemed to occur in relation to others (Miller, 1976).

### **5.3.2 Different friends meet different needs**

The participants described how, in adolescence, they developed a need for more diverse friendships. Compared to their earlier friendships, one single best friend seemed to “not be enough anymore”.

*Emily: Ag it’s just that, you asked me now if I have a best friend... uhm... again I have different people from who I get different things. So it is not primary school any more, I think in primary school a person was simpler. You are not so emotionally developed, so you had one person with who you did everything, you shared everything with, but I think I am now more emotionally developed, so there are more aspects of me and uhm... like one person cannot connect with all those parts necessarily. So then I have many different friendships [...] I think in grade eight I was so concerned with the idea that I did not have a best friend anymore, like in primary school. But now I think I, now I understand... I understand now that I uhm... that I changed and that... yes... like I said, just one person is not going to do the thing for me.*

*Emily: Ag dis maar net, jy het nou gevra het ek 'n beste vriendin... uhm... weereens ek het verskillende mense by wie ek verskillende goeters kry. So dis nie meer in die laerskool, ek dink in die laerskool was mens meer eenvoudig. Mens was nie so emosioneel ontwikkel nie, so jy het een persoon gehad met wie jy alles gedoen het, jy het alles mee gedeel, maar ek dink nou is ek meer emosioneel ontwikkel, so daar is meer aspekte van my en uhm... soos een persoon kan nie inskakel met al daai dele noodwendig nie. So dan het ek klomp verskillende viendskappe. [...] Ek dink in graad agt of so was ek gepla daarmee dat ek nie meer 'n beste vriendin het nie, soos in laerskool. Maar nou dink ek, nou verstaan ek hoekom ek... ek verstaan nou dat ek uhm... dat ek verander het en dat... ja... soos ek gesê het net een persoon gaan nie vir my die ding gaan doen nie.*

**Zelda: Would you say you have a best friend?**

**Jane: No, I do not think so. It is difficult for me, because they are all so... they are all so different like... I do not have two friends that I think, "Joh they remind me a lot of one another". They are so... like individually just, so different that I cannot say, for this girl I have more time than for that one and I love her more than I love the other.**

*Zelda: Sal jy sê jy het 'n beste vriendin?*

*Jane: Nee, ek dink nie so nie. Dis vir my moeilik, want hulle is so... hulle is almal so anders soos... ek het nie twee vriendinne wat ek dink: "Joh hulle laat dink my baie aan mekaar nie." Hulle is so... soos individueel soos, so anders en verskillend dat ek nie kan sê vir hierdie girl ek meer tyd as vir daai een nie en vir haar is ek baie liewer as wat ek vir haar is nie.*

The need for an exclusive single best friend was seemingly replaced with a longing for more diverse individuals. Both Emily and Jane spoke about the breadth of their friendships in late adolescence (16 years old). Emily showed a developing awareness of different "aspects" of herself, and stated that her need for diverse friendships was linked to her need to fulfil certain personal needs.

Researchers have found that, from early to late adolescence, group boundaries become increasingly fluid (Brown, 2003; Rubin et al., 2006; Shrum & Cheek, 1987), which may possibly explain why the girls in this study could interact and make friends with diverse individuals from different groups. Markiewicz and Doyle (2016) noted how adolescents, like the girls in this study, due to improved abilities in abstract reasoning and differentiation of the self and others, are able to recognise how friends have the capacity to meet their social needs. According to Kroger (2007), adolescents may seek different friendships to validate different aspects of themselves, thereby contributing to their process of identity formation. For example, Emily asserted that she had "many different friends" who could "connect with

different parts” of herself. Furthermore, this finding resonates with relational-cultural theory that states personal growth is associated with more diversified networks (Jordan, 2008).

### 5.3.3 When “other” things come into play

From the above it seems as if the emotional maturity that accompanies the late adolescent developmental stage eased conflict management and allowed the girls to engage with each other on a deeper, more fulfilling, level. Late adolescence, however, may also complicate the girls’ friendships as the need for romantic relationships seemed to be associated with competition amongst the girls to attract boys. In the following extracts, we will see how their adolescent growth needs may pose challenges in these girls’ friendships.

***Melissa: So then you half form and then you kind of get your friends and then comes grade nine and then you fall in with those friends again [...] and then academics come into play and then boys also come into play and then... yes...***

*Melissa: So dan vorm jy nou half en dan het jy nou bietjie jou vriendinne gekry en dan kom graad nege en dan val jy weer by daai vriendinne in [...] en dan kom akademie in jou spel en dan kom ouens nou ook in jou spel en dan... ja...*

***Emily: She [Kristen] liked one of the guys, who were with us on the farm, but this guy liked Elise and Elise and he later started dating. And then Elise thought that Kristen didn’t spend that much time with us anymore because she was half a bit... Elise (laughs), “She is dating the guy I like”... so she was a bit jealous. Or that is what Elise thought.***

*Emily: Sy [Kristen] het gehou van een van die ouens wat saam met ons op die plaas was, maar hierdie ou het gehou van Elise en Elise en hy het toe later begin uitgaan. En toe dink Elise maar Kristen is nou nie meer so baie by ons nie omdat sy nou so half ‘n bietjie... Elise (lag), “Sy gaan uit met die ou van wie ek hou”... so bietjie jaloers was. Of Elise het dit gedink.*

***Rebecca: Look, like there, that was grade eight, so it was just like... it was very chilled, everyone just walked around and there was a swimming pool and we swam. That was actually still half fun, which was a clean party, if I must say it like that. So there were not like... ugly things... if I must say it like that. And then in grade nine, Rachel and I went again... there was obviously things happening in between as well, but that was fine and so... then we went to this one guy, William’s, house. And we were there for like 15 minutes and then we were picked up. Like we phoned our parents, because it was just too bad. Everyone was drunk, I haven’t seen anything like that in my life. Well in my head it was one of those movie type of things where everyone is so drunk and it was really gross and stuff. And, uhm, then uhm we went home and so. And from there... now if a social event is like that, then it is half normal.***

*Rebecca: Kyk, soos daar, daai was graad 8, so dit was net soos... dit was baie rustig, almal het net soos daarso rondgestap en daar was 'n swembad en ons het geswem. Daai was actually nog half lekker, daai was 'n skoon partytjie, as ek dit so moet sê. So daar was nie soos... lelike goed... as ek dit nou so moet sê nie. En toe in graad 9, gaan ek en Rachel weer... daar was mos nou obviously tussen in ook goeters, maar dit was fine en so... toe het ons na hierdie een ou, William, se huis toe gegaan. En ons was daar soos vir 15 minute en toe word ons opgetel. Soos, ons het ons ouers gebel, want dit was net so erg. Almal was dronk, ek het nog nooit in my hele lewe so iets gesien nie. Wel in my kop was dit soos een van daai movie tipe goed waar almal so dronk is en dit was regtig soos gross en goed. En, uhm, toe het uhm ons soos huis toe gegaan en so. En toe soos van daar af... nou as 'n kuier soos so is, dan is dit half normaal.*

According to Brown et al. (1999), adolescent growth needs centre around taking increasing responsibility for one's daily life, behaviour, and future, and exploring romantic and sexual relationships. The girls in this study similarly reported the salience of these factors in their friendships. Melissa mentioned that after Grade 9 there was an increased focus on academics and boys in her friendship group. Emily further pointed out how boys seemingly complicated their friendships and evoked jealousy amongst the girls. Researchers noted how girls' friendship groups, like the friendships in this study, were often negatively affected by competition for boys' attention (Thorne, 1993; Van Wyk, 2015).

Yet, the girls seemed hesitant to elaborate on competition and jealousy in their friendships. For example, Melissa's apparent unwillingness to complete her sentence may reflect a discomfort, or even struggle, to elaborate on the possible impact boys and academics might have had on her friendships. Likewise, Emily laughed self-consciously when she told me about jealousy, concerning a boy, in her friendship group. Rind (2002) demonstrated how females, seemingly like the girls in this study, felt discomfort when faced with competitive feelings and considered jealousy and competition to have no place in a close friendship. In Chapter 6, I elaborate on how femininity ideals, such as valuing and fostering relationships, seemingly shaped the girls' ideas on how they should be and act, which included the avoidance of competition and conflict in their friendships.

The girls and their friends in this study often attended social events, referred to as "kuiers", which were seemingly accompanied with experimentation and heavy use of alcohol. In the extract above, Rebecca described what seemed to be her first experience of such a "kuier" and labelled the apparent excessive use of alcohol as "ugly" and "gross". It is acknowledged worldwide that adolescence is a high-risk period for experimentation with health-

compromising behaviour such as alcohol use (Brown et al., 1999; Gilvarry, 2000; Madu & Matla, 2003). In South Africa, adolescents indicated that they mostly drink alcohol at weekend parties with friends, like the “kuiers” mentioned in this study, while the average age for first alcohol consumption was 15.3 years (Grade 9) (Madu & Matla, 2003). The girls’ experiences of drinking at social events are further symptomatic of substance misuse among adolescents in South Africa (Morojele & Ramsoomar, 2016). Brown et al. (1999) noted how being social while drinking is often portrayed in the media as a marker of successful relationships and bonding which could have encouraged the girls’ experimentation with alcohol in this study. Even though Rebecca was shaken by her friends’ use of alcohol at first, she noted that after attending more “kuiers”, the use of alcohol at “kuiers” was considered “half normal”. Thus, as noted by Hepworth et al. (2016), friends’ drinking behaviour in social settings could further promote adolescents’ acceptance of a drinking culture.

#### **5.4 Summary**

In this theme, I discussed the nature of these adolescent girls’ friendships, including how they understood the concept of a “friend”, the binding factors that seemingly played a role in their friendship formations, and the unique quality and developmental significance of their friendships in adolescence. For these girls, the defining feature of a friend, versus an acquaintance, seemed to be someone one invites into one’s private space and spend time with together, outside of the school context. Additionally, the girls tend to place their friends on a continuum of “closeness” which seemed to be based on the extent to which the girl considered the friend a trustworthy confidant with whom she could self-disclose. The girls further noted how communication technologies, with specific reference to WhatsApp messenger, enabled them to be constantly engaged in conversation with friends. Communication technologies, therefore, seemingly played an important role in the maintenance of these friendships by fostering a sense of closeness and belonging regardless of the girls’ physical location.

The girls described the process of friendship formation as a puzzling experience as they had to consider various factors and expressed much ambivalence. Binding factors included proximity, perceived similarity, and perceived complementarity. Being placed in close proximity could have provided girls with the opportunity to get to know one another and

generate affective ties. On the other hand, being placed together in a room, it is possible that the girl had to learn to cooperate and befriend her roommate to maintain a mutually satisfactory living environment. Furthermore, both similarity and complementarity were associated with the girls' friendship choices. Choosing someone similar to the self seemingly contributed to feelings of connectedness and likeness and reduced the possibility of disagreement and conflict in the friendship. Similarity in terms of perceived popularity/prettiness seemed to be a key focus in these girls' friendship choices. The girls further described how choosing a friend who is different from the self, at times, complemented the girl's own personality while diversity in the friendship group was associated with opportunities to learn from friends and created more enjoyable atmosphere.

While their earlier friendships were characterised by superficial interactions, relational aggression strategies, and less diversity, the girls described their current friendships to be more deep, meaningful, and diverse. The girls spoke about how they started reflecting on themselves and their relationships with friends around the time they were in Grade 9. Becoming more aware of the different aspects of themselves, the girls noted how diverse friends could fulfil different personal needs and possibly also validate different aspects of themselves, thereby seemingly contributing to the girls' identity development. During adolescence, however, it seemed that the girls' need for romantic relationships gave birth to jealousy and competition amongst girls to attract boys, while an apparent need for experimentation was accompanied with heavy use of alcohol and acceptance of a drinking culture among girl friends.

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## Chapter 6: Idealising the Friendship

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In the following chapter, I will illustrate how the girls' talk was situated within an idealised friendship discourse. In Table 6.1 below, I present the thematic map for this theme with its subthemes and categories.

Table 6.1

*Thematic Map: Idealising the Friendship*

| Subtheme  | Category   |
|---|--|
| <b>6.1</b> The ideal friend                     | <b>6.1.1</b> Expectations of the ideal friend        |
|   | <b>6.1.2</b> Keeping up appearances                  |
| <b>6.2</b> Challenges to the ideal friend image | <b>6.2.1</b> Conflict as small, stupid, petty things |
|   | <b>6.2.2</b> Shut up and be nice                     |
|   | <b>6.2.3</b> Dealing with conflict: The contra-voice |

Underlying the girls' descriptions of different types of friends was a clear assumption of what they consider to be an ideal vs a "bad" friend. First, I will discuss the "ideal" friend and show how they distinguished an ideal friend from a "bad" friend by focussing on their descriptions of and expectations they had of an ideal friend. I will also discuss how the girls dealt with and reacted to such friendship expectations, particularly when their expectations did not match the reality. Second, conflict in the friendship seemed to be a pertinent challenge to the ideal friend image. In this sub-theme, I will demonstrate how the girls dealt with conflict in the friendship.

### **6.1 The ideal friend**

According to Hall (2011) and Wiseman (2009), same-sex friendships are grounded on highly valued expectations and qualities, and are governed by unwritten social rules. Hey (1997) similarly referred to reliability, loyalty, reciprocity, commitment, confidentiality, trust and sharing as the "ethical rules" of adolescent girls' friendships. According to Policarpo (2015),

late adolescents, compared to older samples, tend to idealise their friendships by expecting their friends to adhere to these “rules” at all times.

In this study, the girls similarly painted a picture of an ideal friend by positioning a friend as either “good” or “bad”. According to the participants, an ideal friend possessed all the qualities of a “good” friend, but none of a “bad” friend. Even though the girls rarely explicitly referred to their friends as either “good” or “bad”, their tone of voice and body language seemingly demonstrated their approval of or dissatisfaction with a friend’s actions. In their talk, the good friend’s actions and qualities were also juxtaposed against undesirable actions and qualities in a friend.

In this subtheme, I will first mention the girls’ expectations of the ideal friend as well as how these expectations seemed to affect the dynamics in the friendship. Thereafter, I will discuss how the girls dealt with the discrepancy between their idea of an ideal friend and their friendship reality.

### **6.1.1 Expectations of the ideal friend**

In the interviews, I asked the girls what they value in their friendships and how they would like their friends to be. Below, Lydia and Rachel talked about what they considered to be an ideal friend. It is interesting to see how they used words like “everything” and “always” which seems to be evident of categorist/essentialist thinking during adolescence (Policarpo, 2015).

*Lydia: I want... I like... a friend must half... for me it just half feels she must be supportive. Because if she is supportive, then many things will go hand in hand and then I half feel she will always love you, she will always be there for you, she will always like it to be with you and socialise with you. And if she supports you in what you do then she will also always be happy for you. I think it is important that a friend must support you in everything you do.*

*Lydia: Ek wil... ek hou... 'n vriendin moet half... dit voel net vir my half sy moet ondersteunend wees. Want as sy ondersteunend is kom daar baie goed hand in hand dan voel ek half soos sy sal altyd lief wees vir jou, sy sal altyd daar wees vir jou, sy sal altyd daarvan hou om by jou te wees en half met jou te kuier. En as sy jou ondersteun in wat jy doen sal sy ook altyd bly wees vir jou. Ek dink dis belangrik dat 'n vriendin jou moet ondersteun in als wat jy doen.*



**Zelda:** *Okay. And what do you think, Rachel, is the most important for you in a friendship? Or to what do you attach the most value?*

**Rachel:** *You must be able to sacrifice anything for them... okay, not ANYTHING (laughs) like you know, not like the world's... but you must be willing... even if you know the rugby is on during that time and you know it will mean a lot for your friend if you go and watch her hockey game, go watch her hockey... it will really not mean the end of your life, like I would watch like Heather's hockey games and she will come to my farm and she knows it is important and like... if you do the small things which you know is not going to make a difference in your life if you do it, do it... to be like there for each other and to trust each other and to know you can literally tell them anything without them telling it to someone else, yes [...] Because she [Heather] would also literally sacrifice anything for me and she will always put in effort for me and... even if she has 500 other things to do, she would put that aside and first ask me what is wrong and like that...*

**Zelda:** *Okay. En wat dink jy Rachel is vir jou die belangrikste in 'n vriendskap? Of waaraan heg jy die meeste waarde?*

**Rachel:** *Jy moet enige iets kan opoffer vir hulle... okay nou nie ENIGE iets nie (lag) soos jy weet, nou nie die wêreldse... maar jy moet bereid wees... al weet jy die rugby is nou daai tyd en jy weet dit beteken vir jou vriendin baie om haar hokkie te gaan kyk, gaan kyk haar hokkie... dit gaan regtig nou nie die einde van jou lewe beteken nie, soos ek sal soos Heather se hokkie games gaan kyk en sy sal na my plaas toe kom en sy weet dit is vir my belangrik en soos... as jy soos die klein goedjies doen wat jy weet gaan nie 'n verskil maak in jou lewe om dit te doen nie, doen dit... om soos daar te wees vir mekaar en op mekaar vertrou en om te weet jy kan letterlik vir hulle enige iets sê sonder dat hulle nou gaan klink, ja. [...] Want sy [Heather] sal ook letterlik enige iets opoffer vir my en sy sal altyd moeite doen met my en... al het sy 500 ander goeters om te doen, sy sal dit opsy skuif en vir my eers vra wat is fout en soos dit...*

The participants typified an ideal friend as someone one can “always” trust to support one in “everything” one does; ideal friends do not fight with each other, think similarly and agree on most matters. For these girls, ideal friends are loyal, devote precious time to the friendship, and are willing to put a friend’s needs and desires above their own. One should be able to tell an ideal friend “anything”, having no doubt that one’s secret is safe with her. Even if one disappoints or betrays her, the ideal friend will forgive one and still have your back. For example, Rachel stated: *“I know she is my friend and it doesn’t matter what happens, I will always have her back, for all my friends.”* Importantly, an ideal friend is always nice, friendly, and decent – even towards non-friends.

While Lydia and Rachel focussed on the qualities of an ideal friend, such as supportiveness and trustworthiness, other participants highlighted undesirable (“bad”) qualities such as the

expression of anger and irritations, meanness, or being a bad influence on morality that an ideal friend should not display.

**Zelda:** *What do you think that girl should do to like, or what should she be like, to form a part of your friendship circle?*

**Heather:** *[...] I think, ugh, don't know, she shouldn't, uhm, like, not quickly... half not get irritated or angry quickly and shouldn't get tensed about stuff.*

**Zelda:** *Wat dink jy moet daai meisie doen om soos, of hoe moet sy wees, om deel te word van julle vriendekring?*

**Heather:** *[...] Ek dink, ugh, weet nie, sy moenie, uhm, soos, nie vinnig... half vinnig geïreiteerd raak of kwaad raak of opgetens raak oor goed nie.*

**Brenda:** *The rotten eggs in School X who makes you go smoking and drinking and go completely of track.*

**Brenda:** *Die vrot eiers in Skool X wat jou nou gaan laat rook en drink en heeltemal van die pad af gaan.*

**Melissa:** *And then in front of him she is so friendly and then smiles and talks to me, but as soon as he leaves then she is mean. So yes, two-faced-friends I also definitely do not want.*

**Melissa:** *En dan voor hom dan is sy so vriendelik en dan smile sy en sy praat met my, maar sodra hy weg is dan is sy ongeskik. So ja, tweegesigvriendinne wil ek ook definitief nie hê nie.*

**Rebecca:** *So it's like Rachel and Heather. Like I know I can trust them and they would not go tell someone else. I have a different friend as well, her name is Jane, and she is like... agh... not meaning this in a bad way, but like I know I cannot tell her something and then the next day someone else is not going to know it. Like she, like, I know her intentions are good and she really has a good heart and is good, but she... she likes to tell other people your stuff.*

**Rebecca:** *So dis nou soos Rachel en Heather. Soos ek weet ek kan hulle vertrou en hulle sal nie vir iemand gaan sê nie. Ek het 'n ander vriendin ook, haar naam is Jane, en sy is soos... agh... nie soos lelik bedoel nie, maar soos ek weet ek kan nie vir haar iets gaan sê, en dan die volgende dag gaan iemand anderste nie weet nie. Soos sy, soos, ek weet soos sy bedoel goed en sy het regtig 'n goeie hart en is goed, maar sy... sy hou daarvan om vir ander mense soos jou goeters te vertel.*

In contrast to the ideal friend, a “bad” friend is mean to one at times and one should be careful of what one tells her as one cannot trust her with one’s secrets. Words to describe a bad friend included: “skinderbek”, “tweegesig”, and “vroteier”. In addition, a bad friend tends to be more involved with boys and was more likely to experiment with alcohol and

smoking, making her a “bad influence”. In other words, a bad friend is considered to be someone who is neither always nice nor decent (“nie ordentlik nie”).

The demands and expectations of an “ideal” friend, however, seemed to pose some challenges for the girls. The notion of *always* being nice and *always* having to be there for one’s friends in *everything* they do seemed to create inner conflict for the girls and tension in the friendship. For example, below, Jane demonstrated the extent to which the girls would disregard their own needs to meet the expectation of caring and supporting their friends.

***Jane: Like I have a very... big group of friends at the school as well and then it is like, “Can I quickly talk to you during the break?” And then I am like, “Yes, you can... tell me, tell me, tell me”. Meantime like today three children came to talk to me about what bothers them and I am just like... I didn’t sleep anything last night, my homework is not done, I still have to do all these things, I stayed awake until two the one evening to sit with this one girl and I wrote Biology the next day. Sometime is... like priorities yes, but I also think like, “Yes, what you do on earth is obviously one day much more important than how high I score in the Biology test”.***

*Jane: Soos ek het ‘n baie... ‘n groot groep vriendinne by die skool ook en dan’s dit soos: “Kan ek gou pouse met jou praat?”. En dan is ek soos: “Ja, jy kan... vertel vir my, vertel vir my, vertel vir my”. Meantime soos vandag het drie kinders met my kom praat oor wat hulle pla en ek is net soos... ek het niks gisteraand geslaap nie, my huiswerk is nie klaar nie, ek moet nog al die goed doen, ek het tot twee uur die een aand wakker gesit met die een meisie en ek het die volgende dag biologie geskryf. Partykeer is... soos prioiriteite ja, maar ek dink soos ook: “Ja, wat mens op die aarde doen is mos obviously een dag mos baie belangriker as hoeveel ek nou vir die toets doen in biologie”.*

Above we see how, for Jane, caring for and listening to her friends’ concerns took priority over her own need for sleep and academic responsibilities. In a similar vein, there seemed to be a clash between Rebecca’s own desires and her good friend Rachel’s expectations. In the following extract, we see how Rebecca spoke about what was expected from her as Rachel’s friend, and how she tried to convince herself that placing Rachel’s desires above that of her own, was the right and noble thing to do.

***Rebecca: And I actually today, like on my own, because I didn’t tell someone this, but I actually thought that I actually would rather want to go to the inter-schools.***

***Zelda: So rather inter-schools and not to her farm?***

***Rebecca: Yes, but because I know Rachel is my best friend, I would not like drop her now, because today is Monday and we go on Friday. And then today, actually by chance, her boyfriend also now cheated on her, so she already had such a bad day. Then the one girl, Diana, now told her that she is not going anymore. She is now the first one to say that she would rather go to the inter-schools’ game. And then Rachel***

*already looked down and then Sarah went to tell her as well. And then I phoned my dad too to talk to him about this and then he told me, “But the right thing to do will be to go to Rachel”. And then I went to tell the others, but I am going to Rachel and then... I do not know yet what Natalie is going to do... and also not Anne. But we are now going to Rachel, because it is not right to leave your friend now, because she is in any case going through a difficult time now... like it is just not right. And, uh... yes, like for me it feels like everyone in the boarding house is very good friends, but they [Rachel and Heather] are like my head friends [...] But I really think we have to go, because Rachel is like our best friend and stuff. And then she [Heather] said yes, like, there is no way she is not going, even if she knows that the inter-schools’ social is going to be a lot of fun and stuff. And then we would, we would just like half try to convince each other and half make it the most positive we can, even though both of us would also like to go to the inter-schools’ thing, we still are not going. Because we had to choose between if a social event or our really, REALLY, close friend is more important. And then obviously you choose your friend, or well, we did. Yes, and then we would just half reason it out with one another.*

*Rebecca: En ek het eintlik vandag, soos op my eie, want ek het dit nou nie vir iemand gesê nie, maar ek het toe eintlik toe gedink ek wil ook nou eintlik interskole toe gaan.*

*Zelda: So eerder interskole toe en nie na haar plaas nie?*

*Rebecca: Ja, maar omdat ek weet Rachel is my beste vriendin, sal ek nie soos haar nou drop nie, want dis nou Maandag en ons ry Vrydag. En toe vandag, eintlik toevallig, toe het haar ou ook nou op haar gecheat, so sy het nou al klaar so slegte dag gehad. Toe gaan sê die een meisie, Diana, nou vir haar sy gaan nou nie meer gaan nie. Sy is nou die eerste een om te sê sy gaan nou eerder interskole toe. En toe lyk Rachel al klaar af en toe gaan sê Sarah vir haar ook. En toe bel ek my pa ook en ek gaan praat toe met hom daaroor ook en toe het hy vir my gesê: “Maar die regte ding om te doen sal wees om nou na Rachel toe te gaan”. En toe gaan sê ek nou vir die ander maar ek gaan na Rachel toe en dan gaan... ek weet nog nie wat Natalie gaan doen nie... en ook nie Anne nie. Maar ons gaan nou na Rachel toe, want dit is nie nou reg om nou jou vriendin te los nie, want sy gaan nou in any case deur so moeilike tyd... soos dit is net nie reg nie. En, uh... ja soos dit voel vir my ons almal in die koshuis is soos baie goeie vriendinne, maar hulle [Rachel en Heather] is soos my hoofvriendinne [...] Maar ek dink regtig ons moet gaan, want Rachel is soos ons beste vriendin en goed. Toe sê sy [Heather] ja, soos, daar is nie ‘n manier wat sy nou nie gaan gaan nie, al weet sy die interskole kuier gaan baie lekker wees en goed. En dan sal ons soos, ons sal net half vir mekaar ook half probeer convince en dit soos half die positiefste maak as wat ons kan, al wil ons altwee ook na die interskole ding toe gaan, gaan ons steeds nie. Want ons moet soos kies is ‘n kuier of soos jou regtige, REGTIGE, close vriendin belangriker? En dan obviously kies jy dan jou vriendin, of wel ons het nou. Ja, en dan sal ons net half soos dit vir mekaar uitredeneer.*

In the extract above, we see how Rebecca is considering her best friend Rachel’s feelings and what is expected of her as Rachel’s best friend. Here she considers Rachel’s feelings because Rachel’s boyfriend cheated on Rachel and some of the other friends had already cancelled on Rachel. We see how conflicted Rebecca was, so much so that she phoned her father to help her with this predicament. Although Rebecca rationalised her decision to live up to the

demands of being a good friend in the interview, later I learnt that she actually decided to go to the inter-schools' social rather than accompany Rachel to the farm. In other words, despite Rebecca's determination to live up to the demands of an ideal friend, she later decided to place her own desires above that of her friend's. Once again, we see how the demands of an ideal friend can be in conflict with the girls' own desires.

In the following extract, we see Rachel's account of the same incident and how this later influenced their relationship.

***Rachel: Like Rebecca wasn't really that sick, she just coughed a little, and then she told me okay but she cannot come [to the farm], because she is sick or she... But then she went to the inter-schools in Place X that weekend, but like I knew she went and it was all fine, but then it just felt a little... Okay, I'd not worry about all the other people, but like I've been planning this for a really long time and I wanted to invite her a few times now, but then things didn't work out and then it just felt a little, but okay... Like I would... Okay, in a way it felt like she chose like boys or that social with a lot of people above... uhm... a thing I have been planning for a very long time and she knew it was on the same weekend and everything and then she cancelled last minute and I must say that made me think a little bit... because Heather did like not at all cancel on me and she would always, I know, it doesn't matter what it is, leave things for me where there it felt a bit she would think twice before she would leave a thing for me, like if you understand what I mean? [...] Like I would literally leave anything for the two of them ... even now... even though she did that, like I never told her or something, it's just me... I tell you this now, because I have not told anyone else... uhm... then it felt like, okay, I was just a bit disappointed.***

*Rachel: Soos Rebecca was nie regtig so siek gewees nie, sy het net so bietjie gehoes toe sê sy vir my okay maar sy kan nie kom [ na die plaas] nie, want sy is siek of soos sy... Maar toe gaan sy die naweek na die, soos, interskole toe in Plek X, maar soos ek weet sy het gegaan en dit was als fine, maar toe voel dit net vir my so klein bietjie soos... Okay, ek worry nie oor die ander mense nie, maar soos ek beplan dit al regtig lank en 'n paar keer toe wou ek al vir haar nooi, maar toe werk dinge net nie uit nie en toe voel dit maar vir my so bietjie, maar okay... Soos ek sou... Okay, dit het in 'n manier gevoel sy kies soos seuns of soos daai kuier met klomp mense soos bo... uhm... 'n ding wat ek nou al baie lank beplan en soos sy het geweet dit is soos op dieselfde naweek en alles en toe cancel sy op die nippertjie en ek moet sê dit het my klein bietjie soos laat dink... want Heather het soos gladnie op my gecancel en sy sal soos altyd, ek weet, maak nie saak wat dit is nie, soos goeters los vir my, waar dit het vir my bietjie daar gevoel sy sal altyd twee keer dink voor sy 'n ding los vir my, soos as jy verstaan wat ek bedoel? [...] Soos ek sal letterlik enige iets los vir hulle twee soos... nou nog... al het sy dit gedoen, soos ek het nooit vir haar gesê of iets nie, dit is nou maar net ek... ek sê dit nou maar vir jou, want ek het niemand anders al dit vertel... uhm... toe voel dit nou maar, okay, ek was maar nou net 'n bietjie... disappointed gewees.*

Above we see Rachel's disappointment that Rebecca did not live up to the expectations of an "ideal friend" and how she felt betrayed that Rebecca rather chose to "party with boys" than spend time with her. We also see how she contrasts Rebecca's behaviour with her other friend, Heather, who did not "cancel on her" and who would "leave anything for her". In Rebecca's extract above, we saw how Rebecca similarly contrasted her initial decision to be a "good" friend against the decisions made by her other friends, Natalie and Diana, saying that what they did was wrong to desert a friend. This comparison serves to strengthen the ideal friend image. At a later stage in the interview, Rachel used this argument to justify her decision for choosing Heather above Rebecca as her roommate.

From the above, it seems that the girls were situating themselves in an idealised friendship discourse. In the case of Rachel, the idea of an ideal friend seemed to dictate the expectations she had of her friends, Rebecca and Heather. Besides placing expectations on her friends, Rachel herself took in the position of an ideal friend. Even though she was clearly unhappy with Rebecca's betrayal and choosing the boys above friends, she did not confront Rebecca about this or her dishonesty. From this incident it could be argued that the demands of "niceness" and being a "good" friend seemed to restrict both girls from being authentic and expressing their feelings to each other. Rebecca feigned illness because she did not have the courage to tell Rachel that she rather preferred to attend the inter-schools' social. Similarly, Rachel refrained from expressing her disappointment to Rebecca, possibly to avoid conflict or placing strain on their friendship. Although Rebecca lied to Rachel, in the extract above, Rachel declares that she will still support Rebecca and "leave things for her".

Like Rebecca, Lydia, at times, also did not live up to the expectations of her friends. In the extract below, Lydia tells us how her best friends expected her, for the sake of maintaining a harmonious friendship, to support their point of view, even though she did not agree with them. Because, according to the participants, ideal friends should think alike and not disagree, as this might lead to conflict. Even though Lydia felt obliged to live up to these expectations and choose her best friends' side, she does not do so, and in turn suffered the consequences.

*Lydia: Uhm, many times... in arguments or so... or like if we have to make a decision say like... stupid decisions... like say which movie we are going to watch or so, then those three would always agree or they would feel obligated to... like I would always feel obligated to choose Christine and Isabella's side because I am roommates with them.*

**Zelda:** *Okay, so you say you feel like you always have to take their side?*

**Lydia:** *Yes, yes, I definitely feel... like Christine have told me before and Isabella as well... they get upset, because they feel I have been longer... because... because I am one of those people, even if I do not agree with something, I don't agree, because many times I have... I... like I... have certain opinions about certain situations and I feel very strongly about certain things. And then many of my friends would, say, get angry and, "Why did you choose her side, because I have known you for longer" and so [...] So yes, I feel obliged half to choose their side, but it doesn't always happen. I just... go with what I agree on.*

**Zelda:** *So let's say something that is more important for you, like you say religion, let's say you... you agree with the one friend and the other friend is now angry with you. Like how do you feel then?*

**Lydia:** *It is obviously not nice for me, but I think all my friends know that... that I won't easily change my opinion. And I think half... I would go tell them... like I feel guilty because they are angry with me and it is not nice if your friends are angry with you.*

**Lydia:** *Uhm, baie keer in... soos argumente of so... of soos as ons nou 'n besluit moet neem soos sê nou maar... soos stupid besluite... soos sê nou maar wat ons moet gaan flik of so, dan sal daai drie altyd saamstem of hulle sal verplig voel om... soos ek sal altyd verplig voel om soos Christine en Isabella se kant te vat omdat ek kamermaats is met hulle.*

**Zelda:** *Okay, so jy sê jy voel jy moet altyd hulle kant vat?*

**Lydia:** *Ja, ja, ek voel definitief... soos Christine het ook al vir my gesê en Isabella het ook al... hulle raak ontsteld, want hulle voel ek is al langer... want... want ek is een van daai mense, as ek nie saamstem met 'n ding nie, stem ek nie saam nie, want ek het baie... ek... soos ek... het sekere opinies oor sekere situasies en ek voel baie sterk oor sekere goed. En dan sal baie van my vriendinne sê nou maar kwaad raak en: "Hoekom het jy haar kant gekies, want ek ken jou al langer" en so [...] So ja, ek voel verplig half om hulle kant te kies, maar dit gebeur nou nie altyd nie. Ek is maar.. gaan waar ek saamstem.*

**Zelda:** *So sê nou maar iets wat nou vir jou meer belangrik is, soos jy sê geloof, sê nou jy... jy stem saam met die een vriendin en die ander vriendin is nou vir jou kwaad. Soos hoe voel jy dan?*

**Lydia:** *Dit is obviously nie vir my lekker nie, maar ek dink al my vriendinne weet dat... dat ek gaan nie sommer van opinie verander nie. En ek dink half... ek sal vir hulle gaan sê... soos ek voel skuldig want hulle is kwaad vir my en dis nie lekker as jou vriendinne kwaad is vir jou nie.*

In the above extract, it is apparent how the constructions of an "ideal" friend seemed to evoke feelings of ambivalence for girls. Here we see how Lydia, at times, feels obliged to agree with her friends even though she disagrees with them about matters, and how she feels discomfort when they are angry with her. Hence, Lydia is marginalised for not adhering to the codes of friendship.

According to researchers, behaviour in girls' friendships tends to be guided by ethical rules that, if broken, can lead to tension in the relationship (Wiseman, 2009; Wright & Patterson, 2006). In the extracts above, we see how the girls experienced disappointment and conflicting feelings when they violated the ethical rules of their friendship. According to the literature, adolescents do not only base their friendship satisfaction on the extent to which friends can meet their expectations (Policarpo, 2015), but they also tend to use this ideal standard to evaluate themselves in the friendship (Fletcher & Simpson, 2001). For example, Rebecca struggled with an inner conflict of choosing between her own versus her friend's desires, while Rachel faced disappointment and feelings of betrayal when Rebecca was not loyal and committed to the friendship. Also, Lydia felt guilty for disappointing her friends when she did not take their side in an argument. Consistent with this finding, Apter and Josselson (1998) stated that girls reported feeling trapped by the expectation that they should think and feel like their friends. Hall (2014) therefore cautions against having too high and fixed standards for friends as higher standards can lead to more experiences of disappointment and is negatively associated with friendship satisfaction (see also Cheng et al., 1995; Flannagan et al., 2005; Policarpo).

Recently there has been an increased focus on contextual understandings of girls' and women's experiences, hence it is necessary to position the girls' friendships within the larger social, cultural, and political context (O'Connor, 1998; Policarpo, 2015). Lesch and Furphy (2013) noted that in South Africa, beliefs about relationship expectations are influenced and shaped by cultural, historical, familial, and social factors. In this study, I similarly found that local notions of femininity and religious values, such as the importance of caring for others and placing others' desires above one's own needs, seemed to influence the girls' explanations of an ideal friend.

Hall (2012) noted that females, compared to males, had particularly high expectations with regard to trust, loyalty, and commitment to the friendship. The girls in my study seemed to have similar expectations, saying that a friend should be "someone you can trust" to "always be there for you", "takes your side", and "is willing to sacrifice anything for you". Hence, social connectedness and harmony seemed to be a priority in these girls' friendships and a core focus of the ideal friend image. Studying the characteristics of ideal friends amongst Chinese adolescents, Cheng et al. (1995) attributed girls' focus on supportiveness and niceness to stereotypes that encourage females to develop nurturing skills. Similar to Cheng



et al.'s (1995) findings, Ross (2015) noted that South African females, like the girls in this study, participate in a discourse of “ordentlikheid”. Also referred to as respectable femininity (Frith, 2004), being “ordentlik” involves being decent and caring towards others. One participant, Nicole, told me that any girl would fit in their friendship group as long as she is “decent” (“ordentlik”). According to Nicole, a girl is decent when she is “friendly” and “nice towards other girls”.

Due to the demands of maintaining respectable femininity and being “ordentlik”, the girls tended to place the needs of their friends above those of their own (see also Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976). For example, it seemed “obvious” to Rebecca that “the right thing” to do is to “choose your friend” when given the choice of doing what one wants versus fulfilling the desires of the friend. Rachel also told me she would be willing to “give up anything” for her friends. Tolman et al. (2015) note that this tendency to place others’ expectations ahead of their own personal needs often leads girls to deny experiences of anger or frustration, and avoid conflict in the relationship. I will elaborate on the girls’ reaction towards conflict, or the possibility of conflict, in a following section.

The friendships in this study, therefore, seemed to function as a space where gender ideology was enacted on a regular basis and where adolescent girls could “do gender” while engaging with their friends (see also Felmlee et al., 2012; Glasser, 2012; Maccoby, 2002).

Interestingly, Willenreiter (2010) examined adolescents’ perceptions of social interaction and suggested gender roles to be the most important factor shaping social processes that took place in an American school cafeteria. In the case of Lydia, we also see how her friends policed normative femininity standards in their friendship, as her friends seemed to instil guilt feelings when Lydia disturbed the harmony in the friendship when she disagreed with her friends.

In addition to gender norms, religion seemed to be another salient factor shaping the girls’ friendship interactions and expectations. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the school involved was based on Christian principles, these principles forming an active part of daily school life. Jane seemed to explain her decision to help and care for her friends, at the cost of getting almost no sleep and neglecting her academic responsibilities, to be in line with her religious views: *“Yes, what you do on earth is obviously one day much more important than how high I score in the Biology test”*. In the Christian religion, emphasis is often placed on servanthood and

submitting one's self to care for others. Hence, to me it seemed that the girls' conception of an ideal friend also reflected their Christian values.

### 6.1.2 Keeping up appearances

As illustrated above, the participants' real friendship experiences often contradicted their ideas of an ideal friendship. To cope with the distress associated with this discrepancy, they developed strategies such as portraying the friendship in an idealised light to others and denying or rationalising less-than-ideal behaviour in their friendships.

#### 6.1.2.1 Portraying the friendship in an idealised light

In describing their friendships, the girls positioned their current friendships in an ideal light to me. In the discussion above, we saw how the participants described their friends as always being willing to sacrifice their own time to unconditionally be there for them. For example, Rachel told me that even though Heather would have "500 other things" to do, Heather would "put these aside" to first help Rachel.

Interestingly, some of the girls acknowledged the less-than-ideal nature of their friendships in the interview. Yet, as can be seen in the extracts below, they chose to portray these friendships to others as one that fits the ideal friend image.

***Rachel: Then it started making me uncomfortable because other friends came to me and said, "Rachel why, it feels like Vera wants to take everything away from you, like she does not want you to be happy". Then it almost made me uncomfortable in a way because, like, I do not want people to say that about our relationship [...] Like I know it is like that, but I do not want to tell them it is like that, because I do not want people to get ideas that our relationship is bad.***

*Rachel: Dan het dit my begin ongemaklik maak want ander van my vriendinne het na my toe gekom en gesê: "Rachel hoekom, dit voel asof Vera alles van jou af wil wegvat, soos nie vir jou iets gun nie". Dan maak dit my amper in 'n manier ongemaklik want soos ek wil nie hê mense moet dit sê van my en haar verhouding nie [...] Soos ek weet dit is so, maar ek wil nie vir hulle sê dit is so nie, want ek wil nie hê mense moet idees kry dat ons verhouding is sleg nie.*

***Nicole: Many times the bitchiness happens in the groups themselves and yes... like some of the groups are very... like then they would fight in the group, but then they half***

***portray this fake image for everyone on the outside, like yes, they are this perfect friends and they are close and whatever.***

*Nicole: Baie keer is die meeste katterigheid soos in die groepies self en ja..Soos van die groepies is soos baie... soos dan sal hulle soos baklei in die groepie, maar dan gee hulle half hierdie fake beeld vir almal na buite, soos ja, hulle is hierdie perfekte vriendinne en hulle is so close en wat okal.*

Although the girls' initial descriptions of their friends as "always" supporting them "unconditionally" may be an accurate reflection of their experiences, it could also be possible that other factors were prevalent. Social desirability may have played a role as the girls wished to portray their friendships and themselves in a positive light to me, as the researcher. Like Rachel noted in the abstract above, she "does not want other people to get ideas" that her friendship is "bad". In accordance with this, during the interviews, I sensed that the girls were scared of possibly "badmouthing" their friends. According to Denzin (2001), the act of being interviewed may become a social performance where the individual uses speech to construct her world to be aligned with cultural norms. Hence, the above descriptions may reflect the girls' ideas of what they would perceive to be a "perfect" or ideal friendship. The portrayal of their friendships as ideal seemed to occur during the initial stages of the interviews while challenges in the friendship tended to appear at a later stage.

### ***6.1.2.2 Rationalising and denying "wrong" actions of friends***

When their friends failed to live up to the demands of an ideal friend, the girls seemingly held on to the ideal friend image by rationalising or denying the "wrong" actions of their friends.

***Rebecca: And I think she really means it in a good way and so, but I really think she cannot help herself.***

*Rebecca: En ek dink sy bedoel dit regtig goed en so, maar ek dink regtig sy kan nie haarself help nie.*

***Nicole: I think it was just a moment of weakness, I don't think it was... I really don't think she would have done it on purpose.***

*Nicole: Ek dink dit was maar net soos 'n moment of weakness, ek dink nie dit was... ek dink regtig nie sy het dit aspris gedoen nie.*

**Emily:** *But the rest of us just kind of wrote it off, because we do not want to believe it, because we like to think we know each other and Isabella would not do that, she is very sweet.*

*Emily: Maar die res van ons het dit soort van net afgeskryf, want ons wil nie dit glo nie, want ons hou daarvan om te dink ons ken vir mekaar en Isabella sal nie dit doen nie, sy is baie oulik.*

**Jane:** *She has these moments in which she is really the sweetest girl and then other moments she is just the biggest bitch ever, and then I just want to tell her, “Listen here girl, come right”, but I love her so much so it doesn’t really bother me. So I just look past it because she has so many good characteristics that you don’t even, like, worry about that.*

*Jane: Sy het hierdie oomblikke wat sy regtig die oulikste meisie is en dan ander oomblikke is sy net soos die grootste bitch ooit, en dan wil ek net vir haar sê: “Hoor hier girl kom reg”, maar ek is so lief vir haar so dit pla my nie. So ek kyk net verby dit want ek weet sy het so baie goeie eienskappe dat mens nie eers soos daaroor worry nie.*

Above we saw how Rebecca and Nicole used rationalisation strategies to explain their friend’s “wrong” behaviour, while Emily and Jane chose to deny such behaviour of friends by “not wanting to believe it” and “ignoring it”. There seemed to be a concern amongst the girls that other people might view their friendship as “bad” which was accompanied by a tendency to hold up an appearance of “perfect friends”. Next, I will try to explain why it was so important for the girls that their friendships match the ideal and to keep up this appearance.

The girls’ tendency to idealise their friendships might be attributed to their developmental context. Compared to adults, adolescents engage more often in essentialist thinking, viewing the world in discrete categories having fixed sets of values (Policarpo, 2015). Thus, for a girl to consider someone a friend, this friend ought to possess all the “good” qualities and none of what they consider “bad” qualities. This might account for the girls’ seeming inability to tolerate “bad” characteristics in their friends, such as not meeting expectations regarding trust or loyalty (see also Apter & Josselson, 1998). Although Jane is aware of her friend’s negative attributes (“*the biggest bitch ever*”), she seems to deny the existence of these qualities in her friend as they do not fit the categoristic view of an ideal friend. Policarpo (2015) hypothesised that as adolescents are exposed to more possibilities with age, they will outgrow their idealised view on friendships to develop a greater tolerance of unmet expectations.

Entering adolescence, girls are faced with the developmental task of forming an identity independent of her parents, but in line with the ideals and expectations of her peer group (Erikson, 1959; Josselson, 1987). Kohut (1985) suggests that, in the process of identity formation, the individual must be able to incorporate reliable self-objects into her sense of self. According to Kohut (1985), individuals are dependent on their primary caregivers to fulfil their self-object needs, including the *idealising need* (i.e., being a part of another's admirable qualities). Hence, the girls' tendency to idealise their friends seemed to fulfil their idealising self-object need. In Kohut's (1985) terms, unmet friendship expectations would refer to an unfulfilled self-object need and as a result, the girl might experience an "empathetic failure". For example, we saw how Rachel expressed her disappointment and feelings of betrayal when her friend did not meet her expectations regarding loyalty and trust. Similar to Kohut (1985), Policarpo (2015) states that adolescent friendships are self-oriented as friends represent someone who is in service of the ego.

Due to the high value placed on relationships and the tendency to define oneself in relation to others (Gilligan, 1982; Miller 1976), perceived friendship quality seems to be a strong predictor of self-esteem, especially for adolescent girls (Thomas & Daubman, 2001). According to RCT, females' relationships may contribute to feelings of acceptance and belongingness, subsequently fostering a sense of personal worth (Miller, 1986). The girls in this study appeared to organise their sense of self around their ability to maintain harmonious friendships. This could possibly explain their tendency to keep up appearances of ideal friendships to me and others, as this would reflect on their ability to maintain harmonious friendships. These findings resonate with those of Cannon et al. (2012) where adolescent girls expressed a loss of sense of self when they lost a friend, thus underscoring the salient role of friendships in identity formation amongst girls.

## **6.2 Challenges to the ideal friend image**

From the findings of this study, it seems that there are certain things girls must do, and not do, to prevent their friendship from falling into a less than ideal state. First, as discussed earlier, the girls reported how they endeavoured to live up to the demands of being an ideal friend, which included being nice at all times and maintaining harmony. In this study, it also appeared that the participants had a low tolerance for conflict and that there seemed to be no

place for conflict in the ideal friendship. When I asked the girls about possible sources of conflict in their friendships, Nicole, in the extract below, stated that the challenge in their friendship group was to “cut out” arguments from their interactions.

*Zelda: What do you think is maybe a challenge in your friendship circle?*

*Nicole: Uhm, I think like the stuff we fight over, which is half stupid things, I think we can overcome... We sometimes fight a little about childish things like that thing which we now half... this one talked out a little about the other one or so... or those type of stuff which I just think we can cut out or so, which would make things better or so. Like I think it was half unnecessary to get a little stuck over that, but we luckily now got over it... like kinda quickly... like we talked about it and stuff. But yes, I just think to cut out small childish things might be clever, yes.*

*Zelda: Wat dink jy is dalk 'n uitdaging in julle vriendekring?*

*Nicole: Uhm, ek dink soos die goed wat ons soos oor baklei, wat soos half stupid goedjies is, ek dink ons soos kan dit oorkom... ons baklei soms soos bietjie oor kinderagtige goed wat soos daai ding wat ons nou soos half... die ene nou half bietjie uitgepraat oor die ander een of so... of sulke tipe goed wat ek net dink ons kan uitsny of so wat dinge sal beter maak of so. Soos ek dink dit was half onnodig om bietjie daaroor soos vas te sit, maar ons net soos darem nou soos oor dit gekom.. soos nogals gou.. soos ons het daaroor gepraat en goed. Maar ja, ek dink net soos klein kinderagtige goedjies wat ons soos kan uitsny is dalk slim ja.*

As Nicole stated above, the other participants also spoke about the undesirability of conflict in their friendships. Hence, they often minimised the magnitude and impact conflict had on their friendships. They also denied the presence of conflict in their friendship and stated that they consciously avoided conflict situations. In this subtheme, I will first mention the challenges the girls faced, and discuss their views on and reactions to conflict in their friendships. Thereafter I will focus on the strategies they employed to avoid or “cut out” conflict from their friendships.

Since it tends to be socially unacceptable for females to deal with conflict directly (Closson, 2009; Hunter et al., 2016), some girls in this study were seemingly inclined to employ alternative strategies. Some reported that they used indirect aggression (e.g., “*Take out frustration on furniture*”) and relational aggression (e.g., gossiping and distributing embarrassing photos via cell phones). As these strategies were only briefly mentioned by some participants, for the purpose of this thesis I will focus on the girls’ dominant reactions towards conflict and the strategies that some used to minimise, deny, and avoid conflict.

### 6.2.1 Conflict as half stupid petty things

The following extracts show how the girls reacted towards conflict or the possibility of conflict in their friendships while also highlighting the typical content of conflict in these girls' friendships. Take note of the use of phrases such as "not really", "quickly solved", "stupid things", and "not worth fighting over".

**Brenda:** *We also argue a lot, but then quickly... it is solved quickly because it is like, yes, I know by now that we can solve it quickly [...]*

**Zelda:** *Okay, so you told me earlier that you argue a lot, but is that...*

**Brenda:** *Yes, it is really stupid stuff. I don't know... I do not really know what other people argue about... or like the other groups or so, because we like really... in our room... we argue over the most stupid things ever... like it is not even worth arguing over.*

**Brenda:** *Ons sry ook baie, maar dan vinnig... dit word vinnig opgelos want dis soos van ja, ek weet dit al ons kan dit oplos vining [...]*

**Zelda:** *Okay, jy het netou gese julle sry baie, maar is dit...*

**Brenda:** *Ja, dis regtig dom goed. Ek weet nie... ek weet nie regtig waarom sry ander mense nie... of soos die ander groepies of so nie, want ons soos regtig... in ons kamer... ons sry oor die domste goed ooit... soos van dit is nie eers die moeite werd om oor te sry nie.*

**Jane:** *Yes, but we will also... we have never been angry with each other for say more than an hour. Uhm, we will fight over it [difference of opinion] and then I will say the next day, "Listen here what are you doing, let's go drink a coffee", and then we talk about it and then it is over and we are done with it.*

**Jane:** *Ja, maar ons sal ook... ons was nog nooit vir langer as sê nou maar 'n uur kwaad vir mekaar gewees nie. Uhm, ons sal daarvoor [verskille in opinies] baklei en dan sal ek die volgende dag sê: "Hoor hier wat maak jy, kom ons gaan drink koffie" en dan praat ons daarvoor en dan is dit nou verby en dan is ons nou klaar.*

**Zelda:** *Okay, and would you say there are challenges in your friendship circle?*

**Rachel:** *Not really, everyone so far I know ???*

**Zelda:** *And if you look at the other friendship circles, do you think like there are challenges?*

**Rachel:** *If you look, if you have two people who tend to fight then definitely. Like this one thinks he is right and this one thinks he is right, then things clash a bit.*

**Zelda:** *And what do you think are the biggest challenges here in friendship circles?*

**Rachel:** *Uhm... people who do not trust each other... think they trust each other... or they tell like gossip, but mostly about gossip and boyfriends... that type of thing.*

**Zelda:** *Like you said earlier, it is mostly about the boyfriends?*

**Rachel:** *Yes, it is actually really bad. But at this stage it is so.*

**Zelda:** *Okay, en sal jy sê daar is uitdagings in julle vriendekring?*

**Rachel:** *Nie eintlik nie, almal sover ek weet ???*

**Zelda:** *En as jy kyk na ander vriendekringe dink jy soos daar is uitdagings?*

**Rachel:** *As jy kyk, as jy twee mense het wat bakleierig is dan definitief. Soos die ene dink hy is reg en die ene dink hy is reg, dan clash dit so bietjie.*

**Zelda:** *En wat dink jy is die grootste uitdaging hier in vriendekringe?*

**Rachel:** *Uhm... mense wat mekaar nie vertrou nie of mekaar... dink hulle vertrou mekaar... of hulle vertel soos skinder, maar soos meerderheid skinder en ouens... daai tipe ding.*

**Zelda:** *Soos jy ook netou gese het, dit gaan meestal oor die ouens?*

**Rachel:** *Ja, dis eintlik baie erg. Maar op die stadium is dit so.*

**Zelda:** *Okay, and what else? Can you give me more examples of what you would argue about?*

**Lydia:** *Like conflict?*

**Zelda:** *Yes, like conflict.*

**Lydia:** *Uhm, there will be many... many people have said like, "You exclude me" or... it is half typical teenage girl things I feel, but we have argued a lot about stuff people tell to others. Today it happened again... like Nicola told Susan half something very confidential and then the whole friendship circle knew that in the end, and from there it was a big thing, because the two of them fought over their... like she said she cannot trust her anymore and stuff like that... but we do not actually fight often. We get a bit frustrated and irritated because we are all so energetic and we are all so half different, so we sometimes bump heads, but we actually never get in a big fight. The only things are just like half these petty stuff that come up. [...]*

**Zelda:** *Hmm. And you also mentioned it is like "typical girl stuff" you fight about...*

**Lydia:** *Hmmm*

**Zelda:** *So what are more typical girl stuff?*

**Lydia:** *No, it's stupid stuff! Our friendship circle really really fights little. Uhm, like... what happened once was that Carla started talking with this one guy over the phone and she started liking him and they started seeing each other and stuff like that, but he did not... he was not interested in her. And then Christine wanted to go and talk to him... half about Carla now and like to hear where is he standing with Carla... and then he started liking Christine. And then things between them were not nice, and then it was half... so it was also a bit jseejsee... a bit uncomfortable at the moment in our friendship circle. But that also blew over. It's half just stupid stuff.*



*Zelda: Okay, en wat nog? Kan jy vir my nog voorbeelde noem oor wat julle sê nou maar sal stry?*

*Lydia: Konflik?*

*Zelda: Ja, soos konflik.*

*Lydia: Uhm, daar sal baie... baie mense het al gesê soos: "Jy sluit my uit" of... dis half tipiese tienermeisie goed voel dit vir my, maar ons het al baie keer gestry oor goed wat mense uitvertel. Vandag het dit weer gebeur... soos Nicole het vir Susan soos half iets baie konfidensieël vertel en toe weet die hele vriendekring op die ou einde, en van toe af was dit nou ook 'n groot ding, want hulle twee het baklei oor hulle... soos sy het gesê sy kan haar nie meer vertrou nie en sulke goed... maar ons baklei eintlik nie baie nie. Ons raak bietjie gefrustreerd en geïriteerd omdat ons almal so energiek is en ons almal so half anders is, stamp ons bietjie koppe, maar ons kom eintlik nooit in 'n groot bakleiery nie. Die enigste goed is net soos half sulke petty goed wat opkom. [...]*

*Zelda: Hmm. En jy het ook genoem, dis maar "tipiese meisiegoed" waaroor julle stry...*

*Lydia: Hmmm*

*Zelda: So wat is nog tipiese meisie goed?*

*Lydia: Nee, dis stupid goed! Ons vriendekring baklei regtig regtig min. Uhm, dit sal... wat eenkeer gebeur het was Carla het met hierdie een ou oor die foon begin praat en sy het van hom begin hou en hulle het begin kuier en sulke goed, maar hy het nie... hy het nie belang gestel in haar nie. En toe wil Christine gaan om met hom te praat... half oor Carla nou en soos te hoor waar staan hy met Carla... en toe begin hy van Christine te hou. En toe was dinge tussen hulle ook nie lekker nie, en toe was dit so half... So dit was ook bietjie jseejsee... bietjie ongemaklik op die oomblik of vir 'n rukkie in ons vriendekring gewees, maar dit het ook maar net verbygegaan. Dis half net stupid goed.*

From the girls' descriptions above, about conflict and how they resolved it, I got the impression that they wanted to minimise the magnitude and impact of conflict in the friendship. Conflict was often referred to as "petty", "small", and "stupid" things. According to Brenda their friendship group fought about "stupid" things that was "not even worth fighting over" while Jane stated that even if they fight, they do not stay angry with each other for more than one hour. Additionally, the girls seemingly denied the existence of conflict in their friendship and were somewhat unwilling to discuss possible conflict situations in the interview. For example, Rachel noted that they "do not really" experience challenges in her friendship group, but appeared to be more comfortable discussing challenges in other friendship groups.

From the above, we see that "petty", "small" and "stupid things" included conflict around boyfriends or potential boyfriends, gossiping and betrayal, irritations, exclusion, and difference of opinion. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that boys,

gossiping, trust and distrust issues seem to be common sources of conflict in girls' friendships (Casper & Card, 2010; Crothers et al., 2005; Huntley & Owens, 2013; Van Wyk, 2015; Way et al., 2005). According to Casper and Card (2010), the higher level of intimacy and self-disclosure in adolescent girls' friendships may introduce a heightened vulnerability to betrayal and feelings of exclusion.

Examples of conflict found elsewhere in the transcripts suggest that the girls' portrayal of their friendships as conflict-free might be a reflection of the socially undesirable nature of conflict in girls' friendship, rather than a reflection of reality. As mentioned previously, "fighting" is not fitted for an ideal friendship (see also Closson, 2009; Rind, 2002).

Exploring adolescent girls' experiences of their intimate relationships in the Western Cape, Lesch and Furphy (2013) found these girls to also minimise conflict, mirroring their view that intimate relationships should not have serious conflict. In a different South African study, however, adolescent girls seemed to be more willing to share their stories on conflict in the friendship (Van Wyk, 2015).

Although the girls minimised or denied conflict in their friendships, from the above extracts it seemed that they experienced conflict as a negative experience, accompanied by feelings of ambivalence, discomfort, and even guilt. For example, Brenda stated that her friendship group "often argues", but immediately afterwards corrects herself saying that they are able to quickly solve these disagreements. The repetition of the phrase "we can quickly solve it", without being willing to provide more detail of how this solving happens, appeared to me as a compensation for her slip "we argue a lot". It could be that Brenda felt guilty for having conflict in her friendship. In a similar vein, Lydia also spoke about an "uncomfortable" feeling when there was disagreement in her friendship group. Resultantly, the girls seemed to employ strategies to avoid conflict, as will be seen in the next section.

### **6.2.2 Shut up and be nice**

In the girls' striving towards "niceness" and being a "good friend" - what stood out for me was their avoidance of conflict for the sake of maintaining this "ideal" friendship. Contrary to their descriptions of conflict as insignificant or non-existent, the girls described their efforts to avoid and "cut out" conflict from the friendship.

**Rebecca:** *But like, I, I didn't really have problems with people, if I can say it like that, because I do not like conflict, so I always try to be nice with them and stuff, because I do not like it if someone is like angry or so, because it is not nice for me... so yes...*

*Rebecca: Maar soos, ek, ek het nie regtig probleme met mense nie, as ek dit so moet sê, want ek hou nie van konflik nie, so ek probeer soos altyd nice wees met hulle en goed, want ek hou nie daarvan as iemand soos kwaad is of so nie, want dit is nie vir my lekker nie... so ja...*

**Lisa:** *I should have probably told her, but I do not like it to like... Many times people take it as mean and I am scared of it and I do not like to have my friendships like that.*

**Zelda:** *So what exactly are you scared of?*

**Lisa:** *I don't know. Like many people react, "Joh, that's mean", and I feel she is one of those people who will react like that and for the rest of the time there will be that bad vibe, but if you just leave it, then it is not there.*

*Lisa: Ek moes dit seker vir haar sê, maar ek hou nie daarvan om soos... Baie keer vat mense dit as ongeskik en ek is bang daarvoor en ek hou nie daarvan om vriendskappe so te hê nie.*

**Zelda:** *So waarvoor is jy bang presies?*

*Lisa: Ek weet nie. Soos baie mense reageer: "Joh, dis ongeskik van jou", en ek voel sy is een van daai mense wat so sal reageer en vir die res van die tyd sal dit daai bad vibe wees, maar as jy dit net los, dan is dit nie daar nie.*

**Zelda:** *Okay, and uhm, is there anything that you do not like being with your friends?*

**Brenda:** *(long pause) No there is not a... I think if something is bothering her then yes, like we do not really talk about it, we just go on... that is actually a bad thing I know, but it also solves problems because you do not fight over something.*

**Zelda:** *So why do you say it is actually also a bad thing?*

**Brenda:** *Because I know people should actually talk about what bothers them because maybe in the future it happens again and then you will just get stuck on it again and maybe it will be a bigger fight then, just because you did not solve it.*

**Zelda:** *Okay. En uhm, is daar iets wat jy nie daarvan hou om saam met jou vriende te wees nie?*

**Brenda:** *(lang pouse) Nee daar is nie 'n... ek dink as iets haar pla dan ja soos ons praat nie regtig daaroor nie, ons gaan net aan... dis eintlik n slegte ding ek weet, maar dit los ook eintlik probleme op want dan soos baklei jy nie oor iets nie.*

**Zelda:** *So hoekom sê jy dis eintlik ook 'n slegte ding?*

**Brenda:** *Want ek weet mens moet eintlik praat oor wat jou pla want dalk in die toekoms gebeur dit weer en dan gaan jy net weer vassit daaroor en dalk is dit dan soos 'n groter fight, net omdat jy dit nie opgelos het nie.*

**Rachel:** *Then I'm like, "Do you know what, just go for this guy, because I'm not going to argue with you about a boy". Or I did not tell her that, but I said to her, "Listen here,*

*okay, go for him he is really a great guy". I would be upset and flippen sad inside me, but then... I'm unfortunately now someone who would always put other people... I'm not going to hurt our relationship by fighting with her over a boy because that is really stupid [...] If somebody gets angry with me and they want to fight with me, I'll keep silent, like I'll keep quiet and I'll stay nice, I will not fight back. Because it's just there where they get angrier and angrier and angrier. For example, I would leave it and then quickly... they will get over it, because they can see that is not worth fighting with me because I will not... Let's say she gets irritated, and then I leave it. When if I would be irritated back, then we would've clashed completely, where I think... uhm... that is why our relationship works so well, because if she gets irritated, then I know to just leave it otherwise if I got angry every time it would have clashed completely.*

*Rachel: Toe is ek soos: "Weet jy wat gaan vir die ou, want ek gaan nie met jou stry oor 'n ou nie". Of ek het nie dit vir haar gesê nie, maar ek het vir haar gesê: "Hoor hier okay, gaan vir hom hy is regtig n great ou". Ek sal binne my flippen ontsteld en hartseer wees, maar dan... ek is ongelukkig nou maar iemand wat altyd ander mense [...] ek gaan nou nie ons verhouding opmors deur met haar te baklei oor 'n ou nie, want dit is regtig dom [...] As iemand vir my kwaad raak en hulle wil met my begin stry dan sal ek stilbly soos, ek sal stilbly en ek sal nice bly, ek sal nie terug begin fight nie. Want dit is net daar waar hulle kwater raak en kwater raak en kwater raak... ek sal dit byvoorbeeld los en dan sal vinnig... kom hulle oor dit, want hulle sien nou dit is nie die moeite werd om met my te baklei nie, want ek gaan niks... sê nou maar sy raak geïriteerd, dan los ek dit. Waar as ek nou terug geïriteerd was, dan sou dit heeltemal geclash het, waar soos ek dink... uhm... ek dink dis hoekom ons verhouding goed werk want as sy geïriteerd raak dan weet ek los dit net anders sou dit as ek nou elke keer kwaad geraak het dan sou dit nou heeltemal geclash het.*

According to the girls, the emergence of conflict in the friendship might introduce a “bad vibe” that could possibly “mess up” the friendship. For this reason, the girls seemed to strive towards “always being nice” and to avoid the expression of anger or frustration in friendships. The dominant notion was to avoid conflict by distancing and silencing the self. This finding is supported by Crothers et al. (2005) who found that a sample of White 15-year-old girls avoided conflict in their friendships due to a fear of invoking negative emotions in others that might lead to disconnection from a friend (see also Field et al., 2006; Hazler & Mellin, 2004). Such inauthentic behaviours researchers have found symptomatic of adolescent girls during their transition from adolescence to early adulthood and is associated with gender socialisation of girls (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Tolman et al., 2015).

As mentioned before, fighting does not seem to fit society’s view of female friendships as harmonious and supportive (Rind, 2002). According to Jack (1999), girls therefore tend to avoid voicing thoughts that could cause tension in their relationships, devaluating their own experiences in the process. In other words, dominant femininity discourses may inhibit

adolescents' ability to act and express themselves in a manner consistent with their inwardly experienced desires, values, and emotions (Lesch & Furphy, 2013; Tolman et al., 2006). Pipher (1994) therefore notes that young women may experience a conflict when they have to choose between abandoning their true selves and maintaining socially acceptable relationships versus staying authentic and risking the abandonment of their peers. For example, above we see how Rachel was willing to support her friend's desires, even though she was "flippen upset and sad inside", to prevent a possible fight in the friendship. Various researchers have cautioned against such tendencies by establishing links between inauthenticity and anxiety, depression, and negative evaluations of self-worth (Harter et al., 1998; Jack, 1999; Schrick et al., 2012; Wenzel & Lucas-Thompson, 2012).

According to RCT, the girls' tendency to deny large parts of their lived experience or relating inauthentically would be conceptualised as "strategies of disconnection" (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Girls may develop these strategies to cope with the fear of being disconnected from others and it seems to be a desperate effort to reconnect with others. According to Miller and Stiver (1997), however, these attempts for reconnection may result in further disconnection. Lisa showed awareness that by silencing the self and not dealing directly with conflict, anger, frustration, and irritation may build up inside the individual which in turn might result in a "bigger fight" at a later stage. This phenomenon is referred to as the central relational paradox (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

Although conflict avoidance emerged as the dominant strategy in this study, other studies have identified a wider range of conflict management strategies adolescent girls employed in their friendships. These included communicating their perspectives and staying true to each other (Field et al., 2006; Huntley & Owens, 2013). Yet, according to international (Brown et al., 1999; Huntley & Owens, 2013) and local (Bhana & Pillay, 2011; Burton & Leoschut, 2013) literature, the dominant strategy seems to be relational aggression including gossiping and social exclusion. Brown et al. (1999) explain the use of relational aggression and more subtle forms of controlling others as creative alternatives for open competition and conflict which is often seen as taboo for girls, especially in the school system (see also Closson, 2009). Numerous factors can account for the seemingly lower prevalence of relational aggression talk in my study. According to Glasser (2012), it is possible that girls in same-sex schools, compared to co-ed schools, internalise femininity ideals more strongly, thereby possibly accounting for the conflict-avoidance tendencies of the girls in this study. Living in

a boarding house and constantly being surrounded by their friends, the girls might have learned how to live in harmony and therefore experience less relational aggression. Lastly, due to social desirability effects, the girls could have refrained from talking about possible relational aggressive incidents.

### 6.2.3 Dealing with conflict: The contra-voice

Contrary to the examples above, some girls chose to voice their own thoughts and feelings which, at times, led to direct conflict in the friendship group. In the following section, I will provide an example of such a contra-voice.

In the extracts above we saw how one participant, Lydia, appeared to be more outspoken about her opinions compared to the rest of her friendship group. Lydia told me that she stood up for what she believed in while her friends chose to agree with one another for the sake of maintaining harmony. In the extract below, Lydia talks about her thoughts and feelings regarding the manner in which her friends dealt with arguments in the friendship.

*Lydia: It really makes me... it frustrates me so much, because then it will be an issue I know my friend feels very strongly about and then she would half regard her opinion as not so important. And I can... I cannot understand why someone would just half allow... that someone walks over them and half force their opinion on them... so I... yes, it frustrates me.*

*Lydia: Dit maak my regtig... dit frustreer my so baie, want dan sal dit soos 'n kwessie wees waaroor ek weet my vriendin sterk voel en dan sal sy half net haar opinie as so half nie belangrik aanskou nie. En ek kan... ek kan nie verstaan hoekom iemand net so half toelaat... dat iemand net oor hulle loop en so half hulle opinie op hulle af forseer nie... so ek... ja, dit frustreer my.*

In the following extract, Lydia provides an example of how her friendship group reacted when she voiced a different opinion that was not in line with their beliefs.

*Lydia: She [Mia] would say she does not agree, because in Mia's eyes it is, say, a big sin to believe in the science and she would like, "Whew whe whe whe", like such sounds... it is actually stupid stuff... but like making sounds while I am talking or just run away or starting to tease me... just half petty... they do not know how to handle it if someone does not agree, they do not know how to express themselves and to half say that, "But I believe this and I do not agree". But I have always been raised like this and my mom always taught me from a young age how to convey an argument and how to tell someone how I feel about a situation and how... my mom always told me what is*

***important and how to... like to stick to my opinion and I do not think they always had that... experience, so they do not know how to handle it if someone does not agree with them. So they would just like a bit... like do stupid stuff.***

*Lydia: Sy [Mia] sal sê sy stem nie saam nie, want in Mia se oë is dit sê nou maar groot sonde om in die wetenskap te glo en dan sal sy soos: “Whe whe whe whe”, soos sulke geluide... dis eintlik stupid goed.... maar soos geluide begin maak terwyl ek praat of net soos weghardloop of my begin spot... net half petty... hulle weet nie hoe om dit te hanteer as iemand nie saamstem nie, hulle weet nie hoe om hulle self uit te druk en so half te sê dat: “Maar ek glo dit en ek stem nie saam nie”. Maar ek is nog altyd so groot gemaak en my ma het my altyd geleer van kleins af hoe om my argument oor te bring en hoe om vir iemand te sê hoe ek voel oor ‘n situasie en hoe... my ma het my altyd geleer wat belangrik is en hoe om my opinies... soos by my opinies te bly en ek dink nie hulle het altyd daai... ervaring gehad nie, so hulle weet nie hoe om dit te hanteer as iemand nie met hulle saamstem nie. So hulle sal ook maar net soos bietjie... soos stupid goed doen.*

Lydia's assertive behaviour seemed to be in stark contrast with the compliant and conflict-averse behaviour of her friends. For this reason, Lydia described herself as the “outsider” of her friendship group. Reflecting on her own versus her friends' reaction to this conflict, Lydia expressed her frustration with her friends' inability to voice their own opinions. Crothers et al. (2005) attempt to explain the differences in girls' reactions towards conflict by suggesting that girls who identify with more traditional gender roles, compared to those who identified with non-traditional gender roles, are more likely to silence themselves in the friendship. In line with this notion, Lydia seemed to identify with less traditional gender norms by explaining how her mother taught her, from an early age, to express her own opinion and to stand up for what she believes in.

In the extract above, we also saw how the friendship group regulated the normative friendship ideal. Lydia seemed to be strong-willed in expressing her opinions and thoughts regarding religion, even though these differ from her friends. In response, Lydia's friends employ strategies, such as teasing and ignoring her, to regulate the friendship interactions they deem acceptable, i.e., not allowing disagreements to enter the relationship. In line with this finding, Brown and Klute (2006) pointed out that teasing remained a common strategy amongst adolescents to keep group members in line with group norms.

The use of teasing strategies to regulate the normative friendship ideal, further suggests the girls to have a low tolerance for differences in the friendship. Lydia tried to explain her friends' use of teasing strategies by saying that they “do not know how to handle” disagreements. Apter and Josselson (1998) similarly noted that when girls are confronted

with differing opinions, they may struggle to voice their own as they have not learned how to deal with such situations. Additionally, due to the merging of identities in adolescence, the emergence of differences could feel like the betrayal of the friendship, possibly resulting in feelings of rejection (Apter & Josselson, 1998). Consequently, girls often submit to dysfunctional relational strategies such as being passive in the friendship and silencing the self (Jack, 1999; Pipher, 1994). According to Piaget (1971), these girls may be in the process of moving towards the formal operational thinking stage, where they will develop the ability to interpret behaviour from different viewpoints and be tolerant of others' behaviour.

### 6.3 Summary

In this theme, I have illustrated how the girls' talk was situated within an idealised friendship discourse. Femininity and religious ideals seemed to determine what the girls considered to be an ideal friendship. Gender discourses, situating female friendships as harmonious, nurturing, and conflict-free, were reproduced in the girls' ideal friend constructions. Similarly, in the Christian religion, emphasis is placed on submitting the self to care for others. As such, according to the participants, the ideal friend, often contrasted against "bad" qualities in friends, was described as someone who is "always there for you" and "supports you in everything you do".

Holding a categoristic view of an ideal friend tended to be accompanied with high expectations of their friends. At times, these expectations were in conflict with the girls' inner desires and created tension in the friendship. For example, being unable to live up to these demands seemingly left the girls' feeling guilty or disappointed which in turn could affect the quality of their friendship.

What seemed to be a constant strive towards the ideal friend image by portraying their friendships in an idealised light to others and rationalising or denying their friends' "wrong" actions, might be attributed to the salient role of these friendships in adolescent girls' identity formation. For example, to some extent, the girls appeared to base their personal worth on their ability to maintain ideal friendships.

The girls often viewed conflict as non-fitting to the ideal and subsequently tried to deny its existence or minimise the impact thereof on the friendship. A dominant notion was to



consciously avoid conflict in the friendships, by silencing the self, in hopes of maintaining a harmonious friendship. At times, these behaviours were regulated in the friendship group. Even though the girls considered the process of conflict avoidance to positively impact their friendship, in some cases, silencing the self was described as also being counterproductive to the well-being of the individual and the friendship. Yet, the majority of the girls seemed to have little experience of alternative conflict resolution strategies.

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## Chapter 7: Friendship as a Support System

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In all the interviews, the participants emphasised how receiving and giving support was an important part of their friendships. In this theme, I discuss the girls' experiences of support within their friendships. Table 7.1 illustrates the thematic map with sub-themes and categories for this theme.

Table 7.1

*Thematic map: Friendship as a Support System*

| Subtheme                             | Category  |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 7.1 She builds me up                 | 7.1.1 Friends as a moodlifter                                       |
|                                      | 7.1.2 Friendship as a source of validation, nurturance, and comfort |
|                                      | 7.1.3 Listening and giving advice                                   |
| 7.2 She <i>knows how</i> to be there | 7.2.1 Understanding and relating                                    |
|                                      | 7.2.2 Reciprocity vs. one-way friendships                           |

Research has consistently shown a positive association between social support and emotional and physical well-being, and how low overall social support could be a risk factor for psychological distress (Chu et al., 2010; Gecková et al., 2003; Klineberg et al., 2006; Uchino et al., 2012). Social support has also been identified as a profound protective factor amongst youth (Lester & Cross, 2015; Tao et al., 2000).

Consistent with Policarpo's (2015) findings, the girls in this study similarly reported how unconditional support was salient in their friendships. For example, below Emily and Lisa tell us what they value most in their friendships.

**Zelda:** *And if you can highlight one thing that is important for you in a friendship... what would you like to have in a relationship with a friend?*

**Lisa:** *Support. Like in situations I would like it and I like to support people or friends. So yes, support.*

*Zelda: En as jy nou vir my een ding kan uitwys wat vir jou belangrik is van 'n vriendskap... wat jy graag sal soek in 'n verhouding met 'n vriendin?*

*Lisa: Ondersteuning. Soos in situasies sal ek daarvan hou en ek hou daarvan om mense te ondersteun of vriendinne. So ja, ondersteuning.*

***Zelda: And if you think about the word friend or so... what is for you... what do you value most in a friend?***

***Emily: Definitely to be there for you, to see that you are struggling with something or you have a problem or you do not feel well, and then to know how to react towards that and how to help you.***

*Zelda: En as jy nou dink aan die woord vriendin of so... wat is vir jou... waaraan heg jy die meenste waarde in 'n vriendin?*

*Emily: Definitief om daar te wees vir jou, om te kan sien jy sukkel met iets of jy het n probleem of jy voel nie lekker, en dan te weet hoe om daarop te reageer en jou te help met dit.*

In the following section, I will first describe the ways in which the participants reported that they “build up” or support each other. Although much has been written on the different types of supportive acts, such as providing a friend with comfort, some researchers pointed out the need to understand and investigate the deeper structure of these social provisions (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016; Warren et al., 2009). In this study, the girls described such deeper structures of socially supporting and being there for each other as “*knowing how to be there*”. Hence, I will elaborate on the girls’ experiences of supportive acts, illustrating how empathy and reciprocity seemed to be essential factors in the process of social support.

## **7.1 She builds me up**

In this study the girls reported that friends helped each other in a variety of ways. The supportive acts that stood out amongst these girls were (1) providing humour and a sense of companionship, (2) providing validation, nurturance and comfort, and (3) listening and giving advice to a friend. In the following extract, Rebecca illustrates the vital role of friends as a source of various types of social support.

***Rebecca: Like in the holidays, my boyfriend and I... I found out that he cheated and I felt so down and stuff. [...] The Sunday evening when I got here and Rachel and Heather also came, then I like, literally, I felt completely different. [...] Everyone always first come and tell their stories, but then we first listen to each other's so that we can***

*first talk about it properly and stuff. And I felt completely different and stuff. My friends are literally, like, they form a really big part of my support system. I love them, literally. If something happens, then I immediately phone Rachel and Heather. Like always, I literally want to share everything with them, because they always make me feel better. Like they do not have to, like, we do not all have to cry or stuff. They would like make a joke or see the funny part of the whole thing and then we would just all laugh and stuff. [...] And Heather would go sit with her [Rachel] and give her a hug, and then we just all feel better. Like me... I would not be able to do it without my friends, it is literally like SO nice for me.*

*Rebecca: Soos die vakansie... toe het ek en my ou.. toe het ek uitgevind hy het gecheat en ek het so soos down gevoel en goeters [...] die Sondagaand toe ek hierso aankom en Rachel en Heather kom hierso aan, toe het ek soos, letterlik, ek het heeltemal anders gevoel. [...] Almal kom vertel altyd eers hulle stories, maar toe luister ons nou eers na mekaar s'n sodat ons nou eers ordentlik daaroor kan praat en goed. En ek het heeltemal anders gevoel en goed. My vriendinne is letterlik vir my, soos, hulle is soos 'n baie groot deel van my ondersteuningsbasis. Ek love hulle, letterlik. As iets gebeur het, dan bel ek dadelik vir Rachel en Heather. Soos altyd, ek wil letterlik alles met hulle deel, want hulle laat my altyd beter voel. Soos hulle hoef nie, soos, ons hoef nou nie soos almal te huil of goed nie. Hulle sal soos 'n joke maak of die snaakse deel van die hele ding sien, en dan sal ons net almal lag en goed. [...] En Heather sal by haar [Rachel] gaan sit en vir haar 'n drukkie gee, en dan voel ons almal net beter. Soos ek... ek sal dit nie soos sonder my vriendinne kan doen nie, dis letterlik soos SO lekker vir my.*

In the above extract, Rebecca illustrated how companionship, listening to each others' stories, the provision of humour, and nurturance in the form of physical affection, "completely" changed the way she felt and "always" made her feel better. Next, I will elaborate on each of these supportive acts as separate categories.

### **7.1.1 Friends as a moodlifter**

When asked what they valued most about their friendships, the girls would describe how camaraderie along with humour and laughter was a major source of joy in their friendships. Below, Nicole, Jane, and Emily show how friends were a "moodlifter", which helped to make things lighter and offered them an escape from difficult situations.

*Zelda: You tell me you feel good if you are with them and you are happy. But what do you think it is that makes you happy around them?*

*Nicole: They are half like a moodlifter, like when I feel bad then I would sometimes go to them and they would say something or make a joke to try and make me feel better, so our friendship circle is very like... we let each other... we build each other up... so yes. So I think that is what I value the most. Like they... even if it is... like they would not compliment you all the time and sugar-coat things, but they would definitely make you*

***feel better and stuff [...] Yes, so I think humour is kind of a big thing in our friendship circle. I think like jokes and stuff and just to like cheer you up a little or to do something funny or to pull a funny face is like yes... what they would do.***

*Zelda: Jy sê vir my jy voel goed as jy by hulle is en jy is gelukkig. Maar wat dink jy is dit wat jou gelukkig maak om hulle?*

*Nicole: Hulle is soos half 'n moodlifter, soos as ek sleg voel dan sal ek na hulle toe gaan soms en dan sal hulle soos iets sê of 'n joke maak om my te probeer beter laat voel so ons vriendekring is baie soos... ons laat mekaar... ons bou mekaar half op... so ja. So ek dink dis waaraan ek soos die meeste waarde heg. Soos hulle... al is dit nou... soos hulle gaan jou nou nie die heelyd komplimenter en sugar coat en goed nie, maar hulle sal jou definitief laat beter voel en sulke goed [...] Ja, soos ek dink humour is nogal 'n groot ding in ons vriendekring. Ek dink soos jokes en goed net om jou soos bietjie op te cheer of soos iets snaaks doen of soos n snaakse gesig trek is soos ja... wat hulle sal doen.*

***Zelda: And what would you say, Jane, you enjoy most about being with your friends?***

***Jane: Uhm, I think... if someone can make me laugh... I do not laugh easily, uhm... If someone can make me laugh good, then I am like... then you have me. So if I am with my friends and I feel the evening, jissie, like my stomach actually pains so much I laughed today, then I am happy, like jissie, today was a nice day.***

*Zelda: En wat sal jy sê Jane is vir jou die lekkerste om saam met jou vriendinne te wees?*

*Jane: Uhm, ek dink... as iemand my kan maak lag... ek lag baie moeilik, uhm... As iemand my lekker kan laat lag dan is ek soos... dan het jy my. So as ek by my vriendinne is en ek voel die aand, jissie, soos my maag pyn eintlik so baie het ek gelag vandag dan is ek happy, soos jissie dit was nou 'n lekker dag gewees.*

***Emily: And then I am also good friends with my roommate at the moment, Karin... and she... I would help her with stuff. So if she has a problem or if she is sad about something then I would talk to her and help her and stuff like that and then... she would make me laugh (laughs) and so.***

*Emily: En dan is ek ook baie goeie vriende met my kamermaat op die oomblik, Karin... en sy... Ek sal haar soos help met goeters. So as sy 'n probleem het of sy is hartseer oor iets dan sal ek met haar praat en ek sal haar help en sulke goeters, en dan... sy sal my weer laat lag (lag) en so.*

Contrary to Hunter et al.'s (2016) finding that adolescent girls also use humour as a strategy to express aggression in their friendships in a socially acceptable way, in this study the girls mainly used humour as a "moodlifter" to "build up" their friends. In the above extracts, we saw how humour, like "making jokes", "doing something funny", and "pulling a funny face", was integral to their friendships and how the girls used humour to "cheer up" their friends when they were sad, when they felt down or when they had a negative experience. Fuhr (2002) similarly found that adolescent girls used humour in their friendships to cope with

uncertainty and stress and getting cheered up. Furthermore, the participants' appraisal of humour as a "moodlifter" in their friendships is consistent with previous research. For example, Hall (2014) identified enjoyment, referring to having fun and sharing a sense of humour, as one of six desired characteristics of same-sex friendships, while Weber and Ruch (2012) also found humour to be the most preferred characteristic in an ideal friend amongst adolescents.

Much has been written on humour as beneficial for interpersonal well-being (Hunter et al., 2016; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010). The use of affiliative humour is associated with reports of greater relationship satisfaction with support (Campbell et al., 2008; Martin et al., 2003). Above we saw how the girls used an affiliative humour style to amuse each other and to reduce their stress, thereby facilitating their relationships (Dyck & Holtzman, 2013; Martin et al., 2003). For example, we saw how the presence of laughter in Jane and Nicole's friendships seemed to promote their connection to friends and how this positively affected their mood.

### 7.1.2 Friendship as a source of validation, nurturance, and comfort

The girls' friendships seemed to be a valuable source of validation, nurturance, and comfort. Below, Heather illustrated the ways in which her friends "build" her up.

*Heather: Uhm, I, like in the holiday I literally once, I think it was at the beginning of the holiday or something, then I just felt very down. Like I cannot remember what, but then I told them, or then I asked on the group, "What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about me?" I don't know, I was probably depressed or something, but then Rebecca, then she sent me an INCREDIBLY beautiful message. She sent it first, Rachel did too, like, Rachel is not a person of that many words (laughs), but she also said nice things. I don't know, but they, they build me up. They build me up. Yes, if you feel down, they build me up [...] This Natalie friend of mine... uhm, this afternoon, yes, I was now on my time and stuff and I got incredibly bad cramps – it is like those where you feel light headed and you feel like you are really going to faint or throw up or something. And she likes it, like she always, then she came to me and laid with me and uhm... in my bed and then she first rubbed my tummy and then she rubbed my back and the she fell asleep next to me. Like stuff like that are half like... sisters... it is basically like sisters... it is not like normal friends.*

*Heather: Uhm, ek, soos ek het letterlik eenkeer in die vakansie, ek dink dit was in die begin van die vakansie of iets, toe voel ek net baie af. Ek kan nie onthou wat nie, maar toe sê ek vir hulle, of toe vra ek op die group: "Wat is die eerste ding wat in julle koppe opkom as julle aan my dink?" Ek weet nie, ek was seker depressief of iets, maar toe het*

*Rebecca, toe het sy vir my 'n ONGELOOFLIKE mooi boodskap gestuur. Sy het dit eerste gestuur, Rachel het ook, soos, Rachel is nie 'n persoon met so baie woorde nie (lag), maar sy het ook soos mooi goed gesê. Ek weet nie, maar soos, hulle bou my op. Hulle bou my op. Ja as jy af voel, hulle bou my op.[...]Die Natalie vriendin van my... uhm, vanmiddag, ja ek is nou op die oomblik op my tyd en goed en ek het ongelooflike erge krampe gekry - dis daai wat jy so flou raak en jy voel asof jy regtig nou gaan flou val of opgooi of iets. En sy hou daarvan, soos sy het altyd, toe kom sy na my toe en toe lê sy saam met my uhm... in my bed en toe vryf sy nou eers my maag en toe vryf sy my rug en toe raak sy ook aan die slaap langs my. Soos sulke goed is half soos... susters... dis basies soos susters... dit is nie soos die normale vriende nie.*

On an emotional level, we saw how Heather's friends provided her with social support in the form of validation. When Heather felt "down" she seemed to turn to her friends for validation by asking them what is the first thing that comes to mind when they think of her. Saying "nice things" ("mooi dinge") about her, Heather's friends seem to "build" her up. In line with this finding, Erdley et al. (2001) noted how comforting, affirming, and encouraging friends may promote feelings of personal competence and enhance self-worth. According to Carnegie (2010), by simply attending to her needs, Natalie may show Heather that she is valued and can therefore indirectly contribute to her self esteem. Warren et al. (2009) also found nurturance and reassurance of self worth to be among the strongest predictors of adaptive skills among adolescent girls. These results are consistent with research underlining the intimate, emotion-focussed nature of girls' friendships (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987; Fehr, 2004).

Heather's need for affirmation may further be related to her search for validation of her identity (see also Hall, 2011). According to the literature, close same-sex friendships are important contexts for the co-construction of identities during adolescence (Kerpelman et al., 1997; Morgan & Korobov, 2012; Sullivan, 1953). In the context of close girl friends' conversations, Morgan and Korobov (2012) identified validation and encouragement as integral to identity construction. For example, by telling her what comes to mind when they think about her, Heather's friends provided her with social feedback. According to Morgan and Korobov (2012), if this feedback is congruent with her own identity beliefs then it could confirm and strengthen Heather's identity. On the other hand, Heather could also adjust her identity beliefs to correspond to this feedback.

Besides emotional comfort, Heather's friendship also seems to be a source of physical comfort. Natalie comforted Heather by rubbing her tummy and back when she was

experiencing menstrual cramps. In contrast to this finding, Burrows and Johnson (2005) wrote about menstruation as a taboo topic amongst young girls, and described their tendencies to hide signs of menstruation, even from friends (see also Moore, 1995; Van Wyk, 2015). Here we see the physical intimacy among the girls in this study, so much so that Heather described her friendship as unique and more than “a normal friendship” – a sisterhood. Physical intimacy (e.g., hugs, rubbing her back) seemed to be a recurring theme related to nurturance in this study. Monsour (1992) similarly identified physical contact, alongside self-disclosure, trust, and unconditional support, as a defining feature of intimacy in same-sex friendships.

### 7.1.3 Listening and giving advice

The girls stated that they could talk about anything (“enige iets”) and everything (“alles”). Researchers studying adolescent girls’ friendships noted topics surrounding self-presentation and boys to be central to girls’ talk (Webb et al., 2014; Young et al., 2014). Although the girls in this study discussed matters related to self-presentation and boys, they also discussed various other matters as friends. These matters ranged from superficial and frivolous subjects (“simple goedjies”) to deeper, serious issues, which demanded a great deal of self-reflection. Harter (1990) identified the act of listening to a friend when she is upset to be indicative of an emotionally supportive friendship. Below, Nicole, Rebecca, and Lydia shared their experiences of talking about “stupid things”.

#### 7.1.3.1 Talk about stupid things

**Zelda:** *And if you talk with each other, with your friendship circle, what would you talk about?*

**Nicole:** *Uhm, I don’t know. Maybe about school if someone irritated us or a teacher or something... or we would talk... many times we would talk about something we saw on Instagram, then we would show that and we would talk about that. But yes, I don’t know... but actually stupid things... not usually in depth if it is like break. But yes. So, yes (laughs).*

**Zelda:** *En as julle nou soos gesels met mekaar, met jou vriendegroep, waaroor sal julle nou gesels?*

**Nicole:** *Uhm, ek weet nie. Dalk soos oor skool as iemand ons geïriteer het of ‘n onderwyser of iets... of ons sal soos praat... ons sal baie keer dan sal ons iets sien op Instagram, dan sal ons nou dit wys en dan sal ons nou daaroor praat. Maar ja, ek weet*



*nie... maar eintlik simpel goed... nie gewoonlik in diepte as dit nou soos pouse is nie. Maar ja. So, ja (lag).*

***Rebecca: Uh, like they, we would talk a lot about boys. [...] But like superficial things, what you are going to wear to this or like that type of thing, or stuff that does not really mean a lot, I would talk to them about that.***

*Rebecca: Uh, soos hulle, ons sal baie praat oor ouens [...] Maar soos oppervlakkige goedjies, wat gaan jy aantrek na hierdie of soos daai tipe goed, of goed wat nie regtig soveel beteken nie, daaroor sal ek met hulle praat.*

***Lydia: But when we socialise together then we just talk about like light stuff, like who is the attractive boy in the sc- in School Y or like who said what now... we talk about movies and stuff like that... or like lighter subjects.***

*Lydia: Maar as ons bymekaar kuier dan praat ons maar net oor soos half ligte goed, soos wie is nou die mooi outjie in die sk- in Skool Y of soos wie het nou wat gepraat... ons praat oor movies en sulke goed... of sulke ligter subjects.*

When the girls mentioned what they considered “stupid” or “superficial” things, they referred to talk involving boys, self-presentation, social media interaction, and shared interests (e.g., music and books). Additionally, discussing shared experiences of everyday happenings (i.e., academics, school sports), joking around, and sharing memories of past events were also regarded as “light things”.

In the literature, talk seems to be central to females’ interactions (Apter & Josselson, 1998; Greif & Sharpe, 2010). Apter and Josselson (1998) noted that this type of “frivolous” talk serves an important role to start and keep a friendship going and could also help to determine whether a person is a good fit for a friend. Additionally, girls’ talk about boys is often a strategy to obtain mating advice regarding their mate-seeking endeavours (Bleske & Buss, 2000). In a similar vein, researchers ascribed girls’ talk about self-presentation to an appearance culture, where significant importance is placed on appearance to gain attention from boys (Tesser et al., 1989; Webb et al., 2014). Even though the girls mentioned talk about boys, they seemed to elaborate more on the “deeper” topics of talk. Below, Brenda, Emily, and Heather share their experience of talking about “deep things”, “difficult decisions” and sharing advice within their friendships.

### 7.1.3.2 Talk about “deep things”, “difficult decisions” and giving advice

**Zelda:** Yes, okay... and you also said you talk about stuff which, say, happened during the day or something that bothers you or something from home... like do you want to give me examples? What type of things are that?

**Brenda:** Okay, that would be, say, Irene gets sick very quickly... so her ulcer and stuff... yes, so she gets a lot of ulcers and stuff and then she comes back and then we ask, “Okay, but how is it going with your ulcer?” and so and she says, “No, check this photo!”, and then she now took a photo of it and then yes... Her dad now applied for a job here en here and now she wants to know... because she will maybe have to move and then she will not be in School X anymore and what do we think... do we think her dad must stay somewhere else if he goes... and I would talk more about... uhm... about my home and like my brother was now... my mom kicked him out of the house, because he failed Maths and now he has to go and live with my grandmother... then I would talk about that.

**Zelda:** Ja, okay... en jy het ook gesê julle praat oor goed wat sê nou maar deur die dag gebeur het of iets wat julle pla of iets van die huis... soos wil jy vir my voorbeelde noem? Watse tipe dinge is dit?

**Brenda:** Okay, dit sal wees sê nou maar, Irene raak baie vinnig siek... so haar ulkus en goed... ja, so sy kry baie ulkuse en goed en dan kom sy terug en dan vra ons: “Okay maar hoe gaan dit met jou ulkus?” en so en dan sê sy: “Nee, check die foto!”, en dan het sy nou 'n foto geneem, en dan ja... Haar pa hulle het nou aansoek gedoen vir 'n werk hier en hier en sy wil nou weet... want sy moet dalk nou trek en dan gaan sy nie meer in Skool X wees nie, en wat dink ons... dink ons haar pa moet dan iewers bly as hy gaan... en ek sou meer praat oor... uhm... oor my huis en soos my broer was nou... my ma se ou het hom uit ons huis uitgeskop want hy het Wiskunde gedop en nou moet hy by my ouma bly... dan sal ek net daaroor praat.

**Emily:** Like she [friend; Karin] told me today that she had to make a difficult decision in terms of... she has to decide if she is going to leave the boarding house or not, and then she will ask my advice and then also... like tell me stuff she would not necessarily tell other people, I think. Yes.

**Zelda:** Hmm and what would those type of things be?

**Emily:** It would be like... like she would tell the people, “Okay, I am maybe leaving the boarding house”, but she would not necessarily tell them that she cried about it or that it was difficult for her or... she would not necessarily say, “Okay I told my mom and this is what my mom told me”, or like that type of thing. Like she would just tell me the details.

**Emily:** Soos sy [vriendin; Karin] het vandag vir my vertel sy moes 'n moeilike besluit maak in terme van... sy moet besluit of sy uit die koshuis gaan of nie, en dan sal sy vir my raad vra en dan ook... soos goeters vir my sê wat sy nie noodwendig vir ander mense sal sê nie... dink ek. Ja.

**Zelda:** Hmm en wat sal daai tipe goed wees?

**Emily:** Dit sal wees soos... soos sy sal nou vir die mense sê: “Okay ek gaan nou miskien uit die koshuis uit”, maar sy sal nie noodwendig vir hulle sê dat sy gehuil het daaroor of

*dat dit vir haar moeilik was of... Sy sal nie noodwendig sê: “Okay ek het met my ma gaan praat en hierdie is wat my ma vir my gese het”, of so en daai tipe van ding. Soos sy sal net vir my die details sê.*

***Heather: You can literally do what you want and we talk about anything that bothers us. We talk about anything that irritates you [...]***

***Zelda: Okay. And if you have to share anything in the group, how does that make you feel? Or how=***

***Heather: They always give like... or they are someone who... or they give really good advice. Or I don't know, I have always felt like I can literally tell them any problem, because in a way they would be able to figure out how we will get through it or what we will do. [...] Yes, like many... maybe it was something they have been through before and then they would say, “Okay, but I did this and this was, say, the results or so, maybe you should rather try this”. Or say I would make a suggestion, then they would say, “Yes, but just remember that this might happen, so rather try this... or so”.***

*Heather: Jy kan letterlik doen wat jy wil en ons praat oor enige iets wat ons pla. Ons praat oor enige iets wat jou iriteer [...].*

*Zelda: Okay. En as jy nou iets moet deel in die groep, hoe laat dit jou voel? Of hoe=*

*Heather: Hulle gee altyd soos... Of hulle is iemand wat... Of hulle gee baie goeie raad. Of ek weet nie, ek het nog altyd gevoel soos ek kan letterlik soos enige probleem vir hulle sê, want hulle sal op 'n manier of ons sal uitfigure hoe ons dit moet deurmaak of wat ons gaan doen. [...]Ja, soos baie... dalk was dit iets waardeur hulle al van te vore was, dan sal hulle sê: “Okay maar ek het dit gedoen en dit was se nou maar die resultate of so, dalk moet jy eerder dit probeer”. Of se nou maar ek sal 'n voorstel gee, dan sal hulle se “Ja, maar onthou net dan gaan dit dalk gebeur, so doen eerder dit...of so”.*

Coterell (2007) and Rowsell et al. (2014) demonstrated that adolescent girls often emphasise talk and emotional sharing while common talk topics included relationship difficulties. As illustrated above, the girls in this study also seemed comfortable to express their feelings, thoughts, and concerns in the presence of their close friends who served as a sounding board. They discussed “deep things”, also referred to as “the stuff that bothers”, which included concerns regarding health, family matters, relocation, their insecurities, and intimate details. Overall, the focus of these conversations centred on sharing feelings, reflecting on past happenings, and exchanging advice. Exchanging advice was common among the girls, which mainly revolved around how to deal with “tricky decisions” about relationship difficulties with parents or boyfriends. In support of this finding, Johnson and Aries (1983) found girls to often discuss personal relationships and personal issues to ultimately help each other solve problems.

According to researchers, friendship provides a safe context for unrestricted self-disclosure and trust which, in turn, contributes to intimacy in the friendship and enables girls to strengthen attachment in the friendship (Glover et al., 2015; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Karin seemingly perceived Emily as a “closer” friend and, as can be seen in the extract above, chose to only share intimate “details” with Emily rather than her other friends. A different participant, Rebecca, also stated: “The more I shared with her, the closer we got”. Hence, like Glover et al. (2015), my findings suggest that the girls’ self disclosure seemingly contributed to intimacy in the friendship and brought girls “closer” to one another. The girls in this study also spoke about how their friends helped them to “figure out the problem” through talking about their experiences and sharing advice. Similarly, researchers noted the act of listening and talking to be females’ preferred way of helping one another (Crick, 1995; Fehr, 2004; Greif & Sharpe, 2010).

Although the girls seemed comfortable to talk about their feelings and concerns regarding personal, family, and health matters, they seemed selective about what they were prepared to discuss in the friendship. For example, in Chapter 6 I illustrated how they refrained from expressing the discontent that surfaced in their friendships. The girls therefore did not seem as open to talk about their own irritations or anger if it was directed towards one another. According to Pipher (1994), girls, possibly like the girls in this study, tend to silence themselves, avoid confrontation, and remain “nice” out of fear of losing their friendships. Even though the findings in this section suggest these girls’ friendships to be intimate and supportive, evidence regarding a low tolerance for differences and the possible inability of these friendships to withstand disagreement, questions whether these girls’ friendships are truly deep and meaningful.

Although having supportive friends in whom one can confide seems to have an adaptive function, Rose et al. (2014) cautioned against adolescent girl friends excessively discussing problems and dwelling on negative affect as this could pose a risk factor for girls developing depressive symptoms. In a similar vein, Casper and Card (2010) argued that an increase in intimacy in adolescent friendships could give rise to both positive and negative experiences.

## 7.2 She knows how to be there

From the girls' talk, it seemed that supporting and "being there for each other" were sometimes not enough if their friends did not know *how* to be there. In the following section, I will illustrate that the participants provided each other with deeper support, which was based on (1) a friend's ability to understand and relate, including showing empathy and emotional sensitivity; and (2) reciprocity in terms of giving and receiving support.

### 7.2.1 Understanding and relating

As discussed in Chapter 6, the girls expected their friends to always "be there for each other". Moreover, the girls stressed the importance of *knowing how* to be there for each other. "Knowing how to be there" seemed to involve the ability to relate to the friend's concerns and have a genuine understanding which, in turn, contributed to feelings of empathy in the friendship.

By being empathetically attuned and sensitive to the needs of her friend Jane, Heather seems to affirm Jane's self-worth. Jane appeared to suffer from depression to such an extent that she was unable to attend school: "*I was in this dark hole and I had so many thoughts about suicide*". The following extract illustrates how empathy and emotional sensitivity featured prominently in the girls' friendships.

*Zelda: And you said you also spoke to Heather and that helped you [...] So how did that help you?*

*Jane: I would sit in the Afrikaans class many times and then... we read a book... "Blinde Sambok" and then I always had this... it was about the dad... something to do with the dad... and then I always... that is where... I think most of my sadness came from, like from my dad... and then she will see like, "Listen here, this girl is like not going to make it", and then she will tell me... she will tell me, "Listen here, I think we should go drink a coffee after school and then we talk a bit". Then she would like ask me, "How was your weekend? How is your mom doing? When last did you talk to your dad?" Like stuff like that... like she really showed an interest and even if she wasn't really interested, then at least she pretended to be. Hmm so yes.*

*Zelda: So it helped you to just share a bit with her about what is going on in your life and...*

*Jane: And she could... she tried to relate... like it was not just like, "I do not know how it feels, so I am not even going to try to help you", it was like, "I do know how you feel, but I can imagine how hard it must be and I am here". Like that was... like it is, yes.*

**Zelda:** *And did you feel that she was there?*

**Jane:** *Yes, like I felt if I would wake up tonight at two I can just wake up Heather and say, "Listen here girl, I want to talk, like now". And that was like it last night with Rebecca when I woke up in tears and my mom didn't answer, then I went next door to Rebecca and when I walked into the room then she awoke immediately and then I just sat there with her and she talked to me and it was just so relaxing to feel okay, someone cares. Yes.*

**Zelda:** *En jy sê jy het ook met Heather gesels en dit het jou gehelp [...] So hoe het dit jou gehelp?*

**Jane:** *Ek sou baie keer in Afrikaans gesit het en dan... ons het 'n boek gelees... "Blinde Sambok" en dan het ek altyd hierdie... dit was ook oor die pa gewees oor... iets met die pa te doen... en dan het ek altyd soos... dis waar... ek dink dis waar my meeste hartseer vandaan gekom het, soos van my pa... en dan sal sy sien soos: "Hoor hier die girl soos gaan dit nou nie maak nie", en dan sal sy vir my sê... sy sal vir my sê: "Hoor hier ek dink ons moet na skool gaan koffie drink en dan praat ons bietjie". Dan vra sy soos vir my: "Hoe was jou naweek? Hoe gaan dit met jou ma? Wanneer laas het jy met jou pa gepraat?" Soos sulke goedjies... soos sy het regtig belangstelling getoon en al het sy nie eers regtig belang gestel nie, dan het sy ten minste gemaak of sy doen. Hmm so ja.*

**Zelda:** *So dit het jou gehelp om net bietjie met haar ook te deel oor wat aangaan in jou lewe en...*

**Jane:** *En sy kon ook... sy het probeer relate... soos dit was nie net van: "Ek weet nie hoe dit voel nie, so ek gaan nie eers probeer om jou te help nie", dit was van: "Ek weet nie hoe jy voel nie, maar ek kan myself indink hoe erg dit moet wees en ek is hier". Soos dit was... soos dit is, ja.*

**Zelda:** *En het jy gevoel sy is daar?*

**Jane:** *Ja, soos ek het gevoel as ek nou wakker word vanaand twee uur kan ek net vir Heather wakker maak en sê: "Hoor hier girl ek wil nou praat, soos nou". En dit was so gisteraand met Rebecca soos toe ek wakker word in trane en my ma antwoord nie, toe gaan ek langsaan na Rebecca toe en toe ek instap in die kamer toe is sy dadelik wakker en toe het ek net daar gesit by haar en sy het met my gepraat en dit was so soos relaxing gewees om net te voel okay, iemand soos gee om. Ja.*

Through sharing her thoughts and feelings with an empathetic friend, Jane was able to feel more positive about herself: *"I felt I had someone who is there for me, who will listen to me all the time... uhm... who is always interested in what I have to say and that is what just (click) picked me up again"*. Researchers have highlighted the inverse relationship between social support and the onset of depressive symptoms in late adolescent girls (Auerbach et al., 2011; Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016). The findings of this study are in line with those of Martínez-Hernández et al. (2016) whose participants similarly described the benefits of supportive acts when friends listen to one, display genuine concern for one's well-being, and are willing to place themselves in one's position to understand. Jane described Heather's support as *"she really showed interest"* and *"she tried to relate"*. Like Jane, Lydia also talked

to her friends about her distress. In contrast to Jane, however, Lydia reported that her friends “did not know how to be there” for her.

*Lydia: They were nice to me and they supported me and stuff, but they did not half understand that it was terribly bad for me and they could not half relate to how I feel and they thought, “Yes, it is not nice, but it is not that bad”. You always think yes it is not that bad until it happens to you. Even with my dad’s illness, they did not understand that my dad is sick and they did not understand that I sometimes... have to sleep at home a lot, because my dad is sick and stuff like that and they do not always understand that. They support me, but they do not completely know how to help me or how to be there for me. For me it feels they would just comfort me when the day gets me under. But yes. [...] The one evening I was very sad about my dad because my dad was extremely sick again that evening... his health is just a bit up and down... and then uhm... then I cried terribly and then my friend... then Carla told me, but I think it was like a joke, but half, “Ag Lydia, it is not that bad, at least he is still alive”, and then it was now half for me... and then I just started crying more and then it was kind of an ugly fight between me and Carla.*

*Lydia: Hulle was nice met my en hulle het my ondersteun en sulke goed, maar hulle het nie half verstaan dat dit vir my bitterlik erg is nie en hulle kan nie half relate oor hoe ek voel nie en hulle dink: “Ja dit is nie lekker nie, maar dit is nie so erg nie”. Mens dink altyd ja dit is nie so erg nie totdat dit met jou gebeur. Selfs met my pa se siekte, hulle verstaan nie dat my pa so siek is nie en hulle verstaan nie dat ek soos soms... baie by die huis moes gaan slaap omdat my pa siek is nie en sulke goed en hulle verstaan dit nie altyd nie. Hulle ondersteun my maar hulle weet nie heeltemal hoe om my te help en hoe om daar te wees vir my nie. Dit voel vir my hulle sal my net soos troos as die dag my nou onder kry. Maar, ja. [...] Die een aand was ek baie hartseer oor my pa gewees want my pa was bitterlik siek daai aand weer gewees... sy gesondheid is maar bietjie up en down... en toe uhm... en toe huil ek vreeslik en toe sê my vrie... toe sê Carla vir my, maar ek dink dit was soos ‘n grappie, maar half: “Ag Lydia, dis nou nie so erg nie, hy lewe darem nog”, en toe was dit nou half net vir my... en toe het ek net nog meer begin huil en toe was dit nou nogal ‘n lelike bakleiery tussen my en Carla.*

In the above extract, we see how Lydia’s friends appear to provide her with supportive acts by listening and comforting her. Yet, what is important to note is that Lydia seems to gain little from these provisions due to her perception that they lacked understanding and could not relate to her. Like providing comfort, humour can function as a buffer in times of distress, but it could become a source of hurt when used insensitively. In the above extract we see how Carla tried to comfort Lydia by making a joke and this resulted in conflict between the girls. Additionally, even though Lydia perceived Carla’s joke as hurtful, it is possible that Carla used humour to deal with her own anxiety surrounding a serious illness of a friend’s father (see also Fuhr, 2002). In line with Rose et al.’s (2014) warning against adolescent girl friends excessively discussing problems in their friendships, this finding suggests that discussing

problems with a friend who does not have the emotional capacity to deal with serious issues, like illness, could also cause emotional distress for the friend.

Consistent with developmental theories, this study illustrates how these adolescent girls could empathise with others (Nielsen, 1996; Piaget, 1971). From the above extracts it is evident how being empathically attuned contributed to the girls feeling supported by their friends (see also Barry et al., 2013). In support of this, Morelli et al. (2015) asserted that an adolescent girl will only enhance the well-being of a friend if she is emotionally engaged while providing supportive acts. In a similar vein, various researchers have identified empathy as a skill necessary to promote the exchange of social support in relationships (Ciarrochi et al., 2017; Ford & Aberdein, 2015; Hojat et al., 2015). According to RCT, mutual empathy is at the heart of growth-fostering relationships (Jordan & Hartling, 2008). Thus, from the findings of this study it seems that the essence of the supportive nature of these friendships was in conveying empathy and emotional sensitivity.

Similarity seemed to play a salient role in the girls' abilities to empathise with one another. Rind's (2002) qualitative analysis suggested three central characteristics of female friendship, namely a sense of familiarity, a shared history, and an understanding that derives from their shared history. Below, Brenda also noted similarity to be important in establishing a connection.

**Zelda:** *And how do you feel if you share with them?*

**Brenda:** *It is... for me... like... I want to... I share more with Helena than I do with my other two roommates, because it feels as if Helena is like more sincere... or is actually feels like she listens, where the other two is just half like, "Oh okay". So... but that doesn't bother me, because it feels like... one person is enough to share with. Because it feels like... because she has the same... I know her dad had like cancer twice already or so, so yes I think she understands. So then it is easier to share these things with her. [...]  
Yes, like just Helena and I usually share... or we usually share what goes on in our homes and we do not really share this with Michelle and Irene, because they do not really care.*

**Zelda:** *En hoe voel jy as jy dit met hulle deel?*

**Brenda:** *Dit is... vir my... soos... ek wil meer... ek deel meer met Helena as wat ek met my ander twee kamermaats doen, want dit voel asof Helena soos meer sincere... of dit voel eintlik asof sy luister, waar die ander twee is dit half net soos: "Oh okay". So... maar dit pla my nie, want dit voel soos... een mens is half genoeg om mee te deel. Want dit voel soos..want sy het dieselfde... ek weet haar pa het al soos twee keer of iets kanker gehad of so, so ja ek dink sy verstaan. So dan is dit makliker om met haar te praat oor die goed*



*[...]Ja soos net ek en Helena ons deel gewoonlik aan... of ons deel gewoonlik wat by ons huis aangaan en dit deel ons nie regtig met Michelle en Irene nie, want hulle gee nie regtig om nie*

According to Linden-Andersen et al. (2009), girls may infer a mutual understanding based on similarities which may, in turn, create a safe place for self-disclosure. From the above, we saw how Brenda chose to talk to Helena about “the things going on in her home” as Helena’s dad had cancer and seemed to share similar hardships at home. Brenda also juxtaposed Helena against her other friends who seemingly did not have similar experiences and therefore, according to Brenda, could not understand her concerns and “did not really care”. Hence, due to their similar experiences, Brenda perceived Helena to be more caring and understanding, thereby motivating her to self-disclose to Helena rather than her other friends. In turn, getting to know Brenda on a deeper level possibly enabled Helena to relate to Brenda’s thoughts and feelings and to act more empathetically towards Brenda. In Lydia’s extract, she seems to illustrate a sense of hopelessness as her friends seem to be unable to understand and relate to her concerns. These friendships are consistent with the friendships in Sebanc et al.’s (2009) study which similarly demonstrated that late adolescent Latino girls rated some of their friendships to be of a higher quality based on understanding and identification.

### **7.2.2 Reciprocity vs. one-way friendships**

Being the provider of social support might be just as beneficial to one’s personal well-being as to being on the receiving end of supportive acts (Jordan & Hartling, 2008; Morelli et al., 2015). Linden-Andersen et al. (2009) stated that perceived reciprocity was associated with more favourable judgements of friendship quality in adolescence. The girls in this study similarly reported how, in addition to their friends’ ability to relate, understand, and respond empathetically, perceived reciprocity in their friendships also influenced how the girls felt supported.

***Nicole: And I also like it, because to me it feels like the friendship comes from both sides. It is not like, say, I am putting in effort to, say, see the other person. We all put in the effort to see each other.***

*Nicole: En dis vir my ook lekker, want dit voel vir my die vriendskap kom half van altwee kante af. Dis nie net soos sê nou maar ek wat net moeite doen om sê nou maar die ander persoon te sien nie. Ons almal doen moeite om by mekaar uit te kom en so.*

**Jane:** *The feeling afterwards of that satisfaction to help someone is nice, but inside yourself... like... you still feel like, “Listen here, I could have done with someone who could help me”. [...] Like I love it to listen to my friends’ stories... like it is so nice for me and I love to like... if I can help, I really always try, but sometimes it gets too much and then like... people can also not... I cannot be everyone’s foundation. So I never had the feeling that she is there for me. I was just always there for her. [...] Like I literally told the one... told my one friend, because I felt so bad, but I also felt, “You never listen to me, so why would I listen to you?”*

*Jane:* Die gevoel na die tyd van daai satisfaction om iemand te help is lekker, maar binne jouself... soos... voel jy nogsteeds: “Hoor hier, ek kon nou doen met iemand wat my sou kon help”. [...] Ek soos love dit om na my vriendinne se stories te luister... soos dit is vir my so lekker en ek love dit om soos... as ek kan help, probeer ek regtig altyd, maar partykeer raak dit te veel en dan soos... mens kan ook nie... ek kan ook nie almal se fondament... ‘n fondament vir almal wees, maar ek het nie my eie soos fondasie nie. So ek het nooit gevoel sy is daar vir my nie. Ek was net altyd daar vir haar [...] Soos ek het dit letterlik vir die een... vir my een vriendin gesê, want ek het so sleg gevoel, maar ek het ook half gevoel: “Jy luister nooit vir my nie, so hoekom sal ek vir jou wil luister?”

**Rachel:** *Like last year she also watched none of my games and I watched every single game of her and then that also hurt me a little, because for me it felt that I support you through everything, but you cannot even put in the effort to simply watch my hockey game or like even at inter-schools which is your main school game, she would rather watch the rugby. And it is not like she can’t come, she can come easily, she just chooses not to be there, understand... Uhm, where the... I don’t know... things like this for me is just... like I... I won’t say I attach value to it, but for me it feels that a friend shouldn’t just one-way... or a friendship shouldn’t just go one way, it should come from both ways and it does, but it is just some small things... or I would sacrifice everything for my friends, but she would definitely not do that for me.*

*Rachel:* Soos sy het laasjaar ook, toe het sy niks van my games gekyk nie en ek kyk elke liewe game van haar en dan het dit my ook soos bietjie seer gemaak want dit voel vir my ek ondersteun jou deur alles, maar jy kan nie die moeite doen om selfs net my hokkie game te kyk nie of soos self by interskole wat jou hoof skoolgame is nie, soos sy sal eerder rugby kyk. En dis nie asof sy nie kan kom nie, sy kan maklik kom, sy kies net sy wil nie daar wees nie, verstaan... Uhm, waar die... ek weet nie... sulke goedjies is maar vir my... ek soos... ek sal nie sê ek heg waarde daaraan nie, maar soos dit voel vir my ‘n vriendin moenie net one-way... of ‘n vriendskap moenie net eenrigting gaan nie dit moet van altwee kante afkom en dit doen, maar dit is net party klein goedjies... of ek sal alles opoffer vir my vriendinne, maar sy sal dit definitief nie vir my doen nie.

Various researchers have shown how reciprocity, like empathy, could deepen the structure of girls’ friendships (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Hartup, 1996; Hartup & Stevens, 1997). In describing growth-fostering relationships, RCT stresses the importance of friends to be on the providing as well as receiving end of supportive acts (Jordan, 2002). Girls do not only have a need to be cared for and to be treated with respect, but they also need to give and find

meaning in contributing to the well-being of others (Weiss, 1974). For example, Jane described feeling “satisfied” when she had the opportunity to help her friends. Similarly, Nicole described her friendships to “come from both sides”, thereby making her friendships enjoyable. In this regard, Furman and Robbins (1985) contend that reliable alliance, namely, reciprocity in empathy and self-disclosure in close friendships leads to more intimate same-sex friendships among women (see also Diamond & Dubé, 2002).

Conversely, we also saw how the girls felt that “one-way” support was not conducive to enhancing the friendship. Jane asserted that the satisfaction resulting from helping a friend will only last if it is reciprocated by the friend. Miller and Stiver (1997) similarly cautioned that discrepant levels of mutuality could lead to disconnection and create a power imbalance and relational conflict among friends. For example, above we saw how Rachel felt aggrieved that she would “sacrifice” anything for Vera, including watching her hockey games, but Vera would seemingly not do the same for her. For Rachel, a “one-way” friendship created an inner tension which made her question the quality of her friendship with Vera and could possibly lead to disconnection in her friendship.

Numerous researchers suggested that intimate friendships possess “psychotherapeutic possibilities” and may therefore be valuable in creating a supportive atmosphere in which girls can work through their personal struggles (Davidson & Packard, 1981; GreyWolf, 2013; Sullivan, 1953). Yet, as seen in the section above, the girls expected their friends to return their supportive gestures. Wiseman (2009) and Policarpo (2015) noted that expectations of reciprocity form part of the unwritten rules between friends and, if broken, could lead to the dissolution of the friendship. Smith and Rose (2011) also cautioned against “empathetic distress” or the “cost of caring” among girls, when girls tend to take on a friend’s emotional distress as their own. As Jane and Rachel commented above, both felt emotionally exhausted when they tried to always be supportive and “being there” for their friends. Likewise, Carla’s “insensitive” joke towards Lydia can be interpreted as an anxiety relieving strategy for taking on Lydia’s emotional distress, regarding her father’s illness, as her own.

### **7.3 Summary**

In this chapter, I illustrated how the girls perceived their friendships as social support structures. This finding is consistent with RCT principles and other research asserting that an

individual's engagement in mutually empathetic and responsive relationships functions as the source of psychological resilience.

In the first subtheme, *She Builds me up*, I illustrated how the provision of (1) humour, (2) validation, nurturance, and comfort, and (3) listening and giving advice to a friend were valued as key sources of support for these participants. Consistent with other research, these social provisions seemed to have a positive influence on the girls' well-being (Husband, 2015; Soji et al., 2015). For instance, the girls' seemed to use humour to lighten up their friends' mood and function as a buffer in times of stress (see also Cohen & McKay, 1984), while nurturance and comfort seemed to help to validate the girls' feelings of worth (see also Cohen & Willis, 1985; Vaux, 1990). Furthermore, girls could regulate their affect, thought, and actions through conversation (see also Lakey & Orehek, 2011; Thompson et al., 2006) while listening to friends and giving advice tended to foster intimacy and feelings of connectedness among these participants.

In a second subtheme, *She Knows how to be There*, I illustrated the conditions under which the aforementioned supportive acts seemingly contributed to the girls' perceptions of feeling supported and cared for by their friends. For the girls, their cognitive appraisal of the received social support seemed to depend on the perceived level of (1) their friend's ability to understand and relate to their concerns and to, consequently, convey a sense of empathy and emotional sensitivity, and (2) perceived reciprocity in terms of exchanging support. Having similar experiences seemed to support the process of understanding and relating to a friend's concerns. According to RCT, the absence of empathy and reciprocity may indeed lead to disconnection in the friendship (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Gaining insight into *how* the supportive component of girls' friendships contribute to well-being, builds towards an understanding of the therapeutic value of these friendships. In their attempt to fulfil the role of the supporting friend, however, the girls tended to take on a friends' emotional distress as their own.

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## Chapter 8: Conclusions and Recommendations

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore a group of 10 late adolescent girls', living in an all girls' boarding house in the Western Cape, experiences of their same-sex friendships. Further aims were to examine how they described their friendships and to understand how they negotiated their positions in the friendship group. Through exploring these girls' experiences, thoughts, and feelings surrounding their friendships, I hoped to identify possible protective mechanisms operating within these friendships and possible challenges that may prohibit these girls from forming healthy connections with other girls. In this chapter, I present a general overview of the key findings, highlight the practical implications for the field of psychology, and discuss possible strengths and limitations of this study. I conclude this chapter with some recommendations for future research.

### 8.1 General overview

Consistent with research on the intimate, emotion-focussed nature of female friendships, the girls in this study emphasised intimacy and self-disclosure, referred to as "closeness", when discerning between acquaintances and different types of friends. The participants reported that they discussed various subjects, ranging from superficial to serious talk and self-disclosing intimate details with friends. The use of communication technologies, such as WhatsApp Messenger, seemingly enhanced feelings of closeness regardless of the girls' physical location.

This study confirms the existing theories and literature on the formation of friendship and how being placed in close proximity, sharing similar values and experiences, or different, possibly complementary characteristics all drew girls to one another and increased the likelihood of them becoming friends. Friendship formation amongst these girls, however, seemed to be a complex and dynamic process as they expressed ambivalence and uncertainty when choosing friends or a friendship circle. In line with existing literature on popularity as a salient component of girls' friendships, perceived levels of popularity status and "prettiness" seemed to influence these girls' friendship choices, since associating with friends of a high status seemingly reaffirmed the girls' sense of self. This apparent focus on prettiness/self-

presentation suggests that these participants were embedded in an appearance culture, where significant importance is placed on gaining attention from boys.

Consistent with the literature, this study illustrated how adolescence seemingly becomes a reflective space where the girls started to think more about their friendships and reflected on how different friendships could meet their personal needs. Whereas their earlier friendships were marked by superficial talk, childish manners, relational aggressive strategies, and less diversity, the girls described their current friendships to be more deep, meaningful, and diverse. Even though adolescence seems to be accompanied with more mature and satisfying friendships, these girls also noted how boyfriends, jealousy, and experimentation with alcohol, could complicate their friendships in adolescence.

This study further illustrated how these girls' talk was situated within an idealised friendship discourse. The girls reproduced gender discourses, situating female friendships as harmonious, nurturing, and conflict-free, in their constructions of an ideal friend. The participants expected an ideal friend to sacrifice her own needs and desires, to stay "nice", and unconditionally support her friends at all times. Furthermore, they viewed conflict and differences as a threat to the ideal friendship and consequently avoided the expression of anger or frustration at all costs. Even though the girls' actual friendship experiences were, at times, in contrast with this ideal friend image, they continued to portray their friendship in an ideal light to others. This finding strengthens the idea that these girls wanted to meet societal expectations of females as "nice", "ordentlik", and able to maintain harmonious friendships.

Being unable to live up to the demands of being an ideal friend, however, often left the girl feeling guilty or disappointed, created tension in the friendship, and could affect the quality of the friendship. Moreover, in their striving to be a supportive friend, the girls, at times, tended to take on a friend's emotional distress as their own. From this study it therefore seemed that holding rigid expectations of oneself and friends influenced the girls' ability to engage in deep and meaningful friendships. Importantly, the girls acknowledged that inauthenticity, or silencing the self in the friendship to avoid conflict, might be counterproductive to their well-being.

One participant, however, resisted these traditional femininity ideals and expressed her opinions in the friendship group even though these differed from her friends. Consequently,

her friends seemingly employed strategies, such as teasing, to regulate the normative friendship ideal. This finding is suggestive of a low tolerance for difference and the majority of the girls seemed to have little experience of alternative conflict resolution strategies.

From the findings of this study, it also seemed that the girls' ability to maintain such ideal friendships influenced their sense of self. This finding is consistent with the literature and relational-cultural theory stressing the importance of female friendships in promoting a sense of personal worth and developing an identity. This study illustrated how the participants' identities were, to some extent, co-constructed and strengthened through conversations with friends, and derived from their membership in a particular friendship group.

Contrary to current literature situating girls' friendships as hierarchical cliques plagued by micro politics and relational aggression over status, popularity, and boys, this study illustrated how compassionate, reciprocal, and empathetic friendships, where friends could understand and relate to each other's concerns, could contribute towards relational resilience. Despite the inauthenticity emerging in these girls' friendships, this study found these girls' friendships created supportive environments in which participants could work through their personal struggles and the challenges associated with adolescence. The girls in this study reported to socially support each other through using humour as a buffer in times of stress, providing each other with validation and nurturance, and exchanging advice regarding "difficult decisions". Experiencing empathy, emotional sensitivity, and reciprocity in terms of exchanging support, seemed to enhance the girls' perception of feeling socially supported by their friends.

## **8.2 Implications for practice**

From the findings of this study, the girls' interpretations of rigid femininity ideals seemingly presented barriers to the creation of deep, meaningful friendships. On the other hand, this study has shown how meaningful and supportive friendships in adolescence could promote the girls' relational resilience. Even though this study, along with much other available literature, provides overwhelming evidence for the vital impact of friendship on girls' well-being, few researchers have addressed the practical implications of these results. Based on the insight gained from this study, I offer some recommendations for practice:

- **Create spaces to listen to girls.** The girls in this study expressed their need to talk about their friendships and mentioned the absence of a safe space where they could freely discuss challenges in their friendships. For example, Emily noted how talking about the challenges in her friendships during the interview was necessary for her to understand her feelings and to stop her thoughts from “running in circles”. Even though the girls often silenced themselves in their friendships, this study demonstrated how the girls were articulate to express their feelings and needs surrounding their friendships and I was impressed by the amount of insight demonstrated by some of the girls during the interviews. Hence, it is vital that we create safe spaces where girls can reflect on and make sense of their thoughts and feelings associated with their friendships.
- **Focus on friendships in therapy.** Given the seemingly significant influence of friends on girls’ state of mind, a more in-depth focus on friendships could help mental health professionals to promote the psychological well-being of adolescent girls. For example, GreyWolf (2013) suggested that the therapist should incorporate social support assessment and psychoeducation on the value of friendships when presented with female clients suffering from depression or anxiety. Additionally, psychologists and school counsellors could provide psycho-education and equip adolescent girls with skills to foster deep and meaningful friendships, to enhance friendship quality by cultivating empathy and compassion, and to deal with the possible challenges associated with these friendships.
- **Educate girls on friendship and conflict management.** From the findings of this study, there seems to be a need to educate girls on how holding an idealised view on friendships, the rigid demands of being an ideal friend, including silencing the self, avoiding conflict, and devaluing their own experiences in the process, could be counter-productive for their own and their friends’ well-being. This study illustrated how these girls seemed to lack the knowledge and skill to employ alternative conflict management strategies. Failing to deal consciously with conflict and differences could deprive girls of the opportunities to work through disconnections that could contribute to their resilience and build their relational competence (Cannon et al., 2012; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Furthermore, despite the participants’ portrayal of conflict situations as insignificant, researchers assert that some of these examples, including betrayal and exclusion, could produce profound negative emotional experiences for girls (Brown,



2003; Joskowitz-Jablonek & Leiser, 2013). Hence, girls need to reframe differences and conflict in their friendships. We also need to help girls to develop an assertive voice by challenging their ideas and reactions towards gender stereotypes expecting females to maintain harmony at all costs in their friendships.

### **8.3 Limitations and strengths of the study**

The first limitation of this study was the sample composition. I recruited 10 participants who were all White, Afrikaans-speaking and from middle- to upper-class households. These girls' friendship experiences may have been partly shaped by their shared demographic characteristics while it is possible that girls of a different class, race, or speaking a different language, may have vastly different experiences of their friendships. The findings of this study can, therefore, not be generalised to all late adolescent girls' friendships in South Africa. Even so, this study yielded rich narratives of White Afrikaans-speaking girls' experiences of their friendships in a same-sex school and middle-to-high income context that could resonate with other girls in similar contexts in South Africa.

A second limitation concerning the sample was that the high level of friendship intimacy and support reported by the girls in this study might be a unique experience for girls living in an all-girls' boarding house. Living in a boarding house away from family, the girls may have been forced, to some extent, to form family-like supportive ties with other girls. Additionally, researchers pointed out that sex segregation in schools provide an environment for same-sex friendships to be cultivated and deepened (Bernard, 1982) and to reinforce what is expected and desired from females in society (Glasser, 2012). Living in an all girls' boarding house might therefore account for the high level of intimacy described by the girls in this study while it is possible that these girls have internalised femininity ideals more strongly, compared to girls in, for example, a co-ed school.

A further limitation of this study revolves around possible "interviewer effects" on the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data in this study. In a qualitative interview, the interviewer plays an active role in the richness and content of data to be collected (Terreblanche et al., 2006). Being a White Afrikaans-speaking young female, the participants related to me in a unique way which may have produced the specific texture of the collected data. Even though I consider this to be a strength of this study, it is important to note that a

different researcher would possibly have elicited different stories and narratives. Likewise, one can take on countless viewpoints to interpret the data in numerous ways and it was therefore not possible for this study to exhaust all the possible meanings attached to these girls' friendship experiences. I hope that through using a range of techniques to increase the trustworthiness of this study, such as providing a section on researcher-reflexivity and receiving input from my supervisor, I have contained some of my biases. Due to time constraints, I could not include member checking to my range of techniques to increase the trustworthiness of my study. Member checking, also known as respondent validation, is a technique where preliminary themes are presented to the participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Bless et al., 2013).

Despite these limitations, this study also had some strengths. Based on all my searches of the databases, a major strength of this study was that it seemingly is the first qualitative study to specifically explore adolescent girls' experiences of their same-sex friendships in the Western Cape and therefore contributes to the limited body of work available on adolescent girls' same-sex friendship experiences in South Africa. The available research tends to either romanticise or denigrate adolescent girls' friendships (Berndt & Keefe, 1993; Hussong, 2000; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1998). This study, however, focussed on both the positive and negative aspects of the participants' friendship experiences to avoid such a biased view on these adolescent girls' friendships.

A second strength of this study is that it provided insight into how the supportive component of girls' friendships contributes to well-being, and therefore builds towards an understanding of the therapeutic value of these friendships. Various researchers pointed out that little is known about the underlying protective mechanisms of social support and that researchers do not yet understand those aspects which are important in adolescents' perceptions of support (Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016; Meyer, 2011; Warren et al., 2009). From the findings of this study, experiencing empathy, emotional sensitivity, and reciprocity in terms of exchanging support, seemed to enhance the girls' perception of feeling socially supported by their friends. Furthermore, despite the large body of research operationalising social support as a unidimensional construct (Warren et al., 2009), this study suggests that different dimensions of social support may be differentially related to adaptive outcomes. For instance, the girls seemed to use humour as a buffer in times of stress, while nurturance and comfort seemingly helped to validate the girls' feelings of worth. Furthermore, listening to

friends and giving advice tended to foster intimacy and regulate their affect, thought, and actions through conversations. Hence, this qualitative study contributed towards a deeper understanding of the link, as illustrated by the abundant quantitative research, between social support and mental health.

A last strength of this study was how I collected the data. During the interviews, I provided the girls a safe place in which they could openly discuss and reflect on their friendship experiences. In my interactions with the participants, I employed various techniques, including being reflexive and adopting a stance of not knowing to learn from the participants' experiences and to elicit thick descriptions. Being able to conduct the interviews in the girls' home language enabled me to make sense of the finer nuances and figurative expressions in their speech. Finally, attending events at the school and forging relationships with the school psychologist and the boarding housematron helped me to develop a contextual understanding of the participants' experiences.

#### **8.4 Recommendations for future research**

Based on questions that emerged from this study and the inconsistencies I identified in the literature, I will make some recommendations for future research. Contrary to the findings of this study, international comparative studies found that in some cultures, autonomy might be a better predictor of mental health than social support (Martínez-Hernández et al., 2016) and self-disclosure might not contribute to intimacy (Fehr, 2004). As such, first, there is a need to explore and compare adolescent girls' same-sex friendship experiences in diverse cultures and different socio-economic groups in urban and rural contexts in South Africa. Future efforts to study adolescent girls' friendships amongst diverse females should seek broader representative sampling. Second, quantitative studies typically incorporate larger samples and could therefore be helpful to investigate possible links between certain aspects of adolescent girls' friendship experiences and their relational resilience. Third, as illustrated above, future research could replicate this study with White Afrikaans-speaking girls not residing in a boarding house to compare their experiences of intimacy and support in their friendships with those of girls living in a boarding house. Lastly, future research should guide against a single focus on girls and explore adolescent boys' experiences of their friendships in South Africa.

In conclusion, this study highlighted the subjective experiences of a group of 10 White Afrikaans-speaking adolescent girls residing in an all girls' boarding house in the Western Cape, South Africa. These girls' narratives provided us with deeper insight into the dynamics of adolescent girls' friendships in South Africa. Throughout this thesis, I illustrated how these adolescent girls perceived their friendships to be complex, dynamic, and multi-faceted. These friendships seemingly provided the girls with valuable support contributing to their relational resilience, but also introduced a wide range of challenges to the girls. Challenges revolved around their rigid interpretations of femininity ideals and holding essentialist views of an ideal female friendship. Emphasis was given to empathy and reciprocity as key to the girls' experiences of feeling supported by their friends. Overall, this study contributed to the current lack of literature on adolescent girls' friendship experiences in South Africa. Knowledge gained from this study could be helpful in planning interventions to promote the well-being of adolescent girls via the formation of meaningful and supportive same-sex friendships in South Africa.

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## **APPENDIX A: Transcription symbols**

|          |                                      |
|----------|--------------------------------------|
| ...      | Indicates short pauses               |
| =        | Participant or interviewer cuts in   |
| ???      | Participants' talk inaudible         |
| CAPITALS | Indicates the participant's emphasis |
| [...]    | Section cut from the transcript      |

## APPENDIX B: Biographical questionnaire

*Dankie vir jou bereidwilligheid om deel te neem aan hierdie studie. Voltooi asseblief die volgende vorm met jou biografiese besonderhede.*

1. Graad: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Ouderdom: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Huistaal: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Plek van woning: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Buitemuurse aktiwiteite: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Belangstellings: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Ouer(s) se hoogste vlak van opvoeding:
  - a. Ma: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. Pa: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Voog: \_\_\_\_\_

*Baie dankie vir jou samewerking!*

### APPENDIX C: Interview schedule

These are some of questions that will be used as probes and to promote discussion during the interviews.

How do adolescent girls describe their same-sex friendships?

- Who is/are your friend(s)? Do you have a best friend? Tell me more about these friendships.
- How long have you been friends for? Tell me more.
- What is it that you like about these friends? / What's different about them compared to other girls?

What are the girls' experiences of their same-sex friendships?

- How do you feel when you are with your friends?
- What do you value most about your friendships?
- When and where do you spend time with your friends?
- What do you do when you spend time together?
- What do you talk about when you spend time together?
- What do you enjoy/dislike about spending time with your friends?
- Do you experience any challenges in your friendships? Tell me more about these/Give examples
- How do you deal with these challenges?

How do they negotiate their own and others positions within a friendship clique?

- What do you think is important to be accepted as a friend in your group? (inclusion/exclusion criteria)
- Is there a leader in your group?
- What are your feelings towards this leader?
- How do the other girls feel about the leader?
- What are the roles of the other girls in your friendship circle? What is your role?
- Do you like all the girls in your group? Tell me more
- Who is your best friend within the group? What is it that you like about her?

*Thank the girl for her participation. What was it like talking about your friendships? Is there anything else you would like to share? Is there anything else that you think I should have asked you?*

**APPENDIX D: Permission to conduct research:  
Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee**



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jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

**Approval Notice  
Stipulated documents/requirements**

03-Jan-2017  
Truter, Zelda ZM

**Ethics Reference #: SU-HSD-002393**  
**Title: Adolescent Girls' Friendships**

Dear Miss Zelda Truter,

Your Stipulated documents/requirements received on 15-Dec-2016, was reviewed and **accepted**.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

**Proposal Approval Period: 25-May-2016 - 24-May-2017**

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter.

**If the research deviates significantly from the undertaking that was made in the original application for research ethics clearance to the REC and/or alters the risk/benefit profile of the study, the researcher must undertake to notify the REC of these changes.**

Please remember to use your **proposal number (SU-HSD-002393)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 218089183.

Sincerely,



## Investigator Responsibilities

### Protection of Human Research Participants

Some of the general responsibilities investigators have when conducting research involving human participants are listed below:

- 1. Conducting the Research.** You are responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC approved research protocol. You are also responsible for the actions of all your co-investigators and research staff involved with this research. You must also ensure that the research is conducted within the standards of your field of research.
- 2. Participant Enrolment.** You may not recruit or enrol participants prior to the REC approval date or after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials for any form of media must be approved by the REC prior to their use.
- 3. Informed Consent.** You are responsible for obtaining and documenting effective informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no human participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their informed consent. Please give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents. Keep the originals in your secured research files for at least five (5) years.
- 4. Continuing Review.** The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is your responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. If REC approval of your research lapses, you must stop new participant enrolment, and contact the REC office immediately.
- 5. Amendments and Changes.** If you wish to amend or change any aspect of your research (such as research design, interventions or procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material), you must submit the amendment to the REC for review using the current Amendment Form. You **may not initiate** any amendments or changes to your research without first obtaining written REC review and approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.
- 6. Adverse or Unanticipated Events.** Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to Malese Fouche within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. You must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the REC's requirements for protecting human research participants. The only exception to this policy is that the death of a research participant must be reported in accordance with the Stellenbosch University Research Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures. All reportable events should be submitted to the REC using the Serious Adverse Event Report Form.
- 7. Research Record Keeping.** You must keep the following research related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence from the REC.
- 8. Provision of Counselling or emergency support.** When a dedicated counsellor or psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.
- 9. Final reports.** When you have completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions) or stopped work on your research, you must submit a Final Report to the REC.
- 10. On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits.** If you are notified that your research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, you must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

Clarissa Graham  
REC Coordinator  
Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

*National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.*

*The Research Ethics Committee: Humanities complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2nd Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.*

## APPENDIX E: Permission to conduct research: Western Cape Education Department



Western Cape  
Government  
Education

Directorate: Research

[Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za)  
tel: +27 021 467 9272  
Fax: 0865902282  
Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000  
[wced.wcape.gov.za](http://wced.wcape.gov.za)

**REFERENCE:** 20160602 – 1079  
**ENQUIRIES:** Dr A T Wyngaard

Ms Zelda Truter  
1 Sybrand Mankadan  
147 Dorpsstreet  
Stellenbosch  
7600

Dear Ms Zelda Truter

### RESEARCH PROPOSAL: ADOLESCENTS GIRLS' EXPERIENCES OF THEIR SAME-SEX FRIENDSHIPS

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

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **19 July 2016 till 30 September 2016**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

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

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards,  
Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard  
**Directorate: Research**  
**DATE: 02 June 2016**

**APPENDIX F: Permission to conduct research: School principal**

[REDACTED]

18 Julie 2016

Zelda Truter  
Departement Sielkunde  
Universiteit van Stellenbosch  
7600

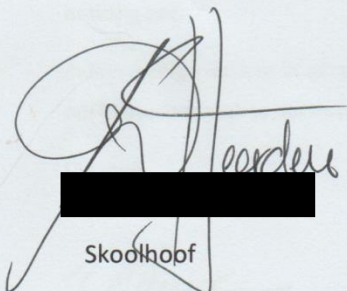
Beste mej. Zelda Truter

As skoolhoof, gee ek hiermee toestemming aan u om meisies van [REDACTED] te nader om deel te neem aan 'n meesterstudie wat die aard van tienermeisies se vriendskappe in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks sal verken.

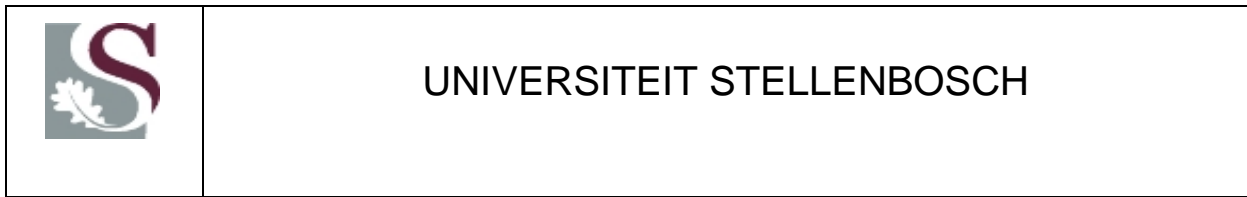
Ek verstaan dat die onderhoude nie met die meisies se normale skoolprogram sal inmeng nie en dat dit sal plaasvind gedurende die derde skoolkwartaal (18 Julie 2016 – 30 September 2016).

Ek is voorsien van 'n kopie van die toestemming- en inwilligingsvorm wat in die navorsingsproses gebruik sal word, asook 'n afskrif van die goedkeuringsbrief van die Wes-Kaapse Onderwysdepartement.

Die uwe

  
[REDACTED]  
Skoolhoof

## APPENDIX G: Informed assent form for participants



### INLIGTINGSTUK EN TOESTEMMINGSVORM VIR DEELNEMERS



**NAAM VAN DIE NAVORSINGSPROJEK:**

Tienermeisies se Ervarings van hul Vriendskappe met Ander Meisies

**NAVORSER(S) SE NAAM:**

Zelda Truter

**ADRES:**



**KONTAKNOMMER:**

072 014 9087

**Wat is NAVORSING?**

Navorsing is iets wat ons doen om MEER TE LEER oor hoe dinge (en mense) werk. Ons gebruik navorsingsprojekte of -ondersoeke om meer uit te vind oor kinders en tieners en die dinge wat hulle lewe beïnvloed, soos hulle skool, hulle gesin, hulle vriende en hulle gesondheid. Ons doen dit omdat ons die wêreld 'n beter plek probeer maak.

**Waaroor gaan hierdie navorsingsprojek?**

Die doel van hierdie studie is om tienermeisies se gedagtes en gevoelens rondom hulle vriendskappe met ander meisies te verken. Ek stel belang in die voordele en

moontlike uitdagings wat hierdie vriendskappe bied. Ek sal ook graag wil leer van die wisselwerking tussen vriendinne in hul vriendekring.

### **Hoekom vra julle my om aan hierdie navorsingsprojek deel te neem?**

Jy is gekies as 'n moontlike deelnemer in hierdie studie, aangesien jy meer inligting oor meisies se vriendskappe in Suid-Afrika aan my kan verskaf.

### **Wie doen die navorsing?**

Ek, Zeld Truter, is 'n Sielkunde student aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch en sal graag hierdie inligting wil gebruik om my meesters-tesis te skryf.

### **Wat sal ek moet doen as ek aan die studie deelneem?**

Voordat jy besluit om aan hierdie studie deel te neem, sal ek die navorsingsproses en jou regte aan jou verduidelik. Indien jy instem om aan die studie deel te neem en hierdie vorm teken, sal ons saam op 'n tyd besluit waartydens ek een individuele onderhoud met jou sal voer. Tydens hierdie onderhoud sal ons gesels oor jou vriendskappe met ander meisies. Hierdie gesprek sal na skoolure in 'n private, veilige klaskamer plaasvind. Die gesprek sal ongeveer een uur duur en sal op oudio-band opgeneem word.

### **Is daar enigiets wat kan verkeerd gaan?**

Ek is bewus daarvan dat beide positiewe en negatiewe gevoelens gedurende die onderhoud na vore mag kom. Indien jy met iemand wil gesels oor hierdie gedagtes of gevoelens, sal ek jou na die skoolsielkundige verwys [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Indien jy verkies om met iemand anders as die skoolsielkundige te gesels, sal ek jou na Welgevallen Gemeenskapsielkundekliniek verwys [021 808 2696; WCPC@sun.ac.za; Welgevallen House, Suidwalstraat, Stellenbosch].

Neem assebelief kennis dat jy vry sal wees om op enige tydstip van die studie te onttrek sonder enige nadelige gevolge.

### **Watter goeie dinge kan met my gebeur as ek aan die projek deelneem?**

Jy sal geen betaling ontvang vir jou deelname aan hierdie studie nie. Deur te gesels oor jou vriendskappe, mag jy meer bewus raak van jou gevoelens en gedagtes rakende hierdie vriendskappe. Ek hoop dat so 'n gesprek 'n betekenisvolle en verrykende ervaring vir jou sal wees.

Deur deel te neem aan die studie sal jy ons ook help om die rol wat vriendskappe in tienermeisies se lewens speel, beter te verstaan. Jou ervarings is waardevolle inligting en ek hoop dat professionele persone hierdie navorsing sal kan gebruik om tienermeisies in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te help.

### Sal ander mense weet ek neem aan die projek deel?

As jy vir my toestemming gee om ons gesprek as deel van my studie te gebruik, sal ek alles waaroor ons gepraat het in die onderhoud vertroulik op 'n wagwoord-beskernde rekenaar stoor waartoe slegs ek en my studieleier, as navorsers, toegang sal hê. Ek sal nie jou naam, jou vriendin(ne) se name, of die naam van jou skool gebruik as ek my tesis skryf nie. Die oudio-bande met die onderhoude sal na twee jaar vernietig word.



### Met wie kan ek oor die projek gesels?

- Zelda Truter [17033950@sun.ac.za; 072 014 9087]
- Dr Sherine van Wyk [sbvwyk@sun.ac.za; 021 808 3452]

### Wat gebeur as ek nie wil deelneem nie?

Jy is vry om te kies of jy aan die studie wil deelneem of nie, selfs al het jou ouer(s) of wettige voog alreeds toestemming gegee. Indien jy besluit om aan die studie deel te neem, mag jy enige tyd onttrek daarvan sonder enige nadelige gevolge. Jy mag ook weier om enige vrae te beantwoord gedurende die onderhoud en steeds deel vorm van die studie.

Verstaan jy waaroor hierdie navorsing gaan, en sal jy aan die projek deelneem?

 JA NEE

Het die navorser ál jou vrae beantwoord?

 JA NEE

Verstaan jy dat jy kan OPHOU deelneem net wanneer jy wil?

 JA NEE

---

Kind se handtekening

---

Datum



## APPENDIX H: Informed consent form for parents



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### UNIVERSITEIT STELLENBOSCH INWILLIGING OM DEEL TE NEEM AAN NAVORSING

---

Tienermeisies se Ervarings van hul Vriendskappe met Ander Meisies

U word gevra, as ouer van 'n minderjarige, om toestemming te gee dat u dogter kan deelneem aan 'n navorsingstudie wat deur Zelda Truter, van die Departement Sielkunde aan die Universiteit Stellenbosch, uitgevoer word. Die ingesamelde data sal deel vorm van 'n meesters-tesis. U dogter is gekies as 'n moontlike deelnemer in hierdie studie, aangesien sy inligting rakende die aard van tienermeisies se vriendskappe in Suid-Afrika aan my kan verskaf.

#### 1. DOEL VAN DIE STUDIE

Die doel van hierdie studie is om data rakende tienermeisies se persepsies en ervarings van hul vriendskappe met ander meisies in te samel. Ek wil graag die begrip rondom die positiewe en negatiewe fasette geassosieer met hierdie vriendskappe uitbrei, asook hoe meisies met sulke kwessies te werk gaan as vriendinne. Laastens hoop ek om die maniere van interaksie binne meisies se vriendekringe te verken.

#### 2. PROSEDURES

Indien u toestemming vir u dogter gee om aan die studie deel te neem, sal ek van haar vra om die volgende te doen:

1. Voordat sy die toestemmingsvorm teken, sal ek weer die volledige navorsingsproses aan haar verduidelik en haar inlig oor haar regte ingeval sy besluit om wel aan hierdie studie deel te neem.
2. Nadat sy toestemming gegee het, sal ons saam op 'n datum en tyd besluit waartydens ek een individuele onderhoud met haar sal voer. Gedurende die onderhoud sal ek 'n veilige omgewing skep waarbinne ons gemaklik in gesprek sal tree oor haar vriendskappe. Die onderhoud sal ongeveer een uur duur en sal na skoolure in 'n private, veilige klaskamer plaasvind. Die onderhoud sal op oudio-band opgeneem word.

#### 3. MOONTLIKE RISIKO'S EN ONGEMAKLIKHEID

Ek is bewus daarvan dat beide positiewe en negatiewe gevoelens gedurende die onderhoud na vore mag kom. Neem asseblief kennis dat u dogter vry sal wees om op enige tydstip van die studie te onttrek sonder enige nadelige gevolge.

Indien u dogter 'n behoefte het om met iemand te gesels oor enige gedagtes of gevoelens wat gedurende die onderhoud na vore gekom het, sal ek haar na die skoolsielkundige verwys [REDACTED]. Indien sy verkies om met iemand anders as die skoolsielkundige te gesels, sal ek haar na Welgevallen

Gemeenskapsielkundekliniek verwys [021 808 2696; WCPC@sun.ac.za; Welgevallen House, Suidwalstraat, Stellenbosch].

#### **4. MOONTLIKE VOORDELE VIR PROEFPERSONE EN/OF VIR DIE SAMELEWING**

Deur in gesprek te tree oor haar vriendskappe mag u dogter meer bewus raak van haar gedagtes, gevoelens en gedrag rakende hierdie vriendskappe. Ek hoop dat so 'n ervaring 'n betekenisvolle en verrykende proses vir haar sal wees.

Buiten die bogenoemde potensiele individuele voordele, hoop ek dat hierdie studie sal bydra tot die groeiende navorsingsveld oor die rol wat vriendskappe in die lewe van tienermeisies speel. Ek hoop dat sulke kennis van nut sal wees vir professionele persone wat beoog om tienermeisies se sielkundige welstand in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te bevorder.

#### **5. VERGOEDING VIR DEELNAME**

U dogter sal geen betaling ontvang vir haar deelname aan hierdie studie nie.

#### **6. VERTROULIKHEID**

Enige inligting wat deur middel van die navorsing verkry word en wat met u dogter in verband gebring kan word, sal vertroulik bly en slegs met u toestemming bekend gemaak word of soos deur die wet vereis. Vertroulikheid sal gehandhaaf word deur die onderhoud data te alle tye op 'n wagwoord-beskermdre rekenaar te bewaar waartoe slegs ek en my studieleier, as navorsers, toegang sal hê. Die oudio-bande met die onderhoude sal na twee jaar vernietig word. Enige persoonlike inligting, soos die name van plekke en persone, sal nie in die tesis genoem word nie. Skuilname sal gebruik word wanneer die data opgeskryf word om die identiteit van die deelnemers te beskerm.

#### **7. DEELNAME EN ONTTREKKING**

As ouer van 'n minderjarige mag u self besluit of u toestemming aan u dogter wil gee om deel te neem aan hierdie studie. Indien u inwillig dat u dogter aan hierdie studie mag deelneem, kan u dogter steeds te eniger tyd haarself daarvan onttrek sonder enige nadelige gevolge. Sy mag ook weier om op bepaalde vrae te antwoord, maar steeds aan die studie deelneem.

#### **8. IDENTIFIKASIE VAN ONDERSOEKERS**

Indien u enige vrae of besorgdheid omtrent die navorsing het, staan dit u vry om in verbinding te tree met Zeldá Truter [17033950@sun.ac.za; 072 014 9087] of my studieleier; Dr Sherine Van Wyk [sbvwyk@sun.a.za; 021 808 3452].

#### **9. REGTE VAN PROEFPERSONE**

U kan te eniger tyd u inwilliging terugtrek en u dogter se deelname beëindig, sonder enige nadelige gevolge. Deur deel te neem aan die navorsing doen u dogter geensins afstand van enige wetlike regte, eise of regsmiddel nie. Indien u vrae het oor u dogter se regte as proefpersoon by navorsing, skakel met Me Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] van die Afdeling Navorsingsontwikkeling.

**VERKLARING DEUR PROEFPERSOON OF SY/HAAR REGSVERTENWOORDIGER**

Die bostaande inligting is aan my, as ouer of wettige voog van 'n minderjarige kind, gegee deur Zelda Truter in Afrikaans en ek is dié taal magtig. Ek is die geleentheid gebied om vrae te stel en my vrae is tot my bevrediging beantwoord.

Ek gee hiermee toestemming aan my dogter om aan die studie deel te neem. 'n Afskrif van hierdie vorm is aan my gegee.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Naam van deelnemer (minderjarige)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Naam van ouer of voog**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Handtekening van ouer of voog**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Datum**

**VERKLARING DEUR ONDERSOEKER**

Ek verklaar dat ek die inligting in hierdie dokument vervat en verduidelik het aan \_\_\_\_\_ . Hy/sy is aangemoedig en oorgenoeg tyd gegee om vrae aan my te stel.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Handtekening van ondersoeker**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Datum**