

# ADOLESCENT DATING VIOLENCE AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

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## Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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## **Abstract**

This assignment attempts to explore how certain factors that play a role in the perpetration of dating violence among South African male adolescents are related to identity development. While there has been much investigation of the factors relating to dating violence, much less has been written about how these factors are related to the developmental tasks of adolescence.

This assignment starts with a brief exploration of local and international literature on adolescent and adult dating violence. Certain factors that are considered to be particularly relevant to adolescent dating violence are then highlighted. These are exposure to trauma, alcohol and drug use, peer group influences, and aggressive and misogynist expressions of masculinity. The main focus of the thesis is then to investigate the extent to which these factors can be tied to one of the main developmental tasks of adolescence, namely identity formation.

It is argued that, while adolescence is a phase in which identity is being developed, identity formation can be compromised by early exposure to aggression. This, together with the desire to imitate significant others, may lead to a re-enactment of aggression. Alternatively, it can lead to a heightened identity confusion, which may create a greater reliance on external sources, most significantly the peer group. It is possible that, for acceptance, the peer group may require an expression of masculinity that is misogynist and aggressive. Given that dating relationships are an arena in which identities are negotiated with a peer group, it is possible that the aggression that is encouraged may find expression within these dating associations. The abuse of alcohol and drugs, modelled by others in early life and encouraged by the peer group, serves to augment the likelihood of dating violence. This process is also discussed in the light of the post-Apartheid South African context.

Understanding the abovementioned factors in terms of identity development has implications for empirical enquiry and prevention programmes. It is argued that research should take into account the developmental tasks of adolescence, whilst attempting to understand the unique challenges that face adolescents in South Africa. Intervention programmes should be focused on assisting adolescent males with the developmental task of identity negotiation.

## Opsomming

In hierdie werkstuk word ondersoek hoe sekere faktore wat 'n rol speel in die pleeg van afspraakgeweld deur Suid-Afrikaanse manlike adolessente met die ontwikkeling van identiteit verband hou. Alhoewel daar reeds heelwat navorsing gedoen is rakende die faktore wat met afspraakgeweld verband hou, is heelwat minder tot dusver geskryf oor hoe hierdie faktore met die ontwikkelingstake van adolessensie verband hou.

Hierdie werkstuk begin met 'n kort verkenning van plaaslike en internasionale literatuur oor afspraakgeweld deur adolessente en volwassenes. Sekere faktore wat as besonder relevant ten opsigte van adolessente afspraakgeweld beskou word, word daarna uitgelig. Dit sluit in blootstelling aan trauma, die gebruik van alkohol en dwelms, die invloed van die portuurgroep, en aggressiewe en misogynistiese uitdrukkings van manlikheid. Die hoofokus van die tesis is 'n ondersoek na die mate waartoe hierdie faktore met een van belangrikste ontwikkelingstake van adolessensie, naamlik identiteitsvorming, verbind kan word.

Daar word gereken dat, terwyl adolessensie 'n fase is waartydens identiteit ontwikkel, die vorming van identiteit deur vroeë blootstelling aan aggressie gekompromitteer kan word. Dit, tesame met die begeerte om lewensmaats na te boots, kan moontlik tot 'n hervasstelling van aggressie lei. Alternatiewelik kan dit tot groter identiteitsverwarring lei, wat 'n groter afhanklikheid van eksterne bronne, veral die portuurgroep, skep. Dit is moontlik dat, die portuurgroep vir aanvaarding 'n misogynistiese en aggressiewe uitdrukking van manlikheid kan vereis. Gegewe dat afspraakverhoudings 'n terrein is waarop identiteite met 'n portuurgroep onderhandel word, is dit moontlik dat die aggressie wat aangemoedig word, binne hierdie afspraakverbintenisse uitdrukking kan kry. Die misbruik van alkohol en dwelms, deur die voorbeeld van ander in die vroeë lewe gevorm en deur die portuurgroep aangemoedig, dien as versterking van die waarskynlikheid van afspraakgeweld. Hierdie proses word ook bespreek in die lig van die post-apartheidsagtergrond in Suid-Afrika.

Begrip van die bogemelde faktore wat betref die ontwikkeling van 'n identiteit het implikasies vir empiriese ondersoek en voorkomingsprogramme. Daar word aangevoer dat navorsing die ontwikkelingstake van adolessensie in ag moet neem, terwyl daar gepoog word om die

besondere uitdagings waarvoor adolessente in Suid-Afrika te staan kom, te verstaan. Intervensieprogramme behoort op bystand aan adolessente mans tydens die ontwikkelingstaak van identiteitsonderhandeling te fokus.

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## 1. Introduction

Numerous studies on violence have been conducted in South Africa (Gilbert, 1995). After 1994, a more progressive constitution that highlighted gender issues also led to a surge in research about the prevention of violence against women and the treatment of survivors of gender-based violence (Walker, 2005). However, there still is a paucity of South African research about male perpetrators of dating violence (Jewkes, Dunkle, Koss, Levin, Nduna, Jama & Sikweyiya, 2006). Given the fact that adolescence has been under-researched in general in South Africa (Swart, 2005), it is not surprising that there are only a few South African studies dealing with the perpetrators of violence in adolescent dating relationships. These studies attempted to explore the factors associated with the perpetration of adolescent dating violence in South Africa (Bugu, Amoko & Ncayiyana, 1996; Swart, Seedat, Stevens & Ricardo, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 1998, 2001b; Jewkes et al., 2006).

Research contributing to an understanding of adolescent dating violence is important because the phenomenon has become a public health problem in South Africa (Swart et al., 2002). Survivors of dating violence report symptoms of depression, severe suicidal ideation and premature termination of education (Hagan & Foster, 2001). They also report a lack of sexual agency whilst in the dating relationship. This may result in sequelae such as HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy (Wood & Jewkes, 2001a).

Given the consequences of violence in adolescent dating relationships, it is imperative that future empirical enquiries and treatment interventions are informed by sound theory. The aim of this paper is to contribute to the development of theory by exploring if and how certain identified factors of adolescent dating violence in South Africa can be understood in terms of processes of identity construction.

The paper starts with a discussion of the South African literature that deals with adolescent dating violence, situating it within the larger international literature concerned with adolescent dating relationships. The larger literature on adult dating violence is also considered. In this discussion, factors that can be associated with processes of identity construction are highlighted.

In the second part of the paper, these factors are discussed in more detail. The emphasis is on **how** such factors can be associated with identity construction.

It is argued that such an understanding of factors that play a role in adolescent dating violence will enable psychologists and allied professionals to design more appropriate and effective prevention programmes.

However, before proceeding to a discussion of the literature, two sections are included to orientate the reader. First, I will discuss the theoretical bases for this paper. Second, I will issue caveats and define terms that are commonly used throughout the body of the paper.

## **2. Theoretical points of departure**

This paper will be critical in nature, examining the literature and providing arguments from assumptions based on social constructionism and psychoanalytic theory.

### **2.1. Social constructionism**

Social constructionism critically examines the ways in which knowledge is understood and practiced, placing primacy on the concept of language and how it is used to shape the ways in which individuals understand their reality (Gergen, 1999). Durkheim (1997, p. 180) states that “language is not referential, but constructive”. Shotter (1993) argues that reality is shaped by inter-subjective exchange, as opposed to fixed processes that reside within an individual.

Social constructionism also recognises that language is employed as a tool that can be used to wield power. For the purposes of this paper, power is discussed primarily with relevance to what Gergen (1999) refers to as *identity politics*, the power to define another's

identity through the use of language about him.<sup>1</sup> This is important, as those in power inevitably inform an individual's emerging view of himself (Gergen, 1999).

The dynamic interaction with others that contribute to, or even determine, the formation of the concept of the self is important for the present study, as it recognises the utility and importance of the notion of context. Social constructionists argue that phenomena do not occur in a vacuum, but always in a context.

For the purposes of this paper, context refers to the surroundings of the individual that fundamentally shape and define him. Social constructionism argues that a dichotomy between the individual and the social realm is false (Lesch, 2000). This means that individuals are inextricably woven with and defined by their respective social and political realms (Hook, 2004).

## **2.2. Psychoanalytic understanding of adolescence**

Psychoanalytic theories are many and varied, and an account of all of them is beyond the scope of this paper. Generally speaking, psychoanalytic theory views human development as a sequential process in which an individual progresses from one stage to another, being affected both by biological and social factors (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981). Erikson's psychosocial model of development pays special attention to the life-stage of adolescence (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981) and assumes that it is a period in which identity is negotiated.

Erikson (1968) labelled the adolescent stage of life *identity versus identity confusion*. According to Erikson, the adolescent is especially concerned during this time with how he presents himself to others. This includes various identities such as those that concern gender and occupational skills. It is in the realm of interpersonal associations – including dating relationships and peer group organisations – that the adolescent learns to express his identity (Erikson, 1968). The adolescent is reliant on the outside opinions of others to

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst I am aware of the need for gender-inclusive language, I will use the masculine pronoun when needed, as this paper deals specifically with adolescent males. This is done for no other reason than in the interests of clarity and conciseness.

confirm his developing self-perceptions through receiving feedback from them. On a more basic level, he is reliant on others to confirm that there is a consistency in his being that reflects that he is the same person over time (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981).

The failure to achieve a sense of identity – which may result from adverse experiences in childhood – may result in identity confusion. Identity confusion could present in *personal disorganization, aimlessness, and a profound sense of futility*, and may even lead to delinquent behaviour (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981).

However, it must be noted that there are certain critiques of literature that are based on life-phase developmental models. Kiguwa (2004) argues that developmental models can be problematic because they prescribe what is normative, and therefore ‘acceptable’, and what is abnormal, and therefore labelled as ‘pathology’. Kiguwa (2004) further argues that gender identity development may vary from context to context rather than continuing along a fixed trajectory. As far as the various South African contexts are concerned, little has been investigated regarding local social constructions of adolescence (Macleod, 2006).

However, Erikson’s theory of development and social constructionism are not entirely incompatible. It is evident that the context of a romantic relationship may have a significant impact on an individual’s construction of himself.

To a considerable extent adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one’s identity by projecting one’s diffuse ego image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified. This is why so much of young love is conversation.

(Erikson, 1963, in Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981, p. 145).

Erikson’s emphasis on conversation is particularly noteworthy. It could be argued that his emphasis on conversation may be consistent with the emphasis placed by social constructionism on language and interaction when considering an individual’s perception of himself and the world.

Also, Erikson's stress on the adolescent's reliance on the perceptions of others to provide him with identity illustrates that, during adolescence, the boundaries between self and others are diffuse. This is consistent with the social constructionist emphasis on a dynamic interaction between an individual and his social realm.

### 3. Definitions of terms

For the sake of lucidity, it is important to provide an explicit account of the most frequently used and significant terms in this text. It is recognised that violence and aggression are socially constructed terms whose meanings have changed over time, depending on whom is defining them and in which context.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, with the acknowledgement that the following definitions are limited by the present context of the author and the sources being cited, they will be considered to be working definitions for this thesis. Citing Gelles and Straus (1979), Stets (1990, p. 501) defines aggression as, "the intent or perceived intent of causing psychological or physical harm to another". It includes both verbal and physical aggression. Burke, Stets and Pirog-Good (1989, p. 72) use the phrases *violence* and *physical abuse* synonymously and define them as "an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury". Sexual abuse or aggression is defined as "[a]ny unwanted or coercive erotic or sexual behaviour" (Burke et al., 1989, p. 72-73). A *batterer* is a perpetrator of any form of the above abuse, whilst a *survivor* or *victim* is a recipient of such abuse. Bergman (1992, p. 21) defines courtship violence as "violence between non-cohabiting adults". In this paper, this definition is expanded to include adolescents.

Macleod (2006, p. 125) cites Burman (1994) by stating that the dominant construction of adolescence is that it is "a time of transition between child and adult, with vestiges of one (childhood) remaining while the other (adulthood) is being developed" (Macleod, 2006, p. 125). For the purposes of this paper, this is how adolescence will be understood.

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<sup>2</sup> See Muehlenhard & Kimes (1999) for a more detailed discussion of the polemics concerning the definition of violence.

Adolescent dating relationships are defined as "... dyadic peer associations that are perceived by the participants or their close peer associations to include strong feelings of liking or caring and at least the potential for sexual activity" (Brown, 1999, p.292).

Identity is understood as "... the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity ... [is] matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (Erikson, in Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981, p. 125). This includes one's self-perception, confirmed by others, and that is experienced as stable over time (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981). Gender identity is defined as "an individual's phenomenological sense of being masculine or feminine in roles, preferences, interests, attitudes, and behaviour" (Feiring, 1999, p. 213).

#### **4. Factors that play a role in dating violence**

##### **4.1. Factors that play a role in adolescent dating violence**

In this section, I will attempt to present the reader with a representative selection of literature regarding adolescent dating violence. Because I am concerned with the South African context, an exhaustive account of all of the international literature is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important that this literature is not excluded altogether. Therefore, two literature reviews of the current international literature are presented along with two very recent international studies that were produced after the publication of the literature reviews. This will be followed by a more detailed account of the South African literature.

###### **4.1.1. International literature**

Ely (2004) reviewed previous literature on adolescent dating violence and concluded that more information was required in order to formulate prevention and treatment programmes. She divided factors that play a role in dating violence into individual factors, familial factors, and societal factors. Among the individual factors were self-esteem problems, aggressiveness and co-existing mental disorders. Among the societal factors were general

community violence, socio-economic status and peer influence. Among the familial factors were abuse in the home of origin, conflict with parents and divorce. It is noteworthy that violence is given attention as a factor on both a societal level and a familial level.

O'Keefe (2005) also notes that the literature emphasises the role of previous experiences of being a survivor of, or a witness to, violence. This includes family and community violence. Related to this, peer influence and positive attitudes toward violence were highlighted as associated factors. Furthermore, she also implicates variables such as self-esteem problems and poor coping styles. She concluded that more research needs to be conducted regarding understandings of gender, as well as "the meaning, context, and consequences of dating violence" (O'Keefe, 2005, p. 6).

The literature reviews by both Ely (2004) and O'Keefe (2005) are helpful in recognising factors that contribute to dating violence, and they acknowledge that knowledge on the subject of adolescent dating violence is not sufficient. Whilst O'Keefe (2005) identifies associated factors, she recognises that there is a lack of understanding of the meaning and contexts in which adolescent dating violence takes place. In order to understand the manner in which certain factors are related to adolescent dating violence, the contexts in which they occur need to be explored. It therefore is important for local investigators to examine how dating violence manifests itself in South Africa and similar contexts.

Johnson, Frattaroli, Cambell, Wright, Pearson-Fields and Cheng (2005) conducted focus groups with adolescents and young adults, predominantly 'African-American', in locales associated with a high incidence of violence in the United States. They reported that, although the connection was not prompted, their participants spontaneously connected violence with gender-based violence. Males reported that they believed that violence was a means of control in a relationship. This was confirmed by a study by Sears, Byers, Whela and Saint-Pierre (2006). On the basis of single-sex focus groups with Canadian high school students in early adolescence, they argue that boys are motivated to be in control of a relationship in order to maintain a favoured status amongst peers.

The work done by Johnson et al. (2005) is helpful in understanding that the need for control may be a possible factor associated with violence in adolescent dating relationships. Sears et al. (2006) show that the peer group is influential in maintaining the belief that control of a relationship is important. However, the studies may be limited in that they may not be directly applicable to the South African context. Sears et al.'s (2006) study was conducted amongst predominantly white students, while Johnson et al.'s (2005) study was conducted in the United States. It is therefore important to examine research that has been conducted locally.

#### **4.1.2. Studies relevant to Africa and South Africa**

There are a number of studies that give mention to dating violence as a factor that is related to HIV/AIDS infection (Varga, 1999, 1997; Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow, 2004), rape (Jewkes, Levin, Mbananga & Bradshaw, 2002) or a means by which women are threatened in order to engage in sexual acts with their partners (Luke, 2003; Varga & Makubalo, 1996). Also, there has been research conducted amongst adolescent females regarding the dynamics of abusive relationships (Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1996; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Wood & Jewkes, 2001a; Jewkes, Vundule, Maforah & Jordaan, 2001) and agency within sexual relationships (Lesch, 2000). However, these studies are concerned primarily with the experiences of the female partners. Therefore, they do not investigate the male partners' experiences or the factors associated with their perpetration of dating violence.

Risk factors for the participation of males in dating violence were explored by Swart et al. (2002). They conducted a study among male and female students attending seven township schools south of Johannesburg. The sample consisted of students in Grade 9 to Grade 12. The average age of the male sample was 17 years of age, ranging from 14 to 23 years old. This study found that witnessing violence in a friendship settings and alcohol and drug use were factors associated with dating violence. The authors also reported a connection between 'familial variables' – including exposure to violence at home – and dating violence for the male participants.



This finding is not limited to township settings. In a study conducted amongst adolescent and young adult males in rural South African contexts, Jewkes et al. (2006) found that both the rape of a partner and of a non-partner were associated with 'adverse' early life experiences. These included physical and sexual abuse, and physical and emotional neglect.

The exposure to violence in the family and in the community was noted by Wood and Jewkes (1998, 2001b). Drawing their conclusions from a study amongst Umtata youth, they maintain that the exposure to such violence normalises aggressive acts against one's partner. They maintain that the youths' identities are dependent on peer group status and sexual successes. In order to assert these positions, violence is often used as an acceptable expression of masculinity. The male adolescent's ability to control his partner is also an indication of his masculinity. Any notion of this control being lost would be followed by jealousy, exacerbated by alcohol, and result in violence (Wood & Jewkes, 1998, 2001b).

Leach (2003) was also concerned about issues of masculinity when she conducted a study in three African countries (Ghana, Malawi and Zimbabwe) in order to investigate the role of the peer group in socialising adolescents into a specific gender identity, and how this manifested in violent behaviour. This study included qualitative interviews with male and female students, as well as with teachers, parents and education officials. She argues that the males are socialised by their peer group into demonstrating a form of masculinity that is defined by multiple sexual conquests and an ability to control one's partner.

Swart (2005) linked misogynist expressions of masculinity to high-risk sexual behaviour and sexual coercion amongst adolescents in her unpublished Master's dissertation. She collected quantitative and qualitative data from learners in an area close to Johannesburg, and argued that sexual coercion is made acceptable by pervasive discourses on masculinity that allow for dominance of male over female, and is made likelier by the consumption of alcohol.

Recognising that the developmental stage of adolescence is concerned with issues of self-esteem, Swart (2005) notes that it is likely that the male participants are less likely to reject the discourses of dominant masculinity as promoted by their peer group in order to fit in. Peer pressure also made abstaining from alcohol consumption less likely.

Local researchers have argued that several factors play a role in adolescent dating violence. These are 'adverse early life experiences' (Jewkes et al., 2006; Swart et al., 2002; Ely, 2004) and substance use (Swart, 2005; Swart et al., 2002). The influential role of the peer group has also been highlighted (Sears et al. 2006; Swart, 2005) as have aggressive expressions of masculinity (Wood & Jewkes, 1998, 2001b; Swart, 2005).

Whilst the above studies are helpful in identifying factors that contribute to the perpetration of dating violence, they do not pay enough attention to the developmental phase of adolescence. Few of the studies view the above factors directly in the light of identity development. Those that do (Leach, 2003; Wood & Jewkes, 1998, 2001b) do not situate them within a paradigm that accounts for the developmental tasks of adolescence, and therefore do not explain why this issue is specifically salient during adolescence. Others give mention to issues that are prominent during adolescence, such as peer group influence (Sears et al., 2006; Swart, 2005) or substance abuse (Swart et al., 2002; Swart, 2005), but do not explain the developmental significance of these issues.

Those sources that recognise that adolescence is a developmental phase (Swart, 2005) do not describe how issues of identity development relate to all of the abovementioned factors. A further shortcoming of the literature is that it not yet extensive enough to account for all the possible factors associated with adolescent dating violence (Ely, 2004; O'Keefe, 2005). Therefore, it may be beneficial to briefly examine factors of dating violence not limited to adolescence in order to compare findings and to assess whether there are other important factors to consider.

## 4.2. Factors that play a role in adult dating violence

Given the lack of knowledge in the area of adolescent dating violence (Ely, 2004; O'Keefe, 2005), it will be beneficial to widen the exploration of factors that are observed as playing a role in adult dating violence. It is argued that adolescent dating violence can result in violence in relationships in later life stages (Arriaga & Foshee, 2004). It is therefore likely that some of the factors associated with partner violence amongst adults may be relevant when exploring adolescent dating violence.

The primary goal of this section is to further elucidate factors that play a role in adolescent dating violence that are implicated in identity development. Three international literature reviews of factors relating to partner violence are included, as well as a paper that draws from local and international sources. Also included is a recent local study. It is recognised that there is much work that deserves mention in the area of dating violence (e.g. Makepeace, 1981, 1989), but an exhaustive overview of all the literature in existence is beyond the scope of this paper.

Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward and Tritt (2004) conducted a review of previous studies in order to provide a concise overview of risk factors associated with partner abuse. They argue that among the risk factors for the perpetration of violence against a romantic partner are alcohol and substance use, traditional views of gender relations, life stress, depression, and anger and hostility. In their review of the literature, Norlander and Eckhardt (2005) also note that anger and hostility are prominent features amongst those who are abusive toward their partners. Dutton (1998) ascribes this anger and hostility to indications of a personality-disordered individual.

In their meta-analysis of research conducted in the United States, Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) note that personality characteristics are among the determining factors for violence in dating relationships. They organise the risk factors for dating violence under three major headings, namely intra-psychic factors, familial factors and interpersonal factors. Personality characteristics are placed under the first of these headings, along with attitudes toward

gender and beliefs about the acceptability of violence. Among familial factors is witnessing violence in one's earlier years in the family. Among the interpersonal factors are past dating violence, commitment level and communication skills. Whilst this study does take into account race and socio-economic class, the results from a United States population may not be relevant for a South African context.

Jewkes (2002) included local studies when she examined previous work on intimate partner violence. She argues that violence is often a result of a "crisis of male identity" (Jewkes, 2002, p. 1423). Aggressive masculine identity was also given attention by Abrahams et al. (2006) when they examined factors associated with partner abuse amongst males in Cape Town, South Africa. Abrahams et al.'s (2006) study highlights other recurring, common factors noted by the literature on the perpetration of adolescent and adult dating violence, namely exposure to violence and substance abuse.

It is also possible to observe differences between the works on adult and adolescent dating violence. Whilst both the adolescent and adult literature discuss 'aggressiveness' (Ely, 2004, Stith et al., 2004), the adult literature places more emphasis on how this relates to personality characteristics (Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989; Dutton, 1998).

This is not inconsistent with the association of the perpetration of dating violence with the traumatic experience of violence as a child, as noted by the literature on adolescent dating violence (Swart et al., 2002; Jewkes et al., 2006). As will be argued in the next section, it is proposed by some that trauma is related to identity confusion that is associated with the diagnosis of a personality disorder (e.g. Dutton, 1998). This has been neglected in the literature that deals primarily with adolescents, because current, dominant constructions of psychopathology exclude the diagnosis of a personality disorder before the age of 18 (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Hill (2002) argues that the traits of personality disorders are demonstrated from childhood and adolescence. Therefore this literature retains credence even when investigating dating violence amongst adolescents, and will be helpful in understanding the relationship between trauma, identity development and dating violence.

### **4.3. Conclusion**

In this section I reviewed the literature in an attempt to elucidate factors that play a role in adolescent dating violence. It is argued that early exposure to aggression, substance abuse, peer group influences and aggressive expressions of masculinity are implicated in dating violence. Contributions from the adult dating violence literature highlight the role of characterological changes that result from trauma.

These factors are highlighted specifically because it will be argued that they are related to adolescent identity development. This was done because the abovementioned studies do not focus primarily on viewing adolescent dating violence from a theoretical paradigm that examines adolescence as a developmental phase with its associated tasks. Given the theoretical assumption that adolescence is a time in which identities are negotiated (Erikson, 1968), the remainder of this paper will be dedicated to exploring **how** the abovementioned factors are related to identity development, thus illustrating what makes dating violence during **adolescence** unique.

## **5. The relationship between factors for dating violence and identity development**

### **5.1. Exposure to violence and its consequences on identity development**

Whilst the above literature discusses exposure to violence as a factor, the process whereby such exposure is related to identity development has not been explicated. What follows is a discussion of this relationship. First, the process whereby exposure may be implicated in personality development is discussed. Following this, attention is paid to the notion of modelling. Finally, and briefly, the subject of identification with the aggressor is explored.

#### **5.1.1. Trauma and personality development**

Dutton (1995b, in Dutton, 1998) links aggressive behavioural patterns with salient symptoms associated with trauma. It was found that men diagnosed with borderline

personality disorder had symptoms that were similar to a non-borderline population that had been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder. Dutton (1998) reports that a common feature in the development of abusive behaviour is intermittent abuse that resulted in poor identity development. He provided abusive men with self-report scales based on three aspects that are associated with borderline traits. These are *identity disturbance*, the use of *primitive defences*, and the experience of transient psychological states in which there is a feeling of unreality. Many men who matched this profile expected the relationship with their romantic partners to give direction as to their identities. This is consistent with Erikson's view that early failure to resolve life crises affects subsequent stages, including the task of coherent identity formation.

Holtzworth-Monroe and Meehan (2004) examined previous work on batterer subtypes. In an attempt to unify the diverse terminology, they argue that *psychopathology* or *personality disorder attributes* are among the terms that can be applied to partner violence.

In a chapter attempting to reformulate accepted beliefs regarding trauma and personality disorder traits, Herman (1999) maintains that prolonged and repeated trauma may impact on the personality development of an individual in a manner that is not often observed in single impact traumas. She argues that such prolonged and repeated trauma may result in the development of borderline personality disorders that she subsumes under the label *complex posttraumatic stress disorder*.

With incoherent self-knowledge, self-expression becomes difficult. In a chapter attempting to introduce the reader to the effects of trauma, McFarlane and Van der Kolk (1996) argue that those who have remained in an abusive situation for an extended time may not be able to access socially appropriate relationships. This may also mean that one's needs and wants may not be expressed in an understandable and non-violent manner.

Malik, Sorenson and Aneshensel (1997) investigated the violent expression of adolescents who had been in situations in which they witnessed violence. They conducted a study

among American adolescents from a wide range of backgrounds and ethnic groups.<sup>3</sup> They found that exposure to violence was the most reliable predictor of later violence. They also argue that contact with aggression in one situation may appear to be related to aggression – both in terms of its reception and execution – in other situations. According to Malik et al. (1997), the execution of violence by males is made more likely if it has been modelled for them.

### **5.1.2. Modelling and identification with the aggressor**

Modelling aggression and the influences of the environment on an individual's behaviour have been given a substantial amount of attention from the proponents of a theory that does not have a psychoanalytic persuasion, namely, social learning theory. Bandura (1979) identified three forms of modelling that may give rise to aggression. First, children learn aggressive behaviour from the family environment. Second, the family forms part of a social network. It is through repeated contact with such a network and its associated norms that an individual learns the rules for social engagement and the limits of appropriate conflict management. Finally, the mass media play a role in the socialisation of an individual.

Riggs and O'Leary (1989) offer a theory of courtship aggression based on social learning theory. Among the contextual variables that they attribute to the development of violent behaviour are those factors that are relevant to the person's history, which include, but are not limited to, the modelling of aggression amongst intimates, violence toward the individual as a child, and acceptance of aggression as an appropriate conflict management style.

Foshee, Bauman and Linder (1999) lent credibility to Riggs and O'Leary's model in their study conducted amongst individuals in early adolescence<sup>4</sup> in public schools in the United States. They reported that those who experienced violence in their family of origin tended to be more aggressive in their approach to conflict, and were more favourable in their attitude toward courtship aggression.

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<sup>3</sup> Their sample consisted of Latino, African-American, Asian-American and white participants. They also represented varied home situations, from parents who did not finish high school to parents who had postgraduate degrees.

<sup>4</sup> These were individuals in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The mean age of male participants was 14 years.

The emulation of such aggressive acts may account for the observation that some batterers display traits of antisocial personality disorder (Bland & Orn, 1986). This disorder can be characterised by abusive or aggressive behaviour and has links to conduct disorder in childhood, which also has an etiology of experiences of abuse or neglect as a child (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The concept of *identification with the aggressor* is relevant here. Coined by Anna Freud, it describes the process whereby the survivor of abuse re-enacts the behaviour of the perpetrator (Dutton, 1998). She writes that, “[b]y impersonating the aggressor, assuming his attributes or imitating his aggression, the child transforms himself from the person threatened to the person who makes the threat” (Freud, 1936/1961, p. 121). This is useful when considering the direct role context plays in the developing identity of an individual. Views of the self are shaped by the environment that one finds oneself in (Erikson, 1968). This has significant implications if such a context is characterised by aggression and violence.

Whilst modelling and identification with the aggressor are two concepts from divergent theories, it can be argued that they are consistent with an Eriksonian formulation of human development. Erikson (1968, p. 128) argued that, in an attempt to forge their own identity, adolescents attempt to emulate “ideal prototypes of the day”. In other words, they attempt to imitate the behaviour of individuals who appear to be examples of what it is to be human. One can argue that phenomena such as identification with the aggressor and modelling are various processes by which this imitation takes place.

It is recognized that the relationship between the concept of modelling and psychoanalytic theories is more complex and requires more attention. However, a more full discussion on this relationship is beyond the scope of this paper.

It is therefore possible to see how exposure to violence interacts with identity development by (1) affecting personality development in a manner that leaves an individual confused



about his identity and (2) by providing models of aggressive behaviour with which the adolescent will associate.

However, in the search for identity, an adolescent's desire to reproduce the actions of the ideal prototypes of the day may not be limited to the imitation of aggressive acts. Beman (1995) indicates that adolescents will copy the substance-abuse habits of those around them, including family members. Adolescent alcohol and drug abuse are factors that play a role in dating violence (Swart, 2005). A discussion of adolescent substance use will further explicate this relationship.

## **5.2. Drug and alcohol abuse, and their interaction with identity formation**

Alcohol and drug abuse have been noted as factors associated with dating violence by a number of researchers, both locally and internationally (e.g. Jewkes, 2002; Bland & Orn, 1986; Hamburger & Hastings, 1986; Malik et al., 1997; O'Keefe, 1997; Bennet Cattaneo & Goodman, 2003; Swart et al., 2002; Swart, 2005; Stith et al., 2004). Within the South African literature, adolescent drinking is often associated with the influences of the peer group (Swart, 2005). Given that substance abuse is a significant problem amongst South African adolescents (Parry, 1998), the manner in which it affects their development and results in behavioural problems requires attention.

Nation and Heflinger (2006) conducted a study investigating factors related to alcohol and drug use amongst adolescents in the United States. They argue that participation in delinquent behaviours and peer group influences are the strongest predictors of drug and alcohol abuse. It is noteworthy that both alcohol and drug abuse, and adolescent dating violence, are heavily influenced by peer associations. As pointed out earlier, Erikson (1968) also places significant emphasis on the peer group. Swart et al. (2002) maintain that peer group pressure may therefore not only be directly associated with male violence, but also indirectly through pressure to abuse alcohol. This, in turn, lowers inhibitions (Nevid, Rathus & Greene, 2000). It is possible that lowered inhibitions result in aggressive behaviour (Bellis, Hughes & Lowey, 2002).

Swart (2005) maintains that, whilst there is a connection between alcohol abuse and sexual coercion, she was unable to establish a causal relationship. It is argued here that whilst causation cannot be established, both are linked to identity confusion.

Among the reasons for abusing alcohol is to escape feelings of anxiety (Nevid et al., 2000) For adolescents, this might be an escape from the daunting experience of identity negotiation. Avoiding the developmental tasks of adolescence may prevent adequate succession through this phase, leading to identity confusion. This, in turn, may create a greater dependence on the peer group for external support and feedback, which, if it promotes aggressive behaviour, may influence the individual to commit further acts of violence.

Peer group influences are a recurrent theme, as they directly or indirectly relate to adolescent dating violence. Their influence on behaviours related to dating violence has been highlighted, and I have emphasised that this is mediated through the process of identity formation. However, **how** peer group pressure affects identity development requires attention. This may also provide insight into the process whereby adolescents are influenced by their peers to engage in aggressive acts.

### **5.3. The developmental phase of adolescence and the role of the peer group**

Issues of identity have thus far been noted as central to issues of exposure to violence and to substance abuse. The process of identity negotiation is explored by the literature that deals specifically with adolescence as a life phase. In terms of adolescent dating literature, one of the most salient influences in identity formation is the role of the peer group (Brown, 1999). It has been noted in this paper that peer group influences serve as a factor in the execution of violence in general (Bandura, 1979), in dating violence (Swart, 2005), and in substance abuse (Nation & Heflinger, 2006).

Because peer group influences appear to be closely related to identity formation and to other factors associated with adolescent dating violence, they should be explored in more

detail. First, I will discuss general identity formation in the light of peer group influences as it relates to dating relationships. I will then discuss the determining role the peer group plays in gender identity development.

### **5.3.1. The relationship between dating, the peer group and identity formation**

In a paper discussing the developmental importance of adolescent romantic relationships, Collins (2003) argues that there is a connection between adolescent romantic relationships and the development of identity. Brown (1999) argues that, in early adolescence, dating behaviours are attempts at negotiating identity through gaining the approval of peers.

The interactive role between dating, the peer group and self-concept was explored by Sampson, Robinson and Watson (2001). They conducted an empirical study amongst a sample of predominantly white high school students in the United States from a wide range of socio-economic positions. They found that those who dated more frequently experienced more popularity and *peer-related self-esteem*. The authors also found that these students experienced less *anxiety, vulnerability, guilt, shame, fear* and *emotional stress*. Rather, they had a secure sense of their own valued position within a peer group. They enjoyed social comforts directly from their partner and indirectly from the peer group, which highly values dating behaviour.

Lashbrook (2000) also investigated the effects that peer status has on self-esteem. He conducted a qualitative study among college students in a rural area of the United States. Not taking into account socio-economic status or ethnicity, he examined the dynamic interplay between the adolescent individual and his environment, as well as explored the emotional component of such influences. He argued that shame was a major motivator for conformity to the demands of the social group. More specifically, the threat of feelings of *inadequacy* and *isolation* spurns individuals to surrender their own agency to the perceived norms of peers (Lashbrook, 2000).

Erikson (1963) proposed that being a member of a peer group gives the adolescent grounding that he lacks internally, and provides a defence against identity confusion (in Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981). The above-mentioned consequences of not conforming to group demands provided by Lashbrook (2000) and Sampson et al. (2001) possibly illustrate some of the manifestations of identity confusion.

The adolescent's sense of being 'acceptable' that is achieved by giving into the demands of the peer group is illustrated by a local study by Buga et al. (1996) that used data collected from male and female adolescents in the Eastern Cape. The male respondents in their study reported "proof of normality, peer pressure, and self-gratification" as reasons for engaging in sexual activity (Buga et al., 1996, p. 526).

Not only is the status of 'being in a couple' or being sexually active prescribed by the peer group, but behaviour within the dating relationship is affected as well. This has direct implications for adolescent dating violence. Arriaga and Foshee (2004) conducted a study amongst a predominantly white population of young adolescents in public schools in the United States. They reported that the perpetration or reception of abuse is related more to dating violence on the part of friends than to exposure to parental violence.

DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998) argue that the male peer group serves as a site where violent behaviours are learnt. Not only are skills imparted in an adolescent peer group, but Brown (1999, p. 323) argues that friends can be "purveyors of cultural norms". This means that the peer group can act as a site where commonly accepted understandings of notions such as gender are learned.

### **5.3.2. The role of peer groups and dating relationships in the development of gender identity**

In a chapter attempting to add to theory regarding adolescent romantic relationships, Feiring (1999) maintains that adolescents look toward their peer groups in order to discover what is

deemed an appropriate masculine or feminine presentation. This “contains expectations ... about the self in romantic encounters” (Feiring, 1999, p. 219).

In a paper that draws from previous studies, Leaper and Anderson (1997) argue that because males and females are placed along separate developmental pathways as children, they learn gender roles that may be causative of violence in dating relationships in adulthood and adolescence. They maintain that boys are often raised in a culture of violent and physical sports that fosters an assumption of the acceptability of aggression. DeKeseredy and Schwartz (1998) maintain that such a culture fosters peer groups that encourage aggression and patriarchal norms. It is in such groups that adolescents have contact with aggressive contemporaries who can cause them to display sexual, physical or psychological aggression against their dating partners.

Therefore, concern about one’s gendered presentation, in the eyes of peers who advocate aggression, may be partially responsible for violent expressions of gender identity. In order to understand this better, the discussion will later examine how young males are encouraged to present a masculine identity that fosters notions of aggression.

### **5.3.3. Conclusions from exploring the influence of the peer group**

In this section I attempted to illustrate the process whereby peer influences are intrinsically linked to identity formation. Based on the need for an outside source to provide him with a solid sense of self, the adolescent may act according to the demands of the peer group, lest he be excluded.

If it is considered part of the healthy developmental process of an adolescent, unsure about his own identity, to look to his peer group for a sense of security (Erikson, 1968), what of the individual who has experienced an abusive home environment or suffered trauma in his early years due to violence in the community? If the literature on this subject is correct, such an individual may have a heightened sense of identity confusion, perhaps creating a greater reliance on his peer group as a source of external grounding and support. Thus, if the

adolescent is reliant on a peer group that advocates the use of aggression, he may engage in such acts to secure their approval and defend against identity confusion. The likelihood of aggressive behaviour may also be augmented by a desire to emulate ideal prototypes of the day (which may include a violent role model at home or in the community). The chances of aggression may be heightened further if the adolescent succumbs to peer group pressure to abuse substances.

If dating is an arena in which adolescents negotiate their identities, it stands to reason that violent behaviour may manifest in such a setting. Given that gender identity is intrinsically linked to this process, and that there are discourses of misogyny within many male peer groups (Swart, 2005; Leach, 2003), the risk for violence in such a setting is made all the more likely.

These discourses of misogyny are linked to accepted expressions of masculinity (Mac an Ghail, 1994). In order to understand how an adolescent attempts to negotiate his identity through conforming to the demands of the peer group, the expressions of masculinity that are demanded by this peer group require attention.

#### **5.4. Masculine identities**

Socially constructed versions of masculinity that promote aggression are factors that are associated with adolescent dating violence (Leach, 2003; Jewkes, 2002; Wood & Jewkes, 1998, 2001b). In my attempt to delineate how certain factors that play a role in adolescent dating violence are linked to identity development, I have shown that the peer group may act as a determining force for one's perception of one's gender identity, as well as a site for the transmission of dominant discourses of masculinity.

Current understandings of the dominant versions of masculinity will be investigated in this section. First, an introduction to some of the seminal works on the social construction of masculinity will be presented. I will then attempt to show how this relates to the issue of masculinities in adolescence, taking into account the power of the peer group and other

social institutions such as the school. Following this, I will widen the scope beyond the peer group and community institutions and examine how events in the history of South Africa have affected masculine identity locally.

Throughout this section I will attempt to show that adolescents' attempts to express socially venerated versions of masculinity are in fact attempts to negotiate identity.

#### **5.4.1. Theoretical introduction to masculinities**

Connell (1995) argues that the present vernacular regarding masculinity assumes that to be considered masculine is to be considered athletic, even aggressive, and that "...an un-masculine person would behave differently: being peaceable rather than violent, conciliatory rather than dominating, hardly able to kick a football, uninterested in sexual conquest, and so forth" (Connell, 1995, p. 68)

A recently emerging view of masculinity is that there is not one innate and universal expression of masculinity, but rather many *masculinities* (Morrell, 1998a). Connell (1995) delineates four major trends in masculinity, namely *hegemonic masculinity*, *subordinate masculinity*, *complicit masculinity*, and *marginalised masculinity*. Hegemonic masculinity is the collectively venerated version of masculinity that serves as a standard with which other forms of masculinity are compared (Connell, 1995, 2000).

Those who are subordinated are those that have been excluded from the realm of acceptable masculine expression. The most salient example of this is the fact that many homosexual individuals are considered un-masculine (Connell, 1995). Those who benefit from the *patriarchal dividend* but who may not meet the standards of hegemonic masculinity may be understood to be complicit. These are men who do not display "naked domination or uncontested ... authority" (Connell, 1995, p. 80). Finally, when factors such as race are considered, various expressions of masculinity have been *marginalised*. This is discussed in further detail in the section that deals specifically with current issues regarding masculinity and post-Apartheid South Africa.

### 5.4.2. Youth and masculinities

Writing about violence in South African schools, Morrell (1998b) argues that the process whereby notions of masculinity are reproduced has been largely ignored. In a study conducted in 10 secondary schools in the Durban region, one school reported that 30% of its female scholars had been assaulted (Griggs, 1997, in Morrell, 1998b). Morrell (1998b) reports that, whilst being a victim of rape is common amongst girls of school-going age, boys are also becoming victims of violent crimes. This illustrates that there are not only power differentials between males and females, but also between those who express different versions of masculinity.

Luyt and Foster (2001) explored how violence and masculinity interact by examining the gang culture in high schools in Cape Town. They argue that participants from areas that report higher gang activity advocate the expression of hegemonic masculinity, indicating the link between violent lifestyle and the culturally sanctioned expression of masculinity. This study is useful in linking hegemonic masculinity to community violence in a South African context. This is important when one considers that there is evidence that violence in one setting may be transferable to violence in a dating relationship (Malik et al., 1997; Ozer, Tschmann, Pasch & Flores, 2004).

Richters (1998) conducted research in the former Yugoslavia, also an area that is rife with violence. Specifically addressing violence against women, he argues that the language of the perpetrators contains misogynist discourse. It is noteworthy that various studies have noted such misogynist language amongst adolescent boys.

Mac an Ghail (1994) examined the social organisation of boys in a British school. He found the primacy of the social group defined the rules of interaction toward women, and that the playground is often used as a powerful norm-imparting force for gendered identities. He notes that the hallmarks of hegemonic masculinity are *misogyny*, *compulsory heterosexuality* and *homophobia*. He observed misogyny within the use of the word “slag”, which denotes sexual promiscuity, as well as being a general term used as an insult. It



relegates women to being “sexually despised and at the same time sexually desired” (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p. 132).

Pattman (1998) also found that women were met with similar disregard by those who expressed a hegemonic version of masculinity in his study at a teachers’ college in Zimbabwe. One group of men, “the beer drinkers”, defined their masculinity by being drunk and having sex with prostitutes. This is consistent with other studies that note that high risk activities, such as drinking and drug taking, are often viewed as signifiers of masculinity (Courtenay, 2000; Pyke, 1996). According to Pattman (1998) the participants engaged in sexual acts with women who were considered as immoral by nature of the fact that they were willing participants in the sexual acts.

Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman (2002) found that, when interviewing boys in Britain, the verbal degradation of women was used as a public demonstration of masculinity. The participants presented as “harder” when in a group, speaking about females in a denigrating manner. However, when interviewed individually, they spoke about women in more positive, even idealising tones. Some boys would position themselves away from the other males by stating that they were “football mad and sex obsessed” (Frosh et al., 2002, p. 122).

Bhana (2005) observed how discourses of misogyny actually manifest in violence against school-going girls when he examined the roles that schools played in developing aggression among young Zulu-speaking males between the ages of six and ten in a township school. He comments that the dominant expression of masculinity in this setting is the *tsotsi* image, one that is connected with violence. Violence in this context is used as a means of control. According to Bhana (2005, p. 209), “the struggle for masculinity always occurs on the presumption of superiority over girls”. These boys were violent toward the girls who were considered too talkative and who, in this subculture, are considered to be showing little respect. He also discussed a subordinated version of masculinity, the *yimvu* boys, who were considered more egalitarian in their views on gender. However, these boys were scorned by those who enacted an aggressive masculinity, and they attempted to coerce the *yimvu* boys into misogynist acts. In this study, it is possible to understand how one’s identity

development is dependent on peer sanction to become violent against women, lest one be relegated to the status of diminished power.

By exploring the discourses that are operative amongst young males it is possible to observe that masculine identity is shaped by a legitimisation of aggression (Luyt & Foster, 2001; Bhana, 2005) and misogyny (Mac an Ghail, 1994; Frosh et al., 2002). It can be observed that both aggression and misogyny are demonstrated in groups of boys through impression-management acts, either through spoken language or actual violence, while they are attempting to secure an identity through gaining acceptance by their respective peer groups (Erikson, 1968).

The pressure placed on the adolescent to present as masculine is not only directly related to misogyny and aggression. It is possible that, in some locales, alcohol and drug use also serves as a signifier of 'real' masculinity (Pattman, 1998; Courtenay, 2000; Pyke, 1996).

It is therefore possible to observe how the complex power relationships between males that are connected to dating violence are largely concerned with identity formation. However, masculinity is not only negotiated in the microcosm of the peer group or school setting. It is affected by discourses that operate on a macro-scale. In the South African context, expressions of masculinity are largely determined by the privilege or disadvantage that is inextricably linked with living in the post-Apartheid society.

#### **5.4.3. The consequences of (post-)Apartheid on masculine identity**

To only focus on the influences of an immediate peer group, family or community would be to ignore the complicated history that still defines the identities of South Africans. Many of the studies that discuss adolescence as a life phase, peer group influences, early exposure to aggression and substance use were not conducted within a post-Apartheid South African context, and placed little emphasis on socio-economic status or race, or their relationship to the concept of power. In South Africa, this issue is connected to the legacy of Apartheid.

Walker (2005) argues that post-1994 traditional versions of masculinity – that have engendered notions of inequality and include legitimised acts of gender-based violence – have been challenged, as the new constitution emphasises the notion of gender equality. She argues that there have been different responses to this. Whilst there have been attempts by some to create new definitions of a masculinity that is egalitarian and accepting of the integrity of women, there also have been reactionary outbursts of violence.

This is consistent with Morrell's (2002) synopsis of men's responses to changing gender politics. Morrell (2002) further argues that an understanding of past and present racial inequalities is central to understanding gender in a South African context. He states that, due to racial oppression, black men were stripped of their identity as they were labelled 'boys'. This led to them sometimes trying to defend their masculine status by attempting to establish their power over women.

A compensatory aggression in order to assert one's masculinity is noted by Niehaus (2005), who ethnographically investigated masculine identity and sexual violence in a community in the South African Lowveld. He argues that the construction of masculine identity as strong and reliable is often not consistent within the reality of many cases of unemployment or economic hardship. Thus, in order to compensate for a crisis in masculine identity, men engage in acts of physical violence in order to re-assert a masculine identity consistent with physical toughness.

Whilst socio-economic differences expressed in large-scale unemployment are an obvious indicator of the legacy of Apartheid (Sparks, 2003), inequalities are still present amongst masculinities that are exposed to the same education opportunities. In my own study in a Cape Town school, derogatory comments were made about white females who engaged in dating practices with coloured boys (Leaver, 2004). In fact, coloured boys were viewed as having 'their own girls', and were thus excluded from the social realm of the white boys (Leaver, 2004). This example serves to illustrate that the effects of racial oppression, perpetuated by Apartheid, entrenched an order in which the masculinities of minority groups were emasculated.

This discussion of post-Apartheid masculine identity is by no means separate from the other identified factors that are related to adolescent dating violence. Post-Apartheid expressions of masculinity are also connected to the issue of trauma discussed above. Desjarles et al. (1995, in Swartz, 1998) argue that trauma is among the effects of state repression that causes family problems, the abandonment of children, and violent conflicts. Given that the effects of Apartheid persist decades after its dismantling (Burman, 2002), it is possible that the present generation of South African adolescents are faced with the lingering consequences of Apartheid. Like Herman (1999), who argues for a shift away from a medicalised view of trauma to understanding it as a shattered view of the self and the world, Swartz (1998) argues that, whilst it is difficult to ascertain the mental health impact of Apartheid on South Africans, it has affected their view of themselves. Therefore, whilst issues of identity are linked to the compensatory aggression of a marginalised masculinity, they are augmented by an identity confusion that results from being faced by the traumatising violence birthed from a system of repression.

#### **5.4.4. Conclusions from exploring masculine identities**

In this section I have attempted to show how the identities of adolescents are defined by pervasive definitions of gender. Therefore, an individual's view of himself is shaped by those who are in power. In the case of boys, it may be those peers who most closely demonstrate an expression of hegemonic masculinity. In order to gain favour with the power-brokers of any given social organisation, it is possible that boys attempt to demonstrate a socially accepted or venerated version of masculinity so as to avoid being marginalised, and to be provided with a favourable identity. This is important if one considers that dominant discourses of masculinity often advocate misogyny and aggression. It is also important because such discourses may be communicated through the medium of the male peer group, a considerable motivator of behaviour during the developmental phase of adolescence.

Amongst the disenfranchised there is the heightened possibility of compensatory aggression that asserts an invalidated masculinity. In post-Apartheid South Africa, it is

possible that the consequences of trauma, resulting from repression and violence, devastate a developing sense of identity. This may lead to a heightened reliance on a peer group that is entrenched in the same community of violence. Furthermore, given that the regular use of alcohol is encouraged as a masculine act in some locations, the possibility of violence is made all the more likely.

## **6. Discussion**

### **6.1. Review of the current paper**

This paper examines previous research about dating violence amongst South African adolescents. This relatively small literature was considered by first situating it within the much larger body of local and international literature on adolescent and adult dating violence. Certain factors that are considered to be particularly relevant to adolescent dating violence were then highlighted. These are exposure to trauma, alcohol and drug use, peer group influences, and aggressive and misogynist expressions of masculinity. The main focus of the paper was then to investigate to what extent these risk factors can be tied to one of main developmental tasks of adolescence, namely identity formation.

The above factors are related to identity formation separately, but also relate to one another. It can be argued that, in an attempt to acquire identity, the male adolescent relies on a peer group (Erikson, 1968). In order to gain acceptance he may attempt to comply with a version of hegemonic masculinity (Frosh et al., 2002). Hegemonic masculinity has been associated with aggression (Luyt & Foster, 2001), misogyny (Mac an Ghail, 1994), and alcohol and drug use (Pattman, 1998; Courtenay, 2000; Pyke, 1996). Adolescents living in the aftermath of trauma associated with exposure to violence in the community and in the family may suffer further identity confusion. This country's history of Apartheid resulted in many of the circumstances that led to the exposure of such violence (Swartz, 1998). The subsequent identity confusion may contribute to reproducing acts of aggression and also heighten the reliance on a peer group, which in turn reproduces discourses of misogyny, encourages aggression, and promotes the use of substances.

Knowledge of how these factors relate to identity formation assists in creating an etiological and theoretical formulation of how an adolescent male becomes violent toward his dating partner. What follows is a discussion of how to pragmatically proceed with this knowledge.

## **6.2. Implications**

A theoretical understanding of how certain factors associated with adolescent dating violence relate to identity formation have implications for theoretical enquiry and prevention programmes.

It is recommended that future empirical investigations focus on the following:

- Qualitative interviews should be conducted with the perpetrators of dating violence who also report witnessing or surviving aggression. Special attention should be paid to how these experiences affect the negotiation of adolescent life tasks, specifically identity development. Given that adolescents cannot be described in terms of personality disorders, a manner in which to describe the characterological effects of trauma should be explored and debated.
- Focus groups and ethnographic research should be conducted in order to observe adolescent interaction within a peer group setting. This should be conducted in locales that have a high incidence of dating violence in order to further understand the process whereby the peer group influences the behaviour of an individual.
- There is a literature on how certain expressions of masculinity in South Africa are related to violence (e.g. Luyt & Foster, 2001; Niehaus, 2005). Future investigations should include theory that accounts for the developmental phase of adolescence in the analysis of the data.
- Given that there still are questions regarding the relationship between substance abuse and dating violence (Swart, 2005), this association needs to be further

investigated. This investigation may be assisted if expressions of masculinity and subsequent identity development issues are taken into account.

- Given that little is known about local constructions of adolescence (Macleod, 2006), there should be further investigation into this life-phase in South Africa. There should be an exploration of what it means to successfully negotiate one's identity in the light of many of the unique challenges that face the adolescents who live in a post-Apartheid society.

Answers to these questions are important, as they will better inform prevention programmes. Such programmes should take into account the powerful role of identity negotiation in adolescent dating violence. They should therefore focus on assisting adolescents through the developmental task of constructing identity by recognising the influential role of peers and make use of peer-led interventions, provide alternative prototypes, and provide legitimacy to expressions of masculinity that are not aggressive.

### **6.3. Limitations of the current paper**

It is recognised that the literature on dating violence has identified factors that were not explored in this paper. Among these are conflictual relationship dynamics between partners (Riggs & O'Leary, 1989; Abrahams, Jewkes, Laubsher & Hoffman, 2006), and a wide range of psychiatric illnesses (Ely, 2004). However, the scope of this paper was limited to factors that are related to adolescent identity development.

When exploring those factors that play a role in identity negotiation, it is recognised that the respective factors that were presented often represent larger fields of study in their own right. Exhaustive accounts of these fields were also beyond the scope of this paper. Only those sources directly relevant for the purpose of linking the respective factors to identity development were commented on.

Finally, given the social constructionist approach of this paper, it is recognised that identity cannot be separated from issues of power. This paper is written in a post-Apartheid context in which issues of race are particularly salient (Sparks, 2003). It is recognised that, by treating the complex issue of race as a neutral subject, racist discourses are reproduced (Durrheim & Mokeki, 1997). The same assumption is applied to the notion of class.<sup>5</sup> Such power dynamics are important issues and were given mention when appropriate. However, a central focus on such issues was beyond the scope of this paper.

#### **6.4. Concluding comments**

I have argued throughout this paper that attention needs to be paid to the central role that adolescent identity development plays in adolescent dating violence. I have also argued that this identity development is fundamentally shaped by the South African context in which we find ourselves. Whilst the phenomenon of dating violence exists elsewhere, it presents in a unique manner in South Africa, where adolescents are faced by distinctive challenges. Only once this is recognised can attention be paid to appropriate avenues of enquiry and intervention.

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<sup>5</sup> It is recognised that class and race are not synonymous, and that the relationship between class and race is controversial. They are grouped together here because these are both given attention when addressing the issue of power. See Gibson (2005) for a more comprehensive discussion on race and political and economic changes in South Africa.



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