Because of temptations: children, sex and HIV/AIDS in Tanzania

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Because of Temptations

Children, Sex and HIV/AIDS in Tanzania

Miranda van Reeuwijk
Because of Temptations

Children, Sex and HIV/AIDS in Tanzania

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My interest in children and working with children has a very pragmatic basis. I am convinced that in a new and unfamiliar environment, children are the best guides you can have. As a newcomer in a different culture it is often difficult to ‘settle in’. My first working experience with children was as an intern at the pediatric department of a Dutch hospital, when I was nineteen. I did not like the hospital at all: the smell, the seriousness, the protocols and hierarchies. Being unfamiliar with the social rules, the language, the hospital culture, I made mistake after mistake. I took refuge in the common room with the children, who shared my opinion of the hospital. During my first days, the children explained to me who was who and who was doing what and they took me around to explore the pediatric wing. The children introduced me to their parents and started to ask me to accompany them when they had to see the doctor or go for tests. Through the children I found a way of communicating with the adults in the hospital. They helped me to define my position and role within that setting and made me feel at ease.

This scenario was repeated a few years later, during my visits to Benin and Tanzania. Even without me speaking the language the children would come to my house and just hang around, helping me out with household tasks or we would play games. The children were always the first to teach me new words and to give me a tour of their areas. They would show me where to get my groceries and in Benin, explained to me where to go to the toilet and what to use for toilet paper. Children would laugh about my silly questions instead of judging me for it. They liked to give me answers and explanations. They facilitated my introduction to adults and I found that adults were quicker to accept me when they saw that their children accepted me.

During my time at the hospital, I learned how interesting it is to speak with children first about their illness before learning the medical diagnosis from doctors, nurses or parents. I became fascinated with the children’s perceptions, explanations, logic and coping strategies. This experience certainly influenced my choice to study children’s perceptions of disease transmission and hygiene, a few years later in Benin. In the evenings I would discuss my day with the neighborhood kids and ask them questions. I found that they not only liked to explain
things to me, but also liked to add their own opinions. I noticed how much they actually see, how they analyze the behavior of others around them and come to conclusions about good and bad, injustices and contradictions. They became my lens for studying and understanding their culture. When I went to Tanzania for the study described in this book, it was a logical step to ask children to help me with interpretations and to involve them as co-researchers.

My hope for this book is to show how fascinating, interesting and important it is to study children perceptions of what is at stake for them, especially regarding sex and sexuality. My greatest hope is for children and youth to become more involved in the design and implementation of the sexual health interventions that target them. Their meaningful participation is crucial for the effectiveness of those interventions and for our joint fight against HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, gender injustices and maternal mortality.

My gratitude first and foremost goes to them, to all the children who helped me to understand their realities, concerns, hopes and wishes. For their patience, courage, humor, enthusiasm, energy, creativity and insights. I will attempt to represent their ideas and experiences as closely as possible in this book. My contact with the children in Tanzania would not have been possible without the help of many people. I am particularly indebted to my friend, research assistant and interpreter Godfrey. Without your help and hard work this research would not have been possible and would not have been so much fun! You have become a brother to me.

My sincere gratitude goes to my guides at home: Sjaak van der Geest and Ria Reis who have been at least as patient with me as my young guides in the field. You have been part of this journey for a long time. Thank you for believing in me, for giving me the opportunity to teach with you and to learn from you and for allowing me to make my own mistakes. Sjaak, thank you for teaching me a different way of looking at the world. Ria, thank you for travelling with me, spiritually and literally. One of the highlights was fighting that giant spider together!

I want to thank the members of the promotion committee for their willingness to read and comment on this thesis, for their input on my proposal at the start of my PhD course and for inspiring me through their own work. I thank WOTRO for funding this research and the ASSR for providing me with an academic home.
Without the permission and support of the Tanzanian government, in the form of Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, the district Ministry of Education, and of the schools and NGO’s involved in the Guardian Programme, I would not have been able to conduct this research. I give my special thanks to the staff of the schools for allowing me to disrupt their schedules and talk with their pupils. I also want to thank the parents and adults in the local communities for their participation; their contributions were most valuable. In particular I want to thank the people in Tanzania who helped me reflect, who asked critical questions and shared their ideas and insights with me: the researchers from NIMR, TANESA and AMREF and Mama Salalah from the International Languages Training Centre in Mwanza. You were my PhD-club in the field. I want to thank Bill, Robyn and Carol for helping me out with cars, paperwork and accommodation. Thank you for your friendship and hospitality, whenever I come to Mwanza. I also want to thank Christopher and Hope, for helping me during the last part of the fieldwork and their courage to talk about sensitive issues.

At home in the Netherlands many people helped and inspired me during the course of this PhD. I want to thank my friends and colleagues at the ASSR, in particular Christine Dedding, Heidi Sauls, Marie Lindegaart-Rozenkranz, Trudie Gerrits and Winny Koster for reading my manuscripts and giving me valuable feedback. Julia Challinor has been a tremendous help editing this book and with her practical questions. I also want to thank my colleagues at the Rutgers Nisso Groep for their interest in this research and their willingness to read this book and help me prepare for my defense. I am particularly grateful for their vision and progressive work in the field of youth and sexuality and their determination for meaningful youth participation in their projects.

Lastly I want to thank my parents, brother, friends and Tijmen for their never ending support. I would not be where I am today without you. Tijm, despite my many goodbyes and leaving you behind for yet another long trip to Tanzania, you have always supported me. All of you are always there for me and there is nothing in the world for which I am more grateful.

Miranda van Reeuwijk
Amersfoort, 8 Mei 2009
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface ........................................................................................................................................i

Table of contents ....................................................................................................................v

## PART 1    STUDYING CHILDREN, SEX AND SEXUALITY ............1

### I  INTRODUCTION .................................................................3
  Studying children and sex: Why? ....................................................................................... 4
  Understanding children and sex: Approaches ................................................................. 6
  Self, society and sexuality: Theoretical framework ....................................................... 8
  Childhood and vulnerability: Assumptions ................................................................. 10
  Children and sex: Definitions ....................................................................................... 11
  Structure of the book: Overview ............................................................................... 13

### II  STUDYING CHILDREN AND SEX ........................................15
  Studying children and sex: Methodological and ethical challenges ......................... 15
  A ‘rights based’ approach .............................................................................................. 16
  The challenge of power disparity and consent ............................................................. 18
    Consent as a process ...................................................................................................... 20
    Anonymity through projection ..................................................................................... 23
  Methods, interpretation and children as co-researchers .............................................. 24
    Cultures of communication ......................................................................................... 24
    Drawings ...................................................................................................................... 26
    Role-play ...................................................................................................................... 27
    Child-to-child interviews .............................................................................................. 28
    Power and respect ......................................................................................................... 29
    Triangulation and interpretation .................................................................................. 31
  Gatekeepers and the challenge of non-malfeasance .................................................. 32
    Guardian teachers and ethical back-up ......................................................................... 32
    Minimizing risk versus participant observation .......................................................... 34
    Challenges posed by gatekeepers in the Tanzanian context ....................................... 34
    Sexual harassment in schools ...................................................................................... 37
  Selection and research locations .................................................................................. 38
    School pupils ................................................................................................................ 38
    Out-of-school children ................................................................................................. 40
  Overview of research activities ...................................................................................... 41
  Limitations of the research ............................................................................................ 42

### III  CHILDHOOD SEXUALITY IN TANZANIA ..............................45
  Childhood in Tanzania ..................................................................................................... 45
    Daily lives: Ability and responsibility ......................................................................... 45
    Education & marriage: Expectations & goals .............................................................. 48
  Sexuality and socialization ............................................................................................. 51
    Gender roles and sexual culture .................................................................................. 51
    Sexual socialization: Parental views and concerns ..................................................... 52
  Childhood sexuality: Violation or confirmation of norms? ......................................... 56
PART 2  CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS ................................................... 59

Introduction: “Because of temptations” ................................................................................................................. 62

IV  PARENTS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE ................................................................. 66

Nyahali Play ........................................................................................................................................................... 66
Defiance and disrespect ................................................................................................................................................. 69
‘Lack of guidance’ and parental encouragement ....................................................................................................... 70
Parents, peers or personality? .................................................................................................................................... 73
Concluding remarks ....................................................................................................................................................... 77

V  PEERS AND PRESSURES ................................................................................................................................. 80

The case of Charlie ....................................................................................................................................................... 80
Keeping it secret ............................................................................................................................................................ 82
‘Positive’ peer pressure ................................................................................................................................................. 83
Strategies to deal with peer pressure .......................................................................................................................... 84
The case of Juma: ......................................................................................................................................................... 85
The case of Neema: ....................................................................................................................................................... 86
Observations: Competition and popularity .................................................................................................................. 87
Concluding remarks ....................................................................................................................................................... 89

VI  COURTSHIP: DECEIT AND SKINNING........................................................................................................... 90

Seduction ........................................................................................................................................................................ 90
Deception ......................................................................................................................................................................... 92
‘Skinning’ ....................................................................................................................................................................... 93
Expectations and force ..................................................................................................................................................... 94
The case of Nuru............................................................................................................................................................ 98
Agreement ...................................................................................................................................................................... 100
Kissing .......................................................................................................................................................................... 102
Flirting ........................................................................................................................................................................... 103
Concluding remarks ....................................................................................................................................................... 106

VII  SECRECY, PARTNER CHOICE AND RELATIONSHIPS................................................................................... 108

Interaction and punishment ........................................................................................................................................... 108
Secrecy as a strategy ....................................................................................................................................................... 109
Friendship and assessment .......................................................................................................................................... 111
Sugar daddies, money and age .................................................................................................................................. 113
Partner choice: Preferences and attraction .................................................................................................................. 115
Meaning of love ............................................................................................................................................................ 120
A conversation: Iddy and Mathias .................................................................................................................................. 121
Selecting a partner: Temporary versus permanent .................................................................................................... 127
Concluding remarks ....................................................................................................................................................... 132

VIII  RESPONSIBILITY: PREGNANCY AND CONDOMS ......................................................................................... 136

Responsibility for pregnancy .......................................................................................................................................... 136
The case of Hope ......................................................................................................................................................... 137
Nyahali debate on pregnancy ...................................................................................................................................... 138
Attitudes towards condom use .................................................................................................................................... 144
Concluding remarks ....................................................................................................................................................... 147
PART 1

STUDYING

CHILDREN, SEX AND

SEXUALITY
I INTRODUCTION

Do you remember what we spoke about last time? I ask the class and Godfrey (my interpreter) repeats my question in KiSwahili. There are 20 boys and girls between 10 and 14 years of age sitting in the classroom. A boy of about 13 years of age stands up:

Boy: We spoke about the reasons why children start with sexual relationships
Me: Exactly, and do you remember which reasons were mentioned?
The children start to reply:
Boy: Because of temptations.
Girl: Deception.
Boy: Learning from friends.
Then one of the girls stands up and adds: But it is a bad thing!
Her classmates start to nod and make sounds of agreement.
Me: Why is it bad?
Boy: Because our age doesn't allow it, we are still young.
Girl: Because we are still students.
Girl: Because a girl might get pregnant and lose her chance for a school education
Me: But if it is bad why do some boys and girls get involved?
Girl: Maybe they are being deceived, maybe their friends are telling her she should get a boyfriend to get material gains.
Boy: Maybe because of poor backgrounds, if the parents can't fulfill their needs, girls have to seek for other means, they need money
Girl: Some are just tempted to have sex...
Boy: Some want to find out what it is like and then they become addicted.
Another boy adds:
Yes, once you have tasted the honey, you cannot stop!
Me: Is that right?
Class: It's true!
Me: So who of you have been approached, or have done the approaching?
[About all the boys in the class laugh and put up their fingers]
Me: What would you say to a girl?
Boy: I love you; I'll buy you a car. I'll buy you some clothes.
Other boy: Us as men, we approach and ask for their needs. And when you give it to her, you would get sex and then you would leave her alone.
Me: So the reason why you approach girls, is sex?
Boys: Yes!
Me: But would a girl believe you, would she believe you’d buy her a car??
Boy: If not, I'll find other means. I tell her I’ve got a rich background; I’ll tell her if you’re with me I will fulfill your every need.
Other boy: I own a shop!
Third boy: You kind of lie so they believe you and have sex.
Second boy: Smart ones always say no.
First boy: With a smart one you have to use a lot of tactics.
Me: There is something I don’t understand… at the beginning you said it is bad behavior to get involved and now you are telling me that you yourselves have girlfriends and that you want sex from them...

[The boys seem a little confused and look at each other to see who would answer]

Girl: It’s the boys fault, blame it on the boys!

Boy: It’s bad, but I got involved with a girl because I was young. But now I don’t do that anymore.

Other boy: Sometimes you feel that it’s bad, but sometimes you feel like it’s good…

Me: Hmm, I understand. Remember I’m not blaming anyone; I’m just curious why is it sometimes a bad thing and sometimes a good thing… What makes you sometimes feel like it’s good?

Boy: The temptation of making love.

Other boy: You feel like there is a need of making love when physical changes occur.

Girl: Some have sex before physical changes take place…

Me: Why is that?

Girl: Because of temptations, or because she gets deceived…

**Studying children and sex: Why?**

This book addresses why children of primary school age (10-16 years) in northwest Tanzania engage in sex and what sex and sexual relationships mean to them. What exactly are the ‘temptations’ the children talk about and why do boys lie to girls and ‘leave them’ the moment they have had sex? What is the role of money and is there a role for love and attraction? How can the sexual behavior of children in northwest Tanzania (the Mwanza region) be understood? In the following chapters these issues and related questions will be explored.

The reason I pose these questions is because during previous research that investigated Tanzanian children’s perceptions of problems in their communities, children spontaneously expressed concerns about sexual issues. Girls mentioned how older boys and men waited for them outside the school compound and offered them money for sex when they walked home. Boys explained how they struggled with peer pressure to have sex. But the children also expressed a curiosity about sex and a wish to be sexually experienced. There was evidence that a considerable number of the primary school aged children in Tanzania were exposed to situations in which they had to make sexual decisions, even before reaching puberty. Yet the

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1 In 2001-2002 I conducted a research that focused on children’s agency and their potential role in development projects, investigating their perceptions of problems in their communities and what should be done about it. The research was executed for IREWOC foundation and financed by Plan International. See Van Reeuwijk (2003a).
children believed they could not turn to adults for ‘guidance’, as children called it, or to report harassment because of the dominant norm that sex is a taboo topic for discussion between children and adults.

Data from literature indicates that unwanted pregnancies, abortions and coerced sexual experiences are common among youth in Tanzania (NBS 2005, Mgalla et al. 1998, Mpangile et al. 1993, Todd et al. 2004). HIV infection among adolescents in northwest rural Tanzania rises steeply from the age of 15, reaching 5% for girls by the age of 20 (Obasi et al. 2001). As elsewhere in Africa, teenage girls in Tanzania have about five times the prevalence of HIV compared to boys in the same age category (Obasi et al. 2001, Barnett & Whiteside 2002, UNDP2). This high prevalence in girls is suspected to be related to the so-called ‘sugar daddy’ phenomenon, whereby adult men have sex with young girls indicating an ‘age mixing’ pattern (Luke & Kurz 2002, Luke 2004, Obassi et al. 2001, Silberschmidt & Rasch 2001). Adolescent girls’ power to negotiate safe sex is believed to be limited by gender power differences, age and economic asymmetries and therefore increase a girl’s vulnerability to HIV infection (Luke & Kurz 2002, Mgalla 1998). Although these data indicate a high risk for sexual and reproductive health problems in adolescents and potentially children, existing sexual and reproductive health interventions and sexuality researchers rarely target children under the age of 14. A possible explanation could be the difficulty of studying childhood sexuality because of the perception that children are not sexual beings and that introducing the topic of sexuality through investigation or intervention will somehow create adverse outcomes (Coleman 2007). Another reason could be that sex research is still framed within the AIDS paradigm. Much research focus on quantitative data about individual risk related sexual behavior and on knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about sexuality that might be associated with the risk of HIV infection (Parker 2001, Spronk 2006, Taylor 2007). From this perspective children under 16 do not form a high risk group and therefore interventions target older youth. These sexual health promotion efforts focus on reducing risky sexual behavior by increasing knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention. The aims include promoting abstinence, delaying sexual debut, decreasing the number of sexual partners and initiating safer sexual practices. Interventions that target adolescents generally follow intervention designs based on biomedical models that conceptualize health and disease at the level of the individual. These designs depart from psychological theories of individual behavior change,

assuming rational behavior. It was expected that increased knowledge would lead to increased risk perception and behavior change (Taylor 2007, Parker 2001). It is becoming clear that research departing from such models limit a fuller understanding of sexuality and that prevention programs have largely failed (Nyanzi et al. 2001, Kalipeni et al. 2007 Taylor 2007, Parker 2001). Furthermore, current HIV prevention programs often use self-reported sexual behavior questionnaires to monitor and evaluate interventions. There are indications that this data is unreliable, particularly from adolescent girls who tend to underreport their sexual experiences (Plummer et al. 2004). In Part 3 of this book I will argue that interventions should include children and must modify their approach to address the daily reality of these children.

**Understanding children and sex: Approaches**

In order to investigate local children’s vulnerability to HIV and the reasons why their knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention did not lead to safer sexual behavior I collaborated with children from 10 to 16 years of age to determine what they believe is at stake in regard to decisions about sexual behavior. Using the empirical data I will analyze the role of risk perception, condom use and the elements that influence sexual decision making. The focus of this study is on understanding how the children experienced sexuality and sexual relationships and how these children interpreted and understood that experience. I will theorize how sexual meaning systems are formed through social interactions and shape both individual and social patterns of sexuality (Parker 2001, Parker et al. 2000, Farmer 1996).

To understand how meanings are negotiated in social interactions children must be firmly contextualized in their social worlds. This implies two approaches: First, in order to collect data that represented the children’s individual ideas, experiences and (reported) actions, I included the children as the central informants of this study and some children as co-researchers (see next chapter). Second, I addressed the children not as passive recipients of an adult culture who simply assimilated and reproduced it, but as active social agents in their own right, with their own experiences, perceptions and actions in the social and cultural world (Caputo 1995, Christensen 1998 & 2000, Van der Geest 1996, Hardman 1973, Matthews 1999, James et al. 1998, Prout 2002). Instead of viewing children as passive subjects of social structures and processes, I consider them as having an active role in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in
which they live (Prout & James 1997). Some researchers have shown that female children are not always passive victims of male sexual exploitation by stereotypical ‘sugar daddies’ or engage in transactional sex out of economic necessity or survival (Silberschmidt & Rasch 2001, Nyanzi et al. 2001 and 2004, Kinsman et al. 2000). The girls in these studies were described as exerting agency in actively pursuing relationships because they believed it benefited them personally and socially.

I chose to study the process of how boys and girls come to an appraisal of benefits in northwest Tanzania. I am interested in how certain social structures, such as norms and poverty interact with personal goals and feelings and lead to an appraisal of risks and benefits that result in a choice for a certain action or inaction. This choice for (in) action is frequently referred to as agency. Agency is described as having a degree of free choice, in the sense that the actor, as Giddens formulated, ‘could have acted otherwise’ (1984). Yet the choices at an actor’s disposal are circumscribed by social structures, ‘the durable elements of a society’, that restrict and enable human thinking and action by limiting or influencing opportunities for choice. Following this line of thinking, choices made by agents usually tend to reproduce those structures. According to Hays however, this is not a stable process and sometimes the structured choices that agents make can have a more or less transformative impact on the nature of structures themselves (Hays 1994). A focus on the interplay of society and self allows us to explain differences in behavior between individuals who are under similar social influences and in similar situations. Furthermore, it leaves room to explore sexual behavior that does not conform to the norm, to investigate how new meanings are created and how change might take place. Insight into these processes makes it possible to understand risk-taking behavior and offer potential entry points for intervention efforts. Such efforts could aim “…at transforming social norms and cultural values, and thus at reconstituting collective meanings in ways that will ultimately promote safer sexual practices” (Parker 2001:168). According to Bourdieu (1977) it is through the link between the self and society, between social expectations, individual choice and decision making, that we can learn most about the dialectical relationship of structure and agency (Bourdieu in Stein 1989:12).
For this approach towards understanding children and sex it is insufficient to define sexuality as only a product of biological instincts, drives and hormones\(^3\). WHO (2005) has proposed the following broad definition of sexuality\(^4\):

> Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.

Such a broad definition of sexuality fits within a social constructionist\(^5\) approach, which assumes that sexuality is constructed differently across cultures and over time. A social constructionist approach to sexuality examines the ways in which cultural, political and economic factors have been linked to the construction or constitution of sexual experience in different settings (Parker & Easton 1998). Although I think that this approach allows for a better explanation of sexual behavior than bio-medical models alone, based on the information from the children I spoke to, I cannot ignore the physiological and emotional influences on their sexual behavior. I therefore start from the WHO definition and present a theoretical model that allows me to incorporate all the factors that the children indicated had an influence on their sexual decisions and behavior.

**Self, society and sexuality: Theoretical framework**

Both the WHO definition of sexuality and the opening discussion with Tanzanian boys and girls at the start of this chapter demonstrate that there are multiple elements that influence a person’s decision to engage in or to refrain from sex. The children mentioned social influences such as peer pressure and culturally normative ideas about good and bad behavior. Elements related to the interaction itself included deception and money. Hopes and fears for the future were described in terms of being a student, the risk of pregnancy, and hope for

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3 Frequently referred to with the concept of ‘essentialist model’ of sexuality
4 This is a WHO working definition and does not represent an official WHO position [http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexualhealth.html](http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexualhealth.html)
support. The boys and girls also indicated that there were physical and emotional elements that influenced their decision to have sex including desire and even ‘addiction’. To understand how these elements interact and lead to particular sexual behavior, I will analyze the children’s decision-making. The difficulty of such analysis is the complexity and multitude of the elements and the risk of creating a static picture of a rational actor making cognitive decisions. Based on the information that the children provided, I choose an analytical model to include these elements in a dynamic way providing insight on how their interactions shapes individual and social patterns of sexual behavior. For the analysis of the ethnographic data, I use the theoretical model of ‘individual temporal orientations’ in the conceptualization of agency (Hitlin & Elder 2007, Emirbayer & Mische 1998). This model provides an analysis of behavior by looking at how goals (whether socially, biologically or personally defined) inform individual decision-making by considering the temporal horizon of these goals and how external circumstances direct the actor’s attentional focus. I apply this model to the empirical data on children’s sexual behavior and experiences. The model helps to explain how and why strong emotions, physical desires or peer pressure can ‘overrule’ other considerations in one situation, but not in another. I will explain more about this model in Chapter 10. The model is useful to demonstrate how social norms and expectations inform but also conflict with and compete with individual goals, feelings and situational demands and how children manage contradictions. It is within this ‘management’ that I believe the concept of agency becomes most concrete. My aim to study children as social agents is not to explore if children have agency, but how it is exerted and constrained and how it is socially manifested within the context of children’s sexual behavior. I will examine how these manifestations of agency shape the characteristics of courtship and sexual relationships and their role in changing and reproducing social structures. I will relate the analysis of sexual decision making to children’s experiences of vulnerability and appreciation of risk. My argument is that risk perception, just like meanings of sex, can be understood as a temporal orientations and that abstract risks like pregnancy and diseases are personalized within the context of interaction between (potential) partners. I will use the insights from this research and theoretical analysis for a reflection on children’s vulnerability to poor sexual and reproductive health and to help explain why sexual health interventions in Tanzania have had limited success. I end with recommendations to increase the success of sexual health promotion efforts.
Childhood and vulnerability: Assumptions

[Field notes - Mwanza City, November 2001]

I am looking at Zimake, how he is grinding the bones of his fried fish and devouring it almost completely. While the ten year old boy is eating, he tells me about his concerns, for his future, his wish for education. How HIV killed some of his family members and his concern that people are not using condoms. I am no longer surprised to find out that such a small boy of only ten years of age has insights into the problems he and the people around him are struggling with, nor his ability to express these to me. For some months now I have encountered other children like him. But then he says: “I try to use a condom with my girlfriend, but they are too big. I can’t find one that fits me”. I can’t help thinking that he’s pulling my leg. But when he goes on with his story my disbelief starts to be replaced by surprise and wonder. Zimake’s physical appearance makes it hard for me to see such a small and young boy as a sexual being. I doubt whether he really is having sex. Maybe he means something else? But if not, or if he is trying, what are his reasons? Or if he is lying, why would he tell me this?

My response to Zimake’s remark of being sexually active reflected my assumptions about the norms and explanations about sex, sexuality and childhood at that time. My initial response of disbelief was derived from a general (Western) perception that sex is not for children and that it would be harmful in some way. If Zimake had been a girl, my feelings would have even been stronger, exposing my gendered assumptions about sex and vulnerability. If the sex had taken place with someone considerably older, I would definitely have condemned it. These perceptions are related to the idea that sex is, in principle, for reproduction and a consequence of bodily processes that involve libido and hormones, making it an inappropriate domain for those who are immature, not fully grown up, or pre-pubertal. Sometimes not only the sexual act, but anything related to it is considered inappropriate or even harmful for children. This is not only due to ideas about sex and sexuality but also influenced by the idea that children can have misguided trust in the intentions and actions of others or a lack of understanding of harmful settings and situations (Frankenberg et al. 2000). Power is easily exerted over children by adults, because of the children’s age, physical strength and position in society. This adds to the image of the (African) child as a powerless victim of abuse, war, poverty and disease that is so frequently exploited by fundraisers. Children are regarded as vulnerable and innocent due to their immaturity and naiveté. These key properties are considered to be intrinsic to children’s identities (Christensen 2000, Frankenber gh et al 2000). In Western perception and in accordance with the psychological and developmental approaches to childhood, children are in need of a protective environment for healthy growth and
development until they reach maturity (Frankenberg et al. 2000, Christensen 2000). Adults are responsible for providing such an environment. Until children reach maturity, they cannot be held fully responsible for their decisions or actions. This is reflected in criminal law and, for example, in the age of consent for medical procedures, sex and alcohol. The number of laws devoted to protecting young people from premature exposure to sexuality is enormous (Rubin 1999). In many Western societies, and in Tanzania, children under the age of 18 are not able to give their consent for sexual relationships (this is however conflicting with the legal age for marriage in Tanzania, which is 15, Interpol 2002). If something goes wrong (i.e., early sexual activity, drinking or criminal behavior) the behavior is explained as pathological or those adults responsible for the child’s protection against ‘bad’ influences are blamed.

In agreement with Christensen (2000), I do not challenge the idea that children may be vulnerable. Nor do I deny my initial feelings and thoughts when I am confronted with very young children, or other children I regard vulnerable, who are sexually active. However, I am aware that the construction of children as essentially vulnerable might not consider the cultural and social context in which the vulnerability is constituted (Christensen 2000). Rather than viewing vulnerability as an enduring property of individual children, I view it as situationally and relationally determined, as proposed by Frankenberg (2000). Childhood in Tanzania is defined differently from childhood in the West, and again varies according to the setting and situation. The roles attributed to children differ substantially from the roles of children in Western societies. Furthermore, the perception of children as vulnerable represents an adult viewpoint, rendering children’s own understanding of themselves and their bodily experiences as unimportant (Christensen 2000). Because I depart from the children’s perceptions and investigate what is at stake for them, in Part 3 of this book I analyze how vulnerability is experienced. I will compare this with public health views on vulnerability to poor sexual and reproductive health (SRH) including infections like HIV.

**Children and sex: Definitions**

The general discourse about sexuality and children younger than 18 years old reflects ideas about innocence, vulnerability and the inappropriateness of sex for children. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) defines a child as “every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained
earlier\textsuperscript{6}. Yet in a context of sex the term ‘children’ is rarely used. Instead there is a shift to using the terms \textit{youth} or \textit{adolescents} suggesting a state of puberty that makes the context of sex more acceptable. Using the term children in sexual discourse is problematic because it connotates abuse. However, I choose to refer to the young informants of this research (10-16 years old) with the term children and not with the terms youth or adolescents. The term youth is generally used to indicate a group of people between the ages of 15 and 24 (UN\textsuperscript{7} and World Bank\textsuperscript{8}) whilst the term adolescents usually implies having reached the stage of puberty and up to the age of 18/19.\textsuperscript{9} Since the mean age of my research population is 13-14 years and some of the (sexually active) interviewees had not yet reached puberty at the time of research, were younger than 14 or reported onset of sexual activity before puberty, I choose to use the term children when referring to the research population and the population that they represent. I made this decision in order to emphasize the young age at which children in this region are confronted with situations in which they have to make sexual decisions. The informants had no consensus for self-identification as youth, adolescents or children (for them it appeared to depend on the context). Some thought they were children (\textit{watoto}) but most tended to call themselves ‘boys’ (\textit{wawulana}) and ‘girls’ (\textit{wasichana}); youth (\textit{vijana}) or pupils/students (\textit{wanafunzi}). There was a shared opinion that one (boy or girl) was not truly an adult until he or she was no longer dependent on parents or family. Therefore, boys and girls who were going to school were by definition minors. Yet in the discussion at the beginning of this chapter it is apparent that boys referred to themselves as \textit{men} (\textit{Us as men, we approach and ask for their needs}), indicating how their perception of themselves shifted according to the context. In the following text I will use the terms children, boys, girls and pupils interchangeably.

Similar to the definition of sexuality, I departed from a broad definition of sex, allowing the children to define sex according to their understanding of the term. In KiSwahili, sex is frequently referred to as \textit{mapenzi}, which also means \textit{love}. A major challenge therefore was to determine whether informants were speaking about love or sex. Yet after discussion it was apparent that when they spoke about sex (\textit{kufanya mapenzi} – to make love; or KiSwahili slang

\textsuperscript{6} \url{http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm}, article 1

\textsuperscript{7} \url{http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/qanda.htm}

\textsuperscript{8} \url{http://youthink.worldbank.org/glossary.php}

\textsuperscript{9} \url{http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/adolescent_development/adult_or_not.php} \textit{Am I an adult or not? There’s more to being a teenager than just growing up.} Mary Pepper, Youth Specialties, 2005
or synonyms for sex\textsuperscript{10}) the children referred to penile-vaginal intercourse. The children did not give accounts of experience with anal or oral sex and most children actually condemned such forms of sex as ‘dirty’. Kissing and manual stimulation was believed to only happen between two people who ‘really loved each other’ and was rarely mentioned as part of courtship or as occurring with new or ‘temporary’ girl-/boyfriends (see chapter 6). Therefore, when I use the term ‘sex’ in relation to the children’s accounts in the second part of the book, this should be understood as (attempt to) penile-vaginal intercourse, unless stated otherwise. However, in Part 1 and Part 3 of the book I use the word sex more broadly and refer to all activities related to sexual stimulation.

**Structure of the book: Overview**

In the next chapter I will give a more detailed description of my methodological approaches and the ethical challenges of studying children and sex in Tanzania. In Part 2 of the book, Chapters 4-9, the greater part of the ethnographic data is presented. However, in chapter 3, which includes adult perceptions of upbringing and childhood sexuality in the researched area, I give a description of childhood, gender and sexuality in Tanzania. The description should establish a framework for understanding the children’s sexual behavior and experiences, as described in Part 2. The narrative of the children’s perceptions and experiences of sex starts with their general perceptions of the motivation to engage in sex and is followed by accounts of the influences of peers and parents. Then a description of courtship, negotiations, expectations and how situations of force can occur are detailed. Personal accounts of relationships and partner choice and the role of love and attraction follow including perceptions of responsibility and risks. Because many prevention efforts take place in the form of sexual education in schools the ethnographic section ends with a reflection on the role of teachers and sexual taboo in the formation of children’s sexual behavior. I give particular attention to the problem of sexual harassment by teachers. Part 3 includes an analysis using the theoretical model of individual temporal orientation. This model conceptualizes how agency and structure interact in the process of shaping sexual

\textsuperscript{10} A wide variety of words were used to indicate sex, including; *kucheza* (to play), *kutiana / kutomba* (to fuck), *kumaliza* (to finish), *kugonga* (to knock / mark / bang), *kuchapa* (to whip / beat / hit), *jigijigi* (slang word used in rap or hiphop songs to indicate sexual feelings and used by some children to indicate sex). Other expressions related to having or getting *raha* (bliss / joy) or *starehe* (pleasure / enjoyment).
meanings leading to individual and social patterns of sexual behavior in children in Mwanza region of Tanzania. I analyze the various social influences, situational aspects and reasons that children indicate are informing their decision to engage or refrain from sex and how these shape the meaning and characteristics of courtship and relationships. In the end, I suggest an answer to the central question of this study: why do children engage in sex and what do sex and relationships mean to them? I ultimately relate these insights to the children’s risk for poor sexual and reproductive health, including HIV infection, and offer recommendations for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) promotion.
II STUDYING CHILDREN AND SEX

Studying children and sex: Methodological and ethical challenges

To believe that science operates in a vacuum devoid of values and assumptions about human behavior is to delude ourselves as scientists. Ira L. Reiss

I have chosen a theoretical approach for studying children and their sexual behavior, in northwest Tanzania, that focuses on children as active social agents and provides an understanding of their sexual behavior within the context of their social worlds. A study of the interplay between individual, societal and situational aspects is limited, by definition, because knowledge about the multitude of elements and their synergy can only be fragmentary. Data collection is influenced by research settings, methods and techniques. Additionally, my (and the interpreter’s) values, assumptions and research skills influence the interpretation and analysis of the data. There are specific challenges in studying sex and sexuality with children and critical questions should be asked about validity, reliability and the generalizability of the research findings. In this chapter I critically reflect on these questions and transparently report on my assumptions and decisions, the methods I used, the mistakes I made and other influences on the research findings. In the construction of this book I have purposefully chosen to separate the ethnographic chapters (Part 2) from the analytical chapters (Part 3). I do not claim that the ethnographic data is neutral or value-free. It is my intention that readers make their own judgment about my analysis. I hope that even if the reader disagrees with my interpretation, the ethnographic data might be useful for the work of others. I start with a description of how the ethnographic data was collected, methodological approaches, the challenges of researching sex and children and how I managed these challenges with varying degrees of success. I reflect on ethical dilemmas and responsibilities when researching children as social actors, in general terms and specifically in regard to the East African context.
A ‘rights based’ approach

As argued in the previous chapter, my intention is to understand children’s sexual behavior in relation to their social worlds and to do this by ‘trying to grasp their point of view’. The aim of the research is to collect information on children’s experiences of sex, sexuality and sexual relationships and those children’s explanations, interpretations and justifications of their own and other children’s sexual behavior. This immediately poses two challenges:

a) How can an adult, white, non-Tanzanian female researcher grasp a Tanzanian child’s point of view?

In order to achieve an *emic* perspective, anthropologists live with the people they study and participate in their daily activities, while building rapport and trying to become ‘an insider’. Some would argue this means that a researcher would have to ‘become a child’ in order to enter the world of children. Since this is impossible, how close can an adult (or in this case, a 29 year old researcher) truly come to grasping a child’s point of view? Furthermore, how close can a relatively powerful, rich and well educated, white, non-Tanzanian, female researcher who is not fluent in *KiSwahili* (national language) or *KiSukuma* (local language) really come to a local Tanzanian child’s perspective?

b) What is said about sex is not always a true reflection of what is actually done.

If sexual feelings and experiences deviate from accepted social norms such experiences may be denied, concealed or the narratives will be adapted to live up to socially accepted behavior. In a context where sexual activity for children is not acceptable, this is exactly what happens and poses a particular challenge to collecting reliable data. Furthermore, experiences and feelings are subject to rationalization afterwards. Aspects that influenced a sexual decision but are difficult to articulate (e.g. certain emotions) or operate on a sub-conscious level (e.g. habitual thinking and action) might not be included in the child’s narrative.

In this chapter I reflect on these challenges. The main issue is data representation: does the data reflect personal experiences, experiences close to the child, assumptions, honest opinions, normative reflections or answers that children thought I was looking for. This is influenced by the research setting and related to issues of power and rapport between the adult researcher(s) and the child informants. My aim was to create a conducive environment for children to openly, freely and spontaneously talk about their experiences and feelings and
express their honest opinions and views\textsuperscript{11}. In order to create such an environment, I addressed the power disparity between my interpreter, the children and me by purposefully inverting roles and positions. We offered children the role of expert and asked for their advice and help in regard to methods and settings. Children helped us with interpretation, explaining language and bodily expressions, and with facilitation of discussions and data collection. I tried to minimize our (my interpreter and I) guidance or supervision. During role-play, child-to-child interviews, drawings, etc. we allowed space for the children to lead discussions and introduce topics they found important. To a certain degree\textsuperscript{12}, the children were not only informants, but also co-researchers and active participants in the research process\textsuperscript{13}. This approach is in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which makes explicit that all boys and girls have a right to participate in matters affecting them, as well as the right to freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of association and the right to information (Hart 1997, Christensen & Prout 2002)\textsuperscript{14}. These articles assert the status of children as individuals with fundamental rights, opinions and feelings of their own (Laws & Mann 2004). I firmly believe in these rights as well as in the potential benefits of participation for the children themselves and the societies they live in, in addition to the benefits child participation can have for research and intervention (see Save the Children’s toolkit by Laws & Mann 2004 for an overview of such benefits). However, particular caution should be given to the potential harm children might experience when they participate in research. This risk is addressed throughout this chapter.

I support the view that all human beings have the right to freely and responsibly decide the number, spacing and timing of their children to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health. This includes the right to make decisions concerning reproduction, free from discrimination, coercion and violence\textsuperscript{15}. Contrary to what many adults in Tanzania (and elsewhere) believe, I do not agree that giving (appropriate) information about sex and sexuality and answering questions openly

\textsuperscript{11} Following Nyanzi et al. 2001
\textsuperscript{12} See Roger Hart’s ‘ladder of participation’ where the scope of participation goes from voluntary and informed participation of children in projects designed and carried out by adults to child initiated research or active involvement in the research set up, decision making and implementation (1997).
\textsuperscript{13} Following Alderson (2000) and see forward Dedding’s dissertation: “Kindparticipatie: een (noodzakelijke) bedreiging van de orde”
\textsuperscript{14} Articles 12 to 15 and 17 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
and honestly, encourages children to engage in sexual activity. Rather it provides them with the means to make informed decisions and benefits their sexual and reproductive health and well-being. This belief and the attendant norms and values have consequences for the methodological and ethical considerations in this research. I grew up in the Netherlands and as a child I always received information about sex in a fairly open and honest way (sometimes to my own embarrassment). My teachers and parents emphasized responsibility and made it clear that the decision to have sex was up to me. I should not do anything against my wishes and I should think about the consequences of my actions. It is this attitude towards sex that is thought to have led to the low number of teenage pregnancies and abortions in the Netherlands\textsuperscript{16}. Despite this liberal attitude, or because of it, the average age for the onset of sexual activity is 17 and 75\% of all youth who engage in sex for the first time use a condom, while 43\% also use the contraceptive pill (RNG 2008). I am not insensitive to local perceptions and taboos in Tanzania. However, I have an open mind towards discussing sex and perceive children as capable of making informed and responsible choices when given correct and reliable information. In my opinion, this is preferable to withholding such information because withholding information may have adverse effects that are described later.

**The challenge of power disparity and consent**

\textit{“I have found pupils that want to participate in your research!”} said the teacher enthusiastically upon entering the small office where Godfrey (my interpreter) and I had been waiting anxiously. We followed the teacher, looking around the compound of the school expecting to see a group of about ten children with whom we could start the research. Except for some small children playing at the dusty edge of the compound, the area was empty. Through the barred but open windows of the classrooms we could hear children repeating after their teachers, singing or chatting. Some children were curiously peeking through the bars at us, whispering to their classmates and drawing their attention to us. To my complete horror, the teacher stepped into an overfull classroom where all pupils stood up, simultaneously shouting \textit{“Good morning Teacher!”} while disappearing halfway in their benches in an attempt to make a kneeling gesture with legs that were too long to fit in the small wooden bench-table combinations that they had to share with too many classmates. About 80 pairs of eyes were staring back at us, silently and curiously awaiting our answer. ‘.. \textit{Uuh…Good morning},’ Godfrey and I responded back shyly. Then the teacher

\textsuperscript{16}The Netherlands belong to the 5 countries with the lowest teenage birth rates in the world (6.2 per 1000 women aged 15-19) (UNICEF 2001)
introduced us in KiSwahili, Godfrey whispering in my ear: “The mzungu\textsuperscript{17} wants to know about the relationships between school pupils and issues to do with AIDS. You will help her.” Then he turned to me in English: “you have the floor, they will help you”. Instead of leaving us alone, as I had requested when explaining the importance of having no adults present in order for the children to speak freely, the teacher remained where he was. A sudden feeling of panic hit me: this was not what I had in mind…

[Field notes Nyahali School]

I used child participatory research as a means to diminish the existing power disparity and to create a conducive environment in which informal discourse could be produced that subsequently provided the core of the study’s data. However, in Tanzania, children are not used to being consulted by adults, involved in decision-making or asked about their opinions. Children are expected to be respectful towards adults, obedient and submissive and speaking up to adults is considered very disrespectful. This is reflected in the teacher’s way of ‘selecting’ participants: “You will help her”. When I was introduced to a child in Tanzania, the child would greet me with ‘Shikamoo’, a respectful greeting voiced towards those who are older or hold a higher status. In some cases girls made a kneeling gesture and both boys and girls would avert their eyes and become silent, giving the impression of being shy. Many boys and girls will not make eye contact with an adult speaker and give short answers or remain silent. Girls tended to hide their faces in their arms when I spoke to them particularly in the rural areas. Therefore, it was challenging to reduce the children’s reticence to voice their opinions and experiences to my interpreter and me. Equable communication was crucial for the collection of meaningful data and also so the children had the ability to consent and the right to withdraw from the study. According to Clacherty and Donald breaking through children’s reticence to voice their opinions to adults is essential in order to “… conducting discussions around questions of anonymity, non-malfeasance and beneficence, wherein children’s open participation is often critical in determining an ethical position” (2007:149).

In order to reduce the children’s reticence, we aimed to work with groups of approximately ten boys and/or girls to build trust and rapport. We planned to start with general topics about their everyday lives and move on from there to more sensitive topics and ask for their participation in individual interviews. As the example of our initial classroom contact illustrates, this plan was not always successful. Frequently we were dependent on gatekeepers, for example teachers, for introductions to the children. We had hoped to have a small group of boys and/or girls from 8-14 years old sitting in a circle somewhere outside on the school

\textsuperscript{17} The word Mzungu is used to refer to foreigners who are white.
grounds. However, twice we found ourselves in front of an entire class. One class had 80 Standard 7 pupils from 13-17 years old (the Nyahali group) and the other class had 30 Standard 5 and 6 pupils from 11-14 years old (the Kijiji rural group). In both classes the teacher’s introduction created the impression that we were AIDS educators and neither teacher left the classroom after introducing us. It is during confronting moments of unexpected realities when most ethical dilemmas occur and decisions have to be made.

Consent as a process

In both the Nyahali and Kijiji rural groups I made the decision to ask the teachers to leave the classroom. This was a disrespectful request since I was a guest. The teachers were older than I was and male. My action created the impression for the children that I was sending their teachers off. Yet in both cases the teachers left. I explained to the children that I was a researcher and wanted to learn from them about children’s lives, friendships and relationships in Tanzania. I told them I was particularly interested in hearing their experiences and opinions about ‘mambo ya mapenzi’ (things to do with love/sex). Then I asked who would be interested to talk with us, and all fingers were raised in the air. This form of consent could be considered as ethically unjust. However, this form of consent illustrates a reality we frequently encountered when conducting fieldwork in Tanzania with children and adults alike. Even if you stress potential harm or limited benefits of the participation, people are curious and often participate as a welcome distraction from more boring every day activities. Some people just hope that some sort of benefit might arise, especially when a foreigner is involved. I believe that most people (including children) confronted with a researcher’s request for consent to participate in a study actually take a ‘wait-and-see’ attitude and evaluate the cost and benefit in an ongoing way. If the subject finds that participation in the study ceases to be fun, no longer interesting or becomes threatening or uncomfortable, they stop giving information, modify their information or withdraw. Another potential problem is that parents or gatekeepers might order their children to participate in research because they have their own expectations and their children may not be able to protest – even when the researcher asks for their consent after their parents have gone.

18 In addition to the Nyahali group and the Kijiji group, another group of primary school students were involved in the research. The school of this group was located in Magu town and referred to as such. Next to the three groups of school going children, one group of children who were not going to school was participating in the research, referred to as the Jabali group. In the paragraph Selection of research locations the groups will be properly introduced.

19 After the session with the children I returned to the teachers to apologize and to explain, again and very carefully, my intentions and why I found it important to speak to children alone. I explained about trust and confidentiality. The teachers said they understood completely and that no harm was done…
I realized that the ‘consent’ given by the students in the classes was influenced by many factors, including: the setting, group pressure, the way I was introduced, my position of power and the limited information given to the children. Yet I thought there was no harm to ‘just to talk with the children in a more general way’, waiting to see where the conversation would lead. I would then ask for a more ethically sound consent from the children when smaller groups were formed to discuss sensitive issues. Therefore, I assume the role that I was offered by the teachers and the children. The interpreter, Godfrey and I stayed in front of the class and asked general questions about their school, their classes and what they did after school time. The children followed school protocol and addressed me as ‘teacher’, pointing a finger in the air when they wanted to answer the question and standing up if I pointed them out. In the Standard 7 class (with 80 pupils) formal protocols were quickly abandoned and after 20 minutes or so we spoke about game playing after school time. The children told me that boys and girls do not play games together.

Me: So boys and girls do not play together?
Class: Nooo! [as if it was absurd that I didn’t know]
Me: Why not?
Boy: Because girls think we want to have sex with them and avoid us [laughter]
Girl: Because we are not allowed!
Other girl: Because boys approach us and offer us money to have sex

I was astonished how quickly and relatively easily the topic presented itself. Perhaps this occurred because the children in this class were a bit older (mean age 14-15 years old) than the children in other classes. Another possibility was due to my introduction and their expectations about my interest in the subject. Or perhaps their prompt discussion of sex was due to experience talking to people from NGO’s or AIDS prevention programs. It is also possible that it was due to the fact that I was so obviously different from a Tanzanian teacher; a foreigner, a woman wearing pants, sending a teacher off and asking about their views. The fact is that the children appeared comfortable with the format of the conversation and the topic and we continued talking for at least half an hour. After this initial meeting I returned to the same classroom once a week over a period of seven months. My conversations with the children became increasingly interactive and I eventually was addressed as Miranda instead of ‘teacher’. During the first sessions with this group, I continued to seek an ethically ‘just’ consent from the children. However, I soon realized that this was going to be impossible with such a large group. The problem was particularly difficult because the student group was in
constant flux (curious new children were added to the class and other children stopped showing up, or skipped a session with me). It was impossible for me to remember all the names and faces of all 80 children. Furthermore, the children began interrupting my ‘informed consent talk’ saying that it was becoming boring and that they already understood what I was talking about. When I defended myself by noting that new students had been added to their class, they said the new students also knew. What I think they meant by knew, was that the newcomers were relatively safe to join in, because of the large group size. The children could walk in and out of the room and they could choose how and whether to reveal sensitive information. As a matter of fact, the children appeared to be conscious and skilled about how to reveal information without running the risk of overexposing themselves and subsequently being punished or laughed at or suffering other unwelcome consequences. As you can see from the short conversation above, children often used terms like ‘us’, ‘we’, ‘boys’ and ‘girls’. By personally distancing themselves, the children could safely refer to their own experiences without revealing themselves to others or me. Although the information did not refer specifically to any of the children’s own experiences, there was consensus among the students that the situations and dynamics described were common for many children. Data gathered through such large ‘Focus Group Discussions’ (FGD) is often normative with adults or children and caution is advised when interpreting the data because it can range from assumptions, perceptions, experiences close to the children themselves, to actual experiences.

During these large classroom sessions, the children learned more about my interests and intentions. They had time to observe my interaction with other children, teachers and with Godfrey, my interpreter. They learned more about the goals of the research and knew they could withdraw without consequences (they had seen others withdraw without me following up on the drop outs). I would argue that, especially for child participatory research, consent should be a continuous process whereby the responsibility lies with the researcher to safeguard the continuous option for the child to withdraw from the study. The researcher must continually monitor and project the consequences of the participants’ current and future participation, rather than rely on an a priori consent. Power disparity and the child’s hope for potential benefits make a priori consent problematic. The information needed to acquire such consent might limit topics for discussion (e.g. naming all the themes and topics I wanted to collect information on. I preferred to maintain space for the children to lead the discussions, to give their own definitions and to introduce topics they found important (see next paragraph).
Therefore, when the dynamics of the data collection method or setting were about to change, I discussed this with the children and asked for more specific (and meaningful) consent.

Anonymity through projection

Initially I focused on building rapport and trust with the children and to gain insight in the research dynamics of the large group sessions. When I thought the level of rapport and trust was good enough, I asked for the consent of the students to participate in conversations in smaller groups either in mixed groups, boys and girls or in separate boy or girl groups. At this point, many of the children did not want to participate and specifically many girls refused (about half of the girls from the large group sessions). At a later stage, many children also did not want to be involved in personal interviews. To my disappointment those girls who withdrew were the ones I thought were sexually active, based on my impression during the larger group discussions. Perhaps their reasons for withdrawal were related to issues of trust and rapport, the presence of an adult male (Godfrey), the school setting, or the sensitivity of the topics. But I believe this refusal indicates how risky it is for girls to reveal their sexual experiences. It also shows how difficult it is to get personal accounts from female children about sexual experiences. Therefore the data that I gathered was limited, especially in regard to girls’ intimate experiences with sex. However, in some cases I had a chance to speak to girls who I suspected to be sexually active. Most of the girls were telling stories projectively, in the form of a narrative about a close friend. In a few cases at a later stage in the research, girls would disclose that they had talked about themselves, but the majority did not. I felt it was inappropriate to probe too much on the details of the sexual experience or to force a confession out of the girls. I believe that the girls did not only use this projective strategy just to prevent punishment or out of concern what others might think. It is possible that the girls were keeping their sexual relationships hidden and were accustomed to sharing sexual information in this way, even with close friends. Speaking out, confessing, can mean there is no option for denial in the future and this might be scary indeed if you have done something that you are not supposed to do. Boys, on the other hand, seemed to have fewer problems revealing their personal sexual experiences. Some boys were so eager to share their experiences, especially in the context of the smaller group discussions, that we suspected that we were hearing some exaggeration of the truth.

So how valid then are the sexual accounts of boys and girls? In order to increase validity we evaluated the consistency of stories and behavior and collected data using a variety of
qualitative research methods, similar to those suggested by Parker et al. (2003). The authors emphasize how the combination of different methods in a study of sexual culture will increase insights and offer wider coverage. Through the use of various techniques and comparing data from different settings, we were able to triangulate data and analyze group dynamics and peer influence. The goal therefore, was not only to obtain ‘truthful’ information about personal sexual experiences and opinions, but also to correctly interpret what is communicated and how it is communicated.

Methods, interpretation and children as co-researchers

Cultures of communication
The children and Godfrey had central roles in the research process. As mentioned earlier, our aim was to create a conducive environment for children to express themselves by positioning them as experts, involving them as co-researchers and attending to what Christensen terms children’s ‘cultures of communication’ (2004). We left space for children to give their own definitions of terms and to introduce topics they found important. We asked them to explain their terminology or slang and used these words or expressions ourselves, or used the literal English translations. The most frequently used expressions that we took over and I continued to use in the text are: ‘to get involved with’ (referring to sexual relationships); ‘agreement’ (see Chapter 6); ‘being approached’ (boy initiating courtship); ‘chasing’ (boy following girl and attempting to seduce her); ‘skinning’ (Chapter 6). Godfrey was crucial in helping me to understand the children’s cultures of communication. He and the children seemed to have a comfortable relationship. I suspect this had to do with Godfrey’s personal background, his character traits and his ‘style’. Godfrey was 26 years old during the research period. He grew up in Bukoba on the western shores of Lake Victoria, Tanzania, before his authoritative father sent him to boarding school in England when he was 16. Godfrey’s experience of growing up in both Tanzania and the UK made him able to relate to both the Tanzanian children as well as to my personal assumptions and working ethos. He had a calm, polite and respectful demeanor but at the same time the children viewed him as a ‘cool’ guy. His ‘style’ was illustrated by his love of rap music and ‘bongo flava’ (Tanzanian hip-hop music style which is very popular among youth, see Chapter 5) and his sporty looks and athletic physique reflected his love for soccer. He had a thorough knowledge of local slang and used words and expressions that the children and youth used (including handshake rituals that boggled my
mind). He used to playfully encourage boys and girls to voice their views using his sense of humor, which added to a relaxed atmosphere.

Godfrey:  Do you hang out with girls?
Bo:  No, I don’t have female friends

**Godfrey:** Why not?
Bo:  I can talk with them, but I would not play with them. I’m a boy, she’s a girl, it doesn’t work

**Godfrey:** Are you interested in having a girlfriend?
Bo:  [Shying away] Nah

**Godfrey:** You have never seen a girl and thought ‘damn, she’s beautiful man’?
Bo:  [Giggles, shakes his head] You’re tricking me! Okay, sure I have

**Godfrey:** What type of girl attracts you most?
Bo:  Any girl, man
**Godfrey:** Even if she has only one leg?
Bo:  [Starts to laugh] No man, I like it when she’s nice and beautiful…

Godfrey’s communication skills definitely helped to build rapport and created an environment in which children could express themselves in their own terms. I saw it as a compliment if the children trusted us enough to ask us questions. I found that many boys sought Godfrey’s advice, especially in regard to sex and relationships. This was certainly a responsibility for Godfrey, as the boys seemed to look at him as a role model. Godfrey’s honest replies always included an emphasis on responsibility and being a gentleman, which I agreed with. Although the girls did not trust or relate to Godfrey as quickly as boys did, they appeared to be comfortable with his presence. Most girls were able to discuss sensitive issues in his presence. I suspect some girls enjoyed getting a chance to talk to an adult male on fairly equal terms (they could voice their opinions and were taken serious). In personal interviews with girls, Godfrey positioned himself in the background only translating and not offering questions or insights, as he would do during group discussions or conversations with boys. Therefore the conversation with the girls felt more like a dialogue between only the girl and me. I believe that Godfrey’s role in the fieldwork phase of the research went well beyond what is normally captured with the term ‘interpreter’ or ‘research assistant’. Rather, I think of Godfrey as a co-researcher and the ethnographic data presented in Part 2 should be seen as a co-production of the children, Godfrey and me. It is crucial to realize that potentially we would have collected different data if Godfrey had been female or if I had not had to use an interpreter.
The children’s role as co-researchers was not limited to selecting topics for discussion and explaining language and non-verbal communications\(^{20}\). They were also involved in decisions about settings and methods that suited their preferred ways of expression. Children actively helped to collect data by facilitating group discussions and interviewing each other with the video camera without assistance. They assisted with interpreting data by reflecting on videoed material. We asked the children to think about and discuss solutions for issues they indicated were problematic. Occasionally we explicitly consulted children, for example in cases of ethical dilemmas involving gatekeepers. Feedback from the children on research methods or topics became more routine, as it became part of the research process. Children participated in the research to varying degrees. The degree of participation depended on the capacity and interest of the child or the stage or setting of the research. On the occasions when we decided to appoint a higher degree of participation for particular children, to increase the efficiency of the data collection, the group immediately resisted and forced us to correct our mistake\(^{21}\).

**Drawings**

Attempting to address the reticence of the children in the other three groups to speak with us as researchers did not always go as smoothly as with the Nyahali group. We were under the impression that the younger the children were and the more rural the location, the harder it would be to convince children to overcome their reticence. This appeared to be a particular problem for girls and for children who did not attend school. In order to build rapport and trust, we visited the children frequently and always started with group discussion. We used drawings as an icebreaking tool and to facilitate conversations. Depending on the child’s capacity and interest, we would encourage them to draw for instance a storyline or a comic and many of the children who were literate would add text to their drawings (see right). These drawings were interesting data for our research. Some children suggested we should show the best drawings to children in the other research locations to

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\(^{20}\) E.g. bodily expressions in flirting, Chapter 6

\(^{21}\) Elaboration follows in the paragraph on Power and Respect.
facilitate discussions. We built on this idea and asked a young artist\textsuperscript{22} we had befriended to make drawings on basis of the information we collected through the drawings and group discussions. Children with whom we had built up rapport gave feedback on the appropriateness of the drawings (whether they recognized the situations depicted as happening in their environments) after which we used them to facilitate conversations in the rural areas and later during in-depth interviews. Projection in drawings is a safe way to encourage discussion about sensitive issues because children can say what they thought the girl or boy in the picture was thinking and what would happen next. For girls in a rural lakeshore village who did not attend school, the drawings offered an object upon which to fix their eyes so they did not have to face us. The use of drawings also added to our strategy of making participation fun and to position the child as the expert. The fact that I was a foreigner gave me an excuse to ask ‘stupid’ questions and most children seemed to be pleased to take on the task of enlightening me.

\textit{Role-play}

Once I believed I had established rapport with a group of children, I would ask them if I could record the group discussions with the video camera (but never individual interviews). Recording the discussions provided Godfrey and me with a way to re-visit the discussion and to determine if we had missed anything, analyze group dynamics and discuss an interpretation of what had occurred. Godfrey literally transcribed all the recordings in KiSwahili and then translated them into English. At first I was concerned that the camera would make the children shy or they would be concerned that I might show the videotapes to others. However, the large majority of the participants showed great enthusiasm about the presence of a camera, especially when we showed them how it worked and they could see themselves in playback. We explained to them that we used the video camera to listen to them again at a later stage and wanted to be sure not to miss anything. The children seemed to interpret the camera as evidence of their importance to us Allowing children to do the recording was proof of our trust in them and emphasized our appreciation of them as active participants and co-researchers. When the camera switched on most children took their role as informant or co-researcher most serious. The presence of the camera also triggered performance-type responses. Children would stand up in front of the camera to show how boys or girls would

\textsuperscript{22} The artist’s name is Jonathan, 20 years of age. Jonathan used to live in the streets of Mwanza as a street child. Through the help of an NGO he learned to make drawings which he sells. He managed to generate enough income to rent a place, but he still feels closely related to the street children and street life. Jonathan used to help us when we were conducting interviews with street children. We paid him for his drawings.
walk, talk, dress, stand and move in order to draw attention or communicate interest. Or they demonstrated how a boy would approach a girl and how a girl would react. When I asked the children to explain to me what they meant by ‘temptations’ they offered to perform a play. Children, including some of the shyest among them, turned out to be excellent and creative actors. They made up storylines while they were acting and improvised adapting to each other in an almost professional way. The plays the children performed gave us insight into complex matters such as relationships with parents or teachers and issues including poverty and peer pressure. Similar to the projective narratives and drawings, the children could ‘act out’ personal experiences and reveal highly sensitive information while not overtly saying this was happening to them. They did not require guidance, except perhaps a theme, like ‘temptations’ or ‘courtship’, and only a short time to prepare (sometimes half an hour was enough). And most importantly they enjoyed doing it and loved to see themselves back on the laptop. While watching their own play, some children would get so involved in the story they seemed to forget that the “teacher” in the play was actually their classmate and they would shout comments of disapproval about the “teacher’s” behavior. Showing the play back to the children was a useful way of facilitating more discussion. These discussions were often more in-depth than the larger classroom sessions. With the approval of the actors/participants we showed the most interesting plays to the groups of participants in the other research locations, to see their responses and ask for interpretation, differences and familiarities. Seeing children participate and address sensitive topics also encouraged other children to contribute their own views and experiences, even when they differed from those on the tape.

Child-to-child interviews

Because the role-play exercises were so successful and the children were used to the camera, we asked them to have small ‘group discussions’ on certain themes on their own. Small groups of friends would use an empty classroom to sit and ‘talk’ and record the conversations. These groups usually included 3-4 boys or 3-4 girls. There was only group with mixed genders. Sometimes only two children interviewed each other. Most of the children who we asked to help us to collect data in this way were key informants who had given us personal interviews, and their closest friends. In one case we received a tape of girls playing around, discussing how they could persuade us to buy them a soda (which was still informative as it showed the girls’ manipulation skills). The other recordings contained personal stories,

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23 See Nyahali play in Chapter 4  
24 More detailed descriptions follow in Part II
mainly of courtship, feelings, concerns, getting caught by parents and sometimes included sexual experiences. Particularly interesting about the data collected through this method was learning what language, humor and imagery were used when there were no adults present. Although there was a risk of ‘nonsense’ stories or exaggerations, we found that the children tended to be very personal about their feelings and emotions or would talk about ‘mistakes’ that they made. Children’s direct access to peer culture enables them to ask questions and collect data in ways that adults cannot. Therefore, this method was useful for the collection of narratives that deviated from social norms and formed a valuable source of information in addition to the data from the other settings. I sometimes got the impression that the children had forgotten about the camera or during the moment of filming they did not realize that we as researchers would be watching the video. However, we were always in the vicinity of the filming. One child would actively handle the camera and the others would take turns interviewing, talking and recording. In any case, Godfrey and I appreciated the amount of trust the children had in us not to show the tapes to anyone and to handle the information with the utmost discretion. In honor of their trust we did not confront the children who made the tapes with specific follow-up questions or embarrass them by referring to their stories even when they were alone with us. Only when a child initiated a discussion of topics that were mentioned in a videotape would we indicate that we were aware of what the children had spoken about on the tape.

Other performance data triggered by the video camera included story telling (referred to as ‘love safari’) and songs, in particular rap, which appeared to be a powerful way for both boys and girls to express themselves. The skills that children showed in role play, storytelling and singing reflect that these are forms of expression that are common in the Tanzanian context and available to them. This research method involving children has proven successful in this study and might be useful in research with adults too.

*Power and respect*

The videotapes were useful feedback to evaluate our own performance and communication skills as researchers. We were unpleasantly confronted by how much we actually missed while conducting group discussions as evidenced by our misinterpretations and leading questions. Therefore, the videos proved to be a good on-going learning tool. Because the children who moved around handled the camera, it revealed remarks or dynamics that perhaps we were not intended to hear. We were not aware of these events because they occurred out
of our sight or hearing. The children would talk among themselves or negotiate answers particularly when Godfrey was translating for me. In one tape of a group discussion on the subject of ‘being approached’ we could hear two girls in the background whisper: “I can’t tell my story, he will beat me up!” This was followed by: “Teacher [name] is not going to beat you up, he’s not here, he won’t know”. Then the girl says: “Don’t say his name!” The girls were perhaps not aware that the camera had moved into their vicinity and we were confronted with information we could not easily ignore. Sometimes we heard children complaining about being bored or they gossiped about us (e.g. about our clothing or how Godfrey looked). Perhaps such information was not intended for us to be heard, yet I suspect that in some cases the children were aware that the camera would record their voices but not their faces and that they might have used this opportunity to give us feedback, to alert us about the ‘bad’ teachers, to provoke us or just to be a bit rebellious.

Other, less desirable effects of the video camera included ‘overacting’ and jealousy. The camera symbolized modernity, status, money and, if chosen to handle it, trust and competence. We had to be very aware to rotate use of the camera evenly among the students. Sometimes we deliberately selected students who remained in the background such as shy young girls. Our motivation was to empower these students. It is important to remember that a video camera as a tool can also convey power and it should therefore be used with care. In more general terms, the same can be said about ‘attention’. Once the children became accustomed to working with us they liked to be heard, to show their ‘expertise’ and active participation seemed to boost their self-esteem. The empowering aspect of participatory research is of course very welcome. However, in some cases the children competed for our attention (e.g. fighting over who could carry my bag). At the beginning of the research process we had selected two children with good interviewing skills to conduct child-to-child interviews. But we received complaints that it was unfair that they were favored over others. We were even more concerned when these two children were bullied by some of the jealous children. We realized that we had to stop working with only two child interviewers and became conscious of how to divide our attention and ‘tasks’, even if this did not benefit the research. Such power differentials between peers are important to consider, in research, but also in peer education programs. We found that many children at the schools where such peer education programs had been implemented showed resentment towards peer educators. These

25 See the paragraph on ‘bad’ teachers in Chapter 9
children complained about the peer educators’ arrogance (they were found to be ‘preaching’) and inability to answer the children’s more difficult questions. Power differentials among the children were also evident in the environment that we created for the children with our ‘research activities’. The children used our ‘research exercises’ or us as researchers as a means to gain popularity in the group or to show how ‘cool’ they were. Boys asked Godfrey or me provocative personal or kinky questions. Occasionally, girls flirted provocatively with Godfrey. Some girls used the public platform to brag about a story of being approached. Boys often bragged about their girlfriends. Some children simply showed off with answers or comments that made the group laugh. These power dynamics within child participatory research pose ethical challenges and sometimes force the adult researcher(s) to actually claim back power and draw boundaries. In order to reclaim power or draw a boundary it was usually adequate to bounce the question back to the student who was asking, ask the group why they were laughing or to show disappointment. The reality of adult-child power disparity during the research process with children requires not only minimizing the disparity but also changing the power dynamics in order to create a balance. It is a mistake to think that children are devoid of power or that adults should hand over their power. It is therefore a misguided strategy for a researcher to try ‘to become a child’ and attempts to do so will be answered with disrespect and distrust. The challenge for researchers lies within creating an atmosphere of mutual respect; even if that means that the researcher has to use his or her power to achieve this.

Triangulation and interpretation

We used large and small group discussions, individual interviews and child-to-child interviews to collect and analyze data, from normative perspectives to personal accounts. Drawings, songs and role-play are helpful tools for facilitation of conversations and data collection. We also used unfinished sentences to be filled in by the children in smaller group discussions. This method is especially useful for assessment of expectations and assumptions, for example ‘rights’ and interpretation of signs and symbols. We asked the children to write essays based on topics we provided. We expected that this exercise would provide the children with an anonymous way of revealing personal experiences or views that deviated from the social or cultural norm. But the essays proved not to be very successful. It appeared that the assignment was too similar to school exercises. The results were frequently normative or general accounts, as if written to get a good mark and often included bullet points or statements about good and bad behavior. A comparison of the information collected with
various methods and settings helped to differentiate between the elements that influenced the process of decision-making for the children. Triangulation helped to assess the plausibility, reliability and validity of the data. However, this (continuous) process also revealed inconsistencies and conflicts. We addressed these contradictions in further conversations with the children. However, we found that debates and ‘card exercises’ helped to create more in-depth and insightful responses about the children’s emotional, thought and prioritization processes. Discussions during debates and card exercises were at least as interesting as the outcomes. We did not interrupt the processes for translation (and thus could not give guidance), but recorded and transcribed the events and later came back with questions.

**Gatekeepers and the challenge of non-malfeasance**

*Guardian teachers and ethical back-up*

Central to this research is the principle of ‘ethical symmetry’ as suggested by Christensen and Prout (2002). This means that the researcher starts with the view that the ethical relationship between researcher and informant is the same whether the informant is an adult or a child (Christensen & Prout 2002). Yet, as I made clear in the previous section, this does not mean that I presume symmetry in social or power positions between me and the children. It does mean that in this research the core principle of my code of conduct was ‘primum non nocere’ (first, do no harm) or to minimize risks for potential research participants also known as the concept of non-malfeasance (Clacherty & Donald 2007). Considering the topic of the research and indications of frequent sexual harassment in Tanzanian schools, there was a chance that I would encounter children with individual or psychosocial problems and who might ask for my help. If such cases occur, one would ideally refer the child to professional help. But in the Tanzanian context institutions or individuals that provide such help are scarce and not easily accessible. In order to ensure that I was able to direct the children to support if needed, I contacted certain NGO’s and the Ministry of Education involved in the *Guardian Programme*. This program aims to protect adolescent girls against sexual exploitation by schoolboys, teachers and (young) men from outside school. The guardian program is active in certain schools in Mwanza and Magu districts. One or two guardian teachers in a school are selected with input from pupils, teachers and parents and receive training. The guardians’ role

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26 See the debate on risk, responsibility and condoms in Chapter 8 and the card exercise on the role of love and attraction in Chapter 7.
is to provide health education and act as counselors for sexual health problems. The guardians monitor and advise pupils on safe sexual behavior and practices (Mgalla et al. 1998, TANESA 2003). Staff members of the ministry or NGO introduced me to the headmasters and guardian teachers at three schools. I had obtained an official research clearance and permit from the Tanzanian Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH) and written permission from the District Educational Commissioner from the Ministry of Education to conduct the research in primary schools in Mwanza and Magu districts. After informing the headmasters and guardian teachers about the content and aims of the proposed research, they gave me permission to proceed at their schools. The guardian teachers were my contact persons; I would make appointments with them, they would introduce me to pupils and act as my ‘ethical back-up’. I asked the guardian teachers to help organize a meeting with the children’s parents and caretakers so I could solicit their consent for their child to participate in the research. However, the guardian teachers at all three schools told me that parental or caretaker permission was not necessary as the parents and caretakers had already given their consent for the guardian teacher and sexual education programs in the schools. My activities were seen as an extension of this program and so they insisted that their permission as guardian teachers was sufficient. Furthermore, obtaining parental or caretaker consent would have been difficult in practice. Some parents and caretakers are hard to contact in person. They live far away from the school, have little time, no money for transportation, or are illiterate and many pupils do not live with their biological parents. I decided to follow the guardian teachers’ advice for the additional reason that I was concerned that the parents or caregivers could potentially hassle their children about the contents of the discussions or push them to obtain material benefit from their child’s participation27. Furthermore, many parents might have refused their consent due to general child protection or fear that the research might encourage their children to engage in sex. Parents might have been reticent to give their consent because if a school pupil is found to be sexually active, s/he is expelled from school. This risk alone could have been adequate for parents not to give their consent. This would have been particularly true if they were already aware of their child’s sexual activity or were actually encouraging it. This is not uncommon in the context of poverty when sexually active children can receive material rewards28.

27 See my problems with a priori consent described earlier.
28 See Chapter 4
Minimizing risk versus participant observation

Children in Tanzania keep their sexual interests and behavior hidden from adults, in particular from parents, caretakers and teachers out of fear of repercussions. In order to gain and maintain their trust we minimized our interactions with parents, caretakers and teachers. I did not want parents or caretakers to start questioning their children or punishing them for talking about sexual issues. Therefore we conducted the research at the children’s schools. It is for this reason that I decided not to live in the areas where the children were living. Instead, I lived in Mwanza City and Godfrey and I travelled to the schools in my car. Unfortunately, this limited our opportunities for participant observation, a research strategy that allows the researcher to become familiar with groups and individuals in their natural environments. I particularly missed out on observing the children’s communication and relationship with their parents or caretakers, siblings and with children in the neighborhood who did not go to school. Instead, we had to rely on what the children, and later, parents reported. For insight about the childhood dynamics outside of school I relied on Godfrey’s insights, on participant observation with children in the (urban) area where I lived and on my experiences during the previous child-focused research in Tanzania a few years earlier. I selected one of the guardian schools near the area where I had conducted my previous research. In 2007 I returned for a three-month follow-up investigation to this study, one year after the main research period (between January 2005 and May 2006). I interviewed local parents and caretakers in the community near, but not in the vicinity of, the schools. Because Godfrey was officially employed elsewhere when I returned in 2007 I had to select another interpreter, Christopher. Christopher, in his early 20’s, had just finished secondary school and was waiting for enrollment in university. He helped me interviewing parents, caretakers and children from the new Standard 7 class of the Nyahali primary school29.

Challenges posed by gatekeepers in the Tanzanian context

After a long drive to Magu we reach the school, just before lunch break. We were almost an hour late. A boy nicknamed Shilling and his two friends were still waiting for us, but hungry. The head mistress was not present and we went to the guardian teacher to ask her if we could take the children to a nearby lunch place. She became quite upset with the idea of us taking the kids out of school: “The children are the school’s responsibility… it is impossible to take them out unless they are accompanied by one of the teachers!” Her concern was understandable and I asked her if it would be okay to bring some food to the school so we could interview the children over lunch. Over

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29 See his role in the ‘sexual education session’ in Chapter 9.
break there are plenty of empty classrooms that we could use. The guardian teacher agreed and we walked back to the car. Shilling and his friends followed us because we would give them the camera so they could start interviewing each other.

A sudden scream from the teacher’s collective room made the children freeze, turn around and hurry back. One of the teachers stood in the doorway holding the large cane, which is normally used to discipline ‘bad’ pupils. Fear took hold of me as I watched my worst nightmare coming true. I wanted to run to the room but Godfrey said: “No, not yet, stay here”. Because the teachers were yelling, Godfrey could hear what they were saying:

“You should not go with them, they might sell you!” …
“You have to be very careful!” …
“They may say dirty things!” …

I was outraged about what they were saying. But most of all I was upset that they threatened our informants and were ruining the trust and bond we had so carefully built up. The children left the teacher’s room. Out of sight of the teachers I apologized profoundly to the children about what had just happened and that I had put them into this situation. Smiles appeared on their faces… “They said it was forbidden to come with you. But the guardian teacher came just in time to stop them. She explained to them that we were not coming with you. Then they tried to make us tell them what we were talking about with you”. With a glimpse of pride they added: “But we didn’t say anything. We were just silent. Don’t worry, they are just jealous”. I was very angry with myself for not having sensed the teachers’ discontent earlier. I told the children I would return a day later to talk with the headmistress and the teachers. Then Shilling said: “Don’t worry, they whip us all the time. It’s like a game; we have a champion in class who holds the record of being whipped most.”

[Field notes School in Magu town]

Despite my ethical principles and efforts to carefully follow ethical guidelines, this situation occurred. In my attempt to guarantee trust and confidentiality, I had minimized my interactions with teachers who were not head master/mistress or guardian teachers. I had not foreseen that some of the teachers were not content with the fact that we paid little attention to them and were kept in the dark about what was discussed with the children. I had carefully guarded my relationship with the headmistress and guardian teacher at this school and had expected them to pass all information on to their colleagues. I also had expected teachers to approach Godfrey or me in cases of distrust or if they had questions. When I asked the headmistress about this the next day, she explained the school hierarchy and that the teachers have to go through her. I suspected that this hierarchy served to decrease the flow of information about my research to the teachers. In consultation with the headmistress, Godfrey and some of the children, I wrote a two page letter explaining on paper in KiSwahili about my background, aim, methods, confidentiality, supervision and permits (see Appendix 2). I left the teachers alone to read and discuss the document among themselves and returned half an hour later. We sat down and I answered their questions. The teachers were relieved now that they had information. They explained:
In Dar there was somebody doing a research with children and something went wrong with a child. The parents became very upset. If anything happens with the children, we are responsible... And sometimes you hear stories of foreigners kidnapping children. But now we know we can trust you.

From that moment on I made an effort to greet all of the teachers and check with them regularly and personally. Fearing my verbal explanations might not have been sufficient in the other schools as well; I distributed the letter and held similar meetings at the other two schools. To build additional trust and rapport with this group, I organized ‘group interviews’ with the teachers over lunch and brought sodas and food, which pleased them greatly.

I made a serious error that harmed some children. Although it may have been more in my eyes than in theirs, I made the mistake of suggesting that the children be taken out of school and also that I bring food for the informants to the school. Food is a material benefit and just like the camera and attention, it can cause jealousy. As Clacherty and Donald point out, material benefits can lead to resentment against children who participate in research and who gain such benefits (2007)\textsuperscript{30}. They illustrate the moral dilemmas this can cause for researchers when confronted with hungry children in a context of deep poverty. I unintentionally treated children better than teachers in regard to involvement in the research, attention and material benefits. I was showing considerable disrespect since teachers have a higher social status than children. This was a problem even if teachers were not participating in my research. I elaborate on my errors because I believe researchers who use child participatory methodology in the African context will be faced with similar challenges. This would also be true in any context where the importance of children’s opinions and rights are valued differently. Reis and Dedding, for example, show how power differentials between doctors, parents and children in a Dutch hospital setting challenge the researcher to not only address the reticence of children to voice their opinions, but to persuade the adults in this setting to acknowledge children as active social agents with the right to be involved and listened to (2004). In general, researchers who want to study (with) children, have to manage gatekeepers who condition access to children. As Alderson states:

\textsuperscript{30} I observed such resentment during my research with children in Benin on their perceptions of disease transmission (2003b). I had given a pen to the son of the neighbors for helping me with the research. Later that day I witnessed his father beating him and taking the pen. When I asked the father of the boy what was wrong he explained that the gift was not worthy a child, but should be given to adults only.
“The limitations in Europe and North America...[and I would add Africa]...for research by children seem to lie less therefore in children’s (in)competencies, than in adults’ limiting attitudes, in constraints, and concerns for protection over participation rights.” (2000: 254)

For children’s participation in research to be meaningful and successful requires researchers to actively negotiate with the adults in the social context of the research and convince them of the usefulness and added value of children’s input and children’s right to participate.

Sexual harassment in schools

During the research it became clear that the children did not trust teachers or guardian teachers with personal information or questions and therefore I could not refer the children to the guardian teachers if they needed help. Yet stories about sexual harassment and sexual relationships between male teachers and schoolgirls, sadly, were plentiful. These stories however were always second hand; we never encountered an informant who said this was happening to them personally. Neither Godfrey nor I received requests for help. It is possible this was because the children realized how difficult it was to address the situation. But there were many complaints by the children. The difficulty for us in such situations was to assess the reliability of the information and how to interpret the degree of ‘force’, since some girls were said to actively seek out a sexual relationship with a teacher because of the benefits (material and non material like good marks or favors). We even heard stories of ‘deals’ between parents and teachers so that the girl could go to secondary school. Taking action against the teacher involved in such a deal might be harmful for the girl, her family, or her future. The girl would be exposed and in the Tanzanian context it is very difficult to get a teacher convicted. We heard the Ministry of Education often addresses issues of student sexual abuse by a teacher by transferring the teacher to another school, their only option for action when lacking evidence. Yet the longer we worked with the children, the stronger our suspicions that some of the teachers were sexually involved with pupils, even if we did not know which pupils, or exactly which teacher. In one case, a guardian teacher told us that the headmaster of one of the primary schools where we worked was having sex with some of the girls in the school and this confirmed our suspicions. Although schools implement the

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31 See Chapter 9
32 See Chapter 9 for more details about the complexity of such situations and why children in this research found it hard to address issues of sexual relationships between pupils and teachers.
33 See Chapter 4
guardian programme to target sexual abuse by teachers, the guardian teacher’s story\textsuperscript{34} illustrates how difficult it still is to address sexual abuse of children by adult teachers due to power and gender inequalities. When I asked the children and later, the guardian teacher, what they wanted me to do with this information, they said I should write about it so that more people become aware of the scale of this problem in schools in Tanzania. It is clear that something structural needs to be done and there lies a great challenge and responsibility for organizations and governments. The central problem is that none of the children or (female) teachers want to expose themselves in case of repercussions or negative consequences. However, the guardian teacher who reported the headmaster’s sexual involvement with pupils of his school allowed me to report my findings to the NGO responsible for the guardian teacher programme in that particular school. This NGO has a child protection policy and program and is currently addressing the issue.

\textbf{Selection and research locations}

\textit{School pupils}

As mentioned earlier, with the help of NGO’s and the Ministry of Education, I selected three schools to participate in the research study based on interest in the subject and current participation in the guardian programme. The names of the schools and informants have been changed to assure anonymity (for an overview of names of locations and informants see appendix 1). One school was selected as it was near an area where I had conducted research a few years before. I deemed the information collected on household and childhood characteristics in that area during that research to be useful for the current research. I will refer to this research site with the fictitious name \textit{Nyahali} (see map below) It is located some kilometers from the outskirts of \textit{Mwanza City}, the second largest city in Tanzania, on the shore of Lake Victoria (see map below). Parents or caretakers of participants were fishermen and/or farmers and/or involved in small business\textsuperscript{35}. The government or the fishing industry employed some of them. Since \textit{Nyahali} is close to \textit{Mwanza City}, many people have migrated from other regions of Tanzania to live near the city and in \textit{Nyahali}. Yet the majority of the participants in this research belonged to the \textit{Sukuma} tribe, which has traditionally lived in the district. The participating group in the \textit{Nyahali} School was a Standard 7 class of 80 children

\textsuperscript{34} The interview with this guardian teacher is presented in Chapter 9

\textsuperscript{35} For more detailed information see Van Reeuwijk 2003a
between 13 and 17 years old. However, not all children participated in all activities or participated to the same degree. The size and composition of each group discussion differed. Class sessions generally included 40-80 children and smaller group discussions included 4-30 children per group. The mean age of student participants was 14-15 years old. The follow-up research, a year later, included many children from the ‘new’ Standard 7 class.

Map 1  Tanzania

Map 2  Enlargement of Mwanza and Magu regions showing the areas in which Mwanza city, Magu town and Nyahali-, Jabali- and Kijiji villages are located
The second primary school that participated in the research was located in *Magu Town*, a big market town 80 kilometers to the east of *Mwanza* on the main road between *Mwanza City* and *Musoma*. Parents and caretakers of the participants were mostly farmers and/or involved in small business such as selling products in the market. Some parents and caretakers were officially employed. The guardian teacher and headmistress selected the students based on their willingness to participate in the research. The girls who volunteered were mainly those who had been working as peer educators in the sexual education program connected to the guardian programme. In this school we worked with a group of 20 boys (10-16 years old) and a group of 20 girls (10-15 years old) who chose to sit in a circle outside on the school compound. Only at a later stage (approximately after 6 months) did we do research activities with mixed gender groups. I refer to these participants and the area they live in as the school/group in *Magu Town*.

The third primary school was located in a rural area in *Magu* district, about 20 kilometers inland from *Magu Town*. Parents of the participants were mainly farmers. The headmaster selected students based on their willingness to participate in the research. The group consisted of 30 pupils from Standards 5 and 6 and ages 11-14. Activities generally included the whole group or were divided into groups of boys and girls separately. I refer to this school with the name *Kijiji* rural school and to the participants in this school with the name *Kijiji* rural group.

Because teachers were involved in the selection of participants, the children we worked with were slightly older than we aimed for. Because of our interest in sexual relationships of primary school students, the teachers included older pupils who might be more likely to be sexually active. The mean age of the participants was 13-14. In a single class students can have ages that span several years and therefore, participants within the groups also differed in age, sometimes as much as five years. This had consequences for the group dynamics. The voices of the older children were probably heard more than those who were younger.

**Out-of-school children**

Our intention was to involve children who attended school and those who did not in equal numbers as participants in the research. Yet it turned out to be considerably more difficult to access and organize meetings with children who did not attend school (children who lived on the street were an exception, see below). This problem was complicated by the fact that we
did not want to conduct our research in the vicinity of parents, caretakers or other adults. ‘Just sitting somewhere’ in the community would have attracted attention from people passing by who wanted to join or listen in (Van Reeuwijk 2003a and b). We were offered help by a local community based organization that manages an orphanage and provides AIDS education for ‘out of school’ youth in a rural area in the district. Through their mediation we were offered an empty classroom at a fourth school in a lakeshore village between Mwanza City and Magu that I name Jabali. We met there with a group of 12 children who we saw, on average, once every two weeks (7 boys, 5 girls, with a mean age of 13). The children’s houses were located on the farmlands in the area around Jabali village. Some children had to walk for almost an hour to reach the school where we conducted our research activities with them. Making appointments and meeting with them was difficult because they did not wear watches and could not contact me if they could not make it. Because of their responsibilities on the fields, with the cattle or in the household they were frequently late or absent. Due to these practical problems the number of participants in this research that did not attend school was far less than those who did attend school and therefore a good comparison could not be made between the two groups. It was also difficult to persuade these children to openly talk with us. Yet I include the contributions of the ‘out-of-school’ children from Jabali because their voices are so often not heard and they show insight in the lives of children who are particularly disadvantaged.

Overview of research activities

The research reported here consists of three periods of data collection: a pilot study over six weeks in 2004, the main fieldwork period from January 2005 until April 2006 and a follow-up visit of three months in 2007. During the first five months of the main fieldwork period (January 2005-May 2005) I could not interact with school pupils due to a delay in acquiring the official research permission from COSTECH. In this period I mainly ‘spoke’ with children who lived on the street, because they were easier to access. I have chosen not to include their accounts here, because their situations were considerably different from the other children we subsequently interviewed. The sexual experiences of children who live in the street are frequently related to survival, abuse, force, group initiation and peer relationships
(kunyenga)\textsuperscript{36}. Yet the street children helped to develop some of the methods and pointed out important topics related to sex and sexuality that we used when we started the ‘official’ research in the second part of 2005.

From the four different groups described in the previous sections about 20 children became what we termed ‘key-informants’. We had several personal interviews with these specific children and they conducted the child-to-child interviews with their friends from the same school. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the names, ages and locations of the (key) informants who were quoted most. Over 60 hours of videotape of 15 child-to-child interviews, eight role plays, two ‘organized’ class debates, 35 larger and smaller group discussions, one ‘sexual education lesson’ and three ‘card exercise’ sessions, were transcribed into Kiswahili and then literally translated into English. Sixty personal interviews with children (40) and adults (20 households were approached during the revisit in 2007) were written down, as well as interviews and conversations with teachers, observations and field notes. In addition a few dozen drawings and handwritten essays were collected. I used Atlas.ti, a software program for qualitative data analysis, to code and analyze the written and translated data.

**Limitations of the research**

By combining various research methods and involving children as active participants and co-researchers I attempted to collect data that genuinely represented the children’s views and experiences in regard to sex and sexuality. However, the data has limitations. I did not manage to convince girls to speak openly about intimate experiences regarding sex. Because these accounts are missing it is possible to have the impression that girls are overly rational or engage in sexual relationships mainly for material reasons. Keep in mind that having limited information about the emotional and intimate aspects of girls’ sexual experiences does not mean they are not experienced. It was just very difficult to get access to this information and I found it inappropriate to ask too detailed questions (I did not want to take the risk that children label the questions or me as ‘dirty’) or to make the girls uncomfortable by too much probing. Other themes with limited information are the influence of religion, media and modernity and consequentially are only superficially addressed in the analysis. Although I

\textsuperscript{36} For more information on street children in Mwanza and their sexual experiences, see Lockhart (2002) and Rajani & Kudrati (1996). Kunyenga refers to homosexual practices between street boys.
actively asked the children about these themes, they seemed to be of minor concern to the children and were rarely mentioned spontaneously. Exceptions were the influence of pornography, music, the wish for modern clothing, mobile phones and in general ‘living in the city’. We encountered some children from very religious families (this is mentioned when I refer to them) who were resolute in their religious reason to abstain from sex, but they were few. It is possible that very religious children might not have participated in this research and therefore their views are underrepresented. In addition, children were most likely not aware of how religion, media and modernity influence them, instead of there being no influence at all. But because in this research I departed from what is at stake for children, what they indicated concerns them, this study does not provide an in depth analysis of the role of these themes on children’s sexual behavior.

In order to understand the sexual behavior of the children living in the areas I studied, I first will contextualize the children in their social worlds as mediating their experiences, before moving on to the ethnographic part of this book. Therefore, the next chapter will provide local understandings of childhood, gender and sexuality, based on information from the children themselves and from parents and caretakers (of other children), triangulated with information already available from previously published literature.
III  CHILDHOOD SEXUALITY IN TANZANIA

The aim of this study is to understand children’s sexual behavior in the Mwanza and Magu districts of northwest Tanzania. Therefore, it is important to consider the daily contexts of children’s social lives and position and the children’s sexual behavior within the local understandings and norms of childhood, gender and sexuality. Sexual behavior is influenced by the meanings and values children learn to attach to sex and sexuality. These are influenced by a complex array of social influences that affect the development of a system of sexual meanings, gender roles and gender identities. This chapter will examine the local Tanzanian understanding of childhood, gender and sexuality based on descriptions of the children themselves of their daily lives, hopes, dreams and concerns. The description will also include perceptions of the parents and caretakers in respect to the norms for a child’s upbringing and explanations of childhood sexuality. These descriptions form a framework for the children’s sexual behavior. The main question to be addressed in this chapter is whether childhood sexuality can be seen as a violation or a confirmation of norms and values in social contexts of Mwanza and Magu.

**Childhood in Tanzania**

Why are those children playing? They should dig!

[**Woman’s remark when passing the compound of a street children’s organization where the boys were playing soccer**]

**Daily lives: Ability and responsibility**

Childhood in Tanzania differs from childhood in the West. Unlike most Western children, Tanzanian children often contribute significantly to their household’s economy. School-going children of the families we interviewed in the Mwanza region in 2001 and 2002 spent on average about three hours on weekdays and eight hours on weekend days helping with the household and/or on income generating activities. In both urban and rural areas, all children helped to fetch water and firewood, clean dishes, sweep the house, clean the home

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37 In addition to data from the fieldwork in 2006 and 2007 information was used from previous research in the Mwanza region from a study called “Children as Agents in Development” (Van Reeuwijk, 2003). For more detailed information on household economy and related roles, tasks and responsibilities as well as perceptions and prioritization of problems I refer to this report.
surroundings, wash clothes, take care of siblings and/or sick family members, and cooking. In addition to household tasks both boys and girls helped their parents, caretakers and families with income generating activities generally farm work, herding cattle, fishing and helped selling products and other small businesses. Children who did not go to school spent most of their day helping with these tasks. Boys and girls spent an equal amount of time and energy in performing tasks. However, girls were more involved in household tasks while boys were more often in the fields or fishing. Parents and caretakers believed that it was essential for their children to perform these tasks as preparation for their future. However, many also acknowledged that they needed their children to help them provide adequate income to sustain the family. Most families in Tanzania are poor subsistence farmers or have ‘small businesses’ (e.g. selling food or firewood or doing handy work). Sometimes grandparents or childless relatives ask parents if they would allow one of their children to go live with the relative in order to help them with the household and generate income. Indeed, half of the participants of this research said they lived with relatives and not their biological parents. Sometimes this was due to divorce or death or by the request of a relative. In the majority of cases, children said their parent(s) could no longer provide for them and so they were sent to a relative with more resources. While many NGO’s target so called OVC (Orphans and Vulnerable Children), for the children themselves it did not seem to matter whether one is living with parents or caretakers. For children important indicators to differentiate between unhappy and happy children were household poverty, fair treatment, care and attention. These impressions are based on information from discussions and role plays on parents’ and caretakers’ roles in children’s sexual decision-making (see Chapter 4).

The majority of the children did not complain or describe suffering from their responsibilities in the household or work tasks, when we interviewed them. Many children considered it a normal way of life and some were even proud to contribute to the family income or to provide for their own needs if their parents or caretakers were struggling financially. Normally the children did not keep the money they earned by helping their parents, caretakers or relatives. But sometimes children worked for other people, for example in the field or carrying bricks and in these cases they earned money that they could keep. The most frequently mentioned motivation for children to take the initiative to earn money was lack of food (see also Van

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38 This corresponds to earlier findings that both parents headed only 58% of the households in certain areas in rural Mwanza and that grandparents headed 12% of the households (Van Reeuwijk 2003a).
Earning money was easier for boys than for girls and, as will be discussed in the next part, some boys used this money to seduce girls.

The responsibilities and the number of tasks for children increase and differentiate with the increasing physical and mental development of the child (Van Reeuwijk 2003a, Varkevisser 1973). Generally, in Tanzania children are not defined by age but by their capacity to assume responsibility. This is particularly noticeable in primary school enrolment. Parents or caretakers will send a child to the first class of primary school when they deem the child ‘ready’ or when they have collected sufficient resources. If the child is physically small for their age or if the child is thought to be too playful or childish their entrance to school might be delayed. Therefore some children enroll at the age of seven while others are not sent until they are 11. It is for this reason that the pupils in school classes often range significantly in age. During this research, we encountered 13 year-old Standard 7 pupils sitting next to 18 year-old classmates. At school, classes consisted of many pupils (between 40 – 100 children per teacher) and materials were scarce and had to be shared. Imprinting through repetition was the teaching style. Teachers were strict and kept children disciplined in order to maintain control. Education is free, but parents or caretakers have to pay for school uniforms, shoes, pens and exercise books, which are considerable costs for many families. If a child lacks one of those materials or looks too shabby, they might be expelled (Rajani et al. 1999).

Children who handle their responsibilities well earn more respect and freedom from their parents or caretakers in regard to decision-making. Responsible behavior and the ability to earn income are seen as signs of maturity. However, most parents are strict about the upbringing of their children and children are not supposed to ‘talk back’ to adults (see previous chapter on adult-child power disparity). Cultural understanding of acceptable authority to exercise with children varies widely (Hart 1997). In Tanzania, respectful behavior from a young person towards an older person is demanded and children have to follow orders from an adult without questioning. If they do not obey these rules for respect, they will be punished. And in most families and schools corporal punishment is the norm (“whipping is a school rule”). Children themselves think corporal punishment is a valid method of discipline. When questioned, however, the children complained about excessive whipping and that adults would not allow them to explain their behavior and punished them when they were blameless.
Children are the only hope of escaping poverty
[Frequent remark of parents in rural areas]

Families in Mwanza and Magu are large and many take care of the children of relatives. An average household has 4-5 children. Many parents hope they will obtain financial help from their children in the future and will depend on this support in old age. Because of the risk of losing children to diseases, parents say they do not want to take the risk of having only one or two children and then losing them. At the same time family planning and contraceptive use is low in Tanzania and a quarter of the mothers in rural Mwanza say they have more children than they can take care of (Van Reeuwijk 2003a). On the other hand, children are regarded as bringing joy to the family and for many parents children are “the only hope of escaping poverty”. Parents and caretakers hope that their children will find a job or a husband or wife who is well-off and provide them with financial security. To increase the chance for their children to succeed, most parents and caretakers are motivated to send their children to school. Both adults and children see education as “the key to a better future” and finishing education as a sign of maturity. Some parents and caretakers see school as a way to prevent their children from loitering on the streets and getting involved in crime and transactional sex. For some, school is thought of as a method to postpone pregnancy and marriage (Van Reeuwijk 2003a).

Tanzanian children feel the expectations and hopes of parents, caretakers, and even communities. Children who are not going to school (the children from Jabali) mention their dream is to one day get the chance to go to school, even when they are too old to enroll. Children who are already in school dream of passing exams and being selected for secondary school. Many children say: “I want to become someone” or “I want to be important” and express their wishes to assist their families. Most children hope that with a secondary education they might ‘escape’ the village and move to the city (in this case Mwanza). Mwanza is perceived as a place with opportunities, money and modernity. But with these hopes and dreams comes a significant concern, the fear of not having the opportunity to attend secondary school.

Most children are aware of the fact that only 50% of the children who enroll in primary school actually finish primary school and only 8% are given the opportunity to go to secondary
school (NBS 2005). Many schoolchildren who are not top of their class know they will probably stay at home after finishing Standard 7, continuing to help their parents or caretakers with their small scale businesses or farming until they are ready to marry and live on their own. Most children said they pray for their parents or caretakers to find money and that they themselves were trying really hard to get high marks and pass the final examinations. Because of this motivation to get into secondary school and because of fun and social activities, the majority of the children valued school as very important. The majority of problems and concerns the children identified were school related. A very pressing problem, according to children, was a lack of food and the sensation of hunger that led to concentration problems, bad school performance, corporal punishment, truancy and school dropout. The children also felt pressure from peers who had dropped out of school and who tried to convince their former classmates and friends to drop out as well. These dropouts told their friends that school was useless and that it did not improve the chance for employment. In addition the dropouts recommended to girls that it was better to try to earn some money or find a boyfriend to get you food or nice things. For boys the recommendation was to use their money earned after dropping out of school to get girlfriends. According to school children, children who drop out of school may join street gangs and harass the children who are going to school, especially the girls. Adults generally blame dropping out of school on the children’s laziness, the bad quality of education, overcrowded classrooms and the failure of teachers to appropriately discipline their students. Teachers on the other hand, believe that the problem of dropouts is related to the parents’ or caretakers’ inability to pay for school related expenses and their perception that education is not important. The children say dropping out is related to hunger, bad school performance, corporal punishment and peer pressure.

Most children who are not, or no longer, going to school support their families until they can marry and live independently. Traditionally, a boy receives a small piece of land from his parents when he is growing up and earns some money farming this land. With this money he can buy materials to build his own hut. After he has accomplished this, he can marry. A girl is selected on basis of good reputation and manners39 and after negotiation between the families. Girls are often perceived as marriageable the moment they finish Standard 7 and do not continue secondary education. If a girl is not attending school she is marriageable when her parents perceive her as ‘grown up’. This is generally defined as having the ability to take care

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39 For a description of what is regarded as good manners and good reputation, see Part II.
of the household tasks on her own and to run a household. A bride price is paid in the form of cattle or money to the family of the bride. When asked about the future, many children included a wish to start a family of their own, but only after finishing education and having found a job. Boys and girls mentioned that a life is not complete without children and parenthood was highly valued. Girls, who were out of school and helping their parents or caretakers because of the lack of employment opportunities, hoped to marry a loving man with a job who would provide her family with a high bride price. To increase the chances of marriage and the amount of the bride price that her family can ask, a girl has to guard her reputation and manners. However, virginity does not seem to be expected at the time of marriage by most people (also not traditionally, Varkevisser 1973) and the amount of the bride price is said to mainly depend on how much the man loves the girl and the wealth of his family.

Many young men cannot continue secondary education and do not find official employment. For them it is hard to find adequate financial resources to build a place of their own and support a wife and family. Many of their families have difficulties collecting enough money or cattle to pay a bride price. Therefore many young men have to delay marriage and most men do not marry until their late 20’s. According to Mzinga, this has implications for male identity, because marriage is considered an essential rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood (2002). According to Silberschmidt socioeconomic change affects men’s social value, identity and self-esteem, leading to multi-partnered sexual relationships and sexually aggressive behavior to strengthen male identity and sense of masculinity (2001). When men marry, they marry women who on average are 6-7 years younger than they are (Van Reeuwijk 2003a). If a man has not yet built a place of his own a married couple will move in with the husband’s family. If a couple is not married, but the girl becomes pregnant, she is generally not allowed to move in with the family of the boy until the bride price has been paid. In many cases (pregnant or not) an arrangement is made between the families that the bride price can be paid in installments over time. It is possible that a young man ‘kidnaps’ a girl and they flee the village to live elsewhere, with the plan to return when enough money is collected to pay the girl’s family. These young couples flee to the city in the hope of finding jobs and money. But if something goes wrong and the couple split up or if the man is abusive, the girl or
woman cannot return home because she will be regarded ‘a prostitute’ and bring shame upon her family.

Sexuality and socialization

Gender roles and sexual culture
As in most of Tanzania, gender roles in the Mwanza region reflect the dominance of men over women. Despite efforts by the government and NGO’s to fight gender inequality, local customs tend to discriminate against women. Men are the main decision makers and therefore, control production and distribution of resources (Setel 2001). This power inequity in gender relations translates into an unequal power balance in heterosexual interactions where male dominance also prevails. It is the male partner who makes basic decisions in regard to sexual actions, including whether or not to use a condom (Plummer et al. 2006, Mzinga 2002, Gupta 2000). Because many men give their girlfriends money or gifts in return for sexual favors, male control over sexual decisions is an assumed right. The transactional component to sexual relations is widespread (Dilger 2003, Nnko & Pool 1997, Wamoyi et al. N.d. a and b, Luke & Kurz 2002). This is also true for younger boys and girls (see Chapter 6). Receiving money, gifts or favors in return for sex is the norm for non-marital relationships. Not receiving something in return for sex is viewed as being used and humiliating to the girl, or a sign that the girl is cheap which is damaging for the girls’ reputation. In this respect, receiving money has a symbolic meaning for the girls’ self-worth and as an expression of the man’s love for her. On the practical side, this monetary exchange is an important motivator for girls to engage in sexual relationships. This is due to many reasons ranging from poverty and survival, to the need for capital to start a small business, the desire for status and possessions or for non-essential consumables like nice clothes and beauty-products (Wamoyi et al. N.d. (b), Nnko & Pool 1997, Luke & Kurz 2002). In general, sex is regarded as a female resource that can be exploited (Wamoyi et al. N.d. (b), Wight et al. 2006) and sometimes is explained as a consequence of adapting to modernization and as a motivation of women to strive for individual profit (Dilger 2003). According to Wight et al. (2006) and Wayomi et al. (N.d.(b)) there are ideas of romantic love, but in many sexual encounters the meaning of sex is more

40 The option of kidnapping was mentioned during some FGD’s with young men and women in the villages. The information about abuse and not being able to return home comes from personal stories of some young women in the slums of Mwanza City.
instrumental; to satisfy feelings of desire, to boost masculine esteem and as a resource to be exploited. Yet at the same time the children disapprove of this instrumentality and sexual relationships are thus rendered morally ambiguous. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 will provide an in-depth discussion of the role and meaning of transaction, peer pressure, love and expectations in the Tanzanian children’s sexual experiences.

Transactional sex increases vulnerability to HIV infection, because affluent men are more desirable to girls and women. These men are often a bit older and able to ‘afford’ multiple partners and therefore more prone to HIV infection. Transactional sexual relationships are usually short lived and characterized by multiple partners and form a further barrier for condom negotiation (Wamoyi et al. N.d.(b)). In Tanzania HIV prevalence increases as educational level and wealth increase (TACAIDS 2005). The use of condoms in the northwestern part of Tanzania appears to be low, due to associations of condoms with promiscuity, reduced male sexual pleasure, low risk perception, dynamics of gender and power and cultural values concerning meaningful, decent or natural sex and reproduction (Plummer et al 2006), and including the strong association of the sexual act with unhindered male ejaculation (Dilger 2003).

Sexual socialization: Parental views and concerns

You know when a daughter is getting involved; she becomes proud

[Father mid 40’s, raising 6 children]

Sexual activity of men, women, adolescent boys and girls is generally seen as ‘natural’ and perceived as inevitable unless prevented, by adults (Wight et al. 2006) and children (Part 2 introduction). Yet sexual activity for children is deemed undesirable. Parents and other adults try to control and restrain children’s sexuality by avoiding discussions about sex with children and therefore, this topic is taboo. Furthermore, parents and caretakers limit interactions between boys and girls in an attempt to regulate children’s sexuality. Even if a boy and girl are seen talking together in the street they might get punished or beaten by their parents. There are clear norms for school pupil abstinence, female sexual respectability and religious norms for monogamy and abstinence until marriage (Wight et al. 2006). Ideally boys and girls abstain from sex until marriage, but this seems to be an expectation for Tanzanian girls more than for Tanzanian boys. The norm (and thus parent and caretaker expectation) for boys is to move out of the house when they become financially independent: “Only when he is stable he
can start looking for a spouse”. Girls stay with their family until they get married. A boy is supposed to be the one who looks for a suitable girl and to approach the family of the girl ‘to introduce himself’. As a father commented: “He should tell about his family background. Then we send someone to his village to investigate behind his back, to check if what he says is true.” Girls are not allowed to go out to look for a potential husband, the “culture forbids it”. Because of these social rules and the norms about school pupil abstinence and female sexual respectability many parents and caretakers are strict with their children and in particular with their daughters:

I do not allow my sons and daughters to have friendships with the opposite gender. Pregnancy spoils the education and the reputation of the family, so you have to monitor the behavior of your daughter; for instance with regard to when she comes home. I’m strict on my sons too, but with boys it’s a bit difficult. If you tell them this, they will do the opposite. My son likes to play football outside and gets influenced by his friends and then he doesn’t want to come home in time and comes home late. Girls do not do games outside, they are kept inside – that’s the culture. So for girls it’s harder to escape.

[Father, mid 40’s, raising 6 children]

Parents and caretakers told us that culture forbids talking about sex directly with their children or allowing the children to initiate a conversation about sex. If children talk about sex or show ‘bad behavior’ such as showing in public that they have a boy- or girlfriend, this is regarded as one of the most disrespectful actions that a child can take against their parents or caretakers. This is one of the reasons that parents and caretakers fear talking ‘openly’ about sex to their children or allowing them to interact with the opposite sex:

You cannot allow as a parent, because then they will do it openly. It’s better if they do it behind your back. Otherwise they might even bring a boyfriend or girlfriend home and that means they disrespect me as their parent.

[Father, early 30’s, raising 2 children]

Many parents and caretakers are aware that this attitude leads to secrecy rather than to abstinence and that children hide their sexual relationships from them. Therefore many parents and caretakers find it essential that their children receive sexual education and are taught how to respond to being approached and peer pressure. However, due to traditional taboos, Christian values and ideas about respectful interaction between members of different age groups and gender, parents and caretakers say they feel unable to do the sexual education themselves. In the Mwanza region we found no evidence of traditional sources of sexual information like initiation rituals. This corresponded with published literature reports that among the Sukuma people (the main tribe in Mwanza region) sexual initiation rituals were not
common historically (Allen 2000). However, Varkevisser (1973) referring to Cory (1953) mentions that in the past boys and girls would leave the homestead upon attaining physical maturity. Boys would sleep in collective sleeping huts and girls would move in with a grandmother. Young men would visit the girls at night. The grandmother was seen as best placed to teach a girl how to prevent or abridge unwanted pregnancy and to prevent her for falling in love with any particular lover. But already in the early seventies the collective sleeping places were “a phenomenon of the past” (1973:268). A decrease or disappearance of traditional sexual training (called jando / unyago) to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood around the age of 13 has been noted in other parts of Tanzania (Dilger 2003, Fuglesang1997). New socio-economic patterns, rural-to-urban migration and the disruption of families due to diseases and divorce are all believed to be reasons for this decline (Mzinga 2002). Hence, many parents and caretakers expect schools to take on the responsibility of providing children with sexual information41.

Only when parents notice that their children are ‘behaving badly’ does a father warn his son or a mother warn her daughter. These warnings are limited to “Don’t get involved”; “You’ll end up like those street kids”; “You should study first” and pointing out unwelcome consequences like pregnancy, being kicked out of school and embarrassment to the family. But some parents and caretakers indicated that there was not much they can do if their child decided to continue: “If they do not listen, you leave them; there is nothing you can do”.

Parents and caretakers mentioned that they noticed if their children were getting involved in sexual relationships. If a girl had money or new equipment for school or clothes, this was considered a sign. Their daughter would become ‘proud’. “She would answer back to her parents as if they were her peers. She would become disrespectful”, mentioned a mother of five children. Boys and girls are said to no longer “want to sit at home”, “hear about the word of God” and “make up excuses to go out”, according to parents and caretakers from the Nyahali village.

The degree to which parents and caretakers expected schools to give information about sex and sexuality differed. Some parents and caretakers were of the opinion that teachers should

41 This corresponds with the findings of Fuglesang (1997: 1249) and the Tanzanian 2005 Demographic and Health Survey, where 7 out of 10 adults reported support for teaching children, from ages 12-14, about condom use to prevent AIDS.
be very open about sexual issues. They argued that girls who were not well educated about sex ended up pregnant. Yet other parents, caretakers and many teachers were against giving too much information (for instance about condoms), because this was believed to encourage children to engage in sex. Sexual education was being taught in the primary schools where this research was conducted. However, the child informants complained that the information they received was “only in overview”, and limited to scientific information about reproduction and HIV/AIDS. One parent commented:

Teachers don’t bring the topic the right way, they leave question marks. It is because of these question marks that children become curious and want to find out.

Like parents and caretakers, teachers are products of the same Tanzanian socialization that inhibits parents and caretakers from discussing sex with children, unless they can distance themselves and approach the topic as a purely academic subject. This reaction was similar to findings in Kenya (Mbugua 2007).

Parents and caretakers we spoke to perceived that children engage in sexual relationships at earlier ages compared to the past and they contributed this to poverty and social changes. “The most important thing nowadays is money”. Migration and modern influences like media were said to cause ‘mixing of tribal cultures and rules’:

The rules get confused. In the past you could only marry a girl from your own tribe and you had to obey the rules of the culture you grew up in. Now there are many influences that change ideas about proving manhood or womanhood.

[Father of five in Magu town]

This mixing of cultures and rules is also thought to contribute to a decrease of social control. A mother commented that in the past, the whole village was involved in raising the child and any villager could punish an errant child if they did something wrong. “Nowadays you are not supposed to interfere with other people’s children. You can be brought to court if you do”. The parents and caretakers mentioned poverty, lack of parental guidance and bad influence of friends as important contributors to the loss of social control. However, parents and caretakers also mentioned that love could play a role in boys’ and girls’ engagement in sexual relationships and that boyfriends give girls a sense of being grown up; “A sense of maturity is important for girls”.

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Tanzanian parents and caretakers are generally concerned with their children’s sexual lives, especially their daughters. They are aware of the high occurrence of teenage pregnancies and all know stories about ‘bad teachers’ who become involved with schoolgirls.

It scares me as a parent, because as a parent you trust teachers with your children and they spend a lot of time with each other. If something happens, the child is scared to report it.

They said that that they knew that boys and men specifically approach schoolgirls because they are considered to be safe (HIV free) and inexpensive compared to girls who are not, or no longer going to school. Attempting to protect their children, parents and caretakers are strict. Girls’ freedom is especially restricted because they are considered most vulnerable to negative consequences.

**Childhood sexuality: Violation or confirmation of norms?**

Despite ideas about the naturalness of sexual activity, parents and caretakers attempt to regulate and restrain their children’s sexuality, at least until they have finished school and preferably until they get married. Sexual activity before ‘the right age’ (which refers to stage rather than chronological age) is a disgrace to families because it is a display of disrespect by children to their parents. Yet the interval between puberty and marriage is now growing longer due to lack of employment and income earning opportunities. Norms about masculinity expect maturing boys to have sexual experiences and results in parents and caretakers giving boys more slack than girls. Norms regarding female sexuality are more restrictive, especially because of the risk of pregnancy. Yet it was traditionally acceptable for Sukuma girls to enjoy their freedom at night so long as they considered not shaming their parents by explicit display of their sexual relationships (Varkevisser 1973). Economic hardship and ideas about sex as a resource for exploitation can make parents or caretakers turn a blind eye (see Chapter 4). The most important rule that needs to be obeyed is discretion (Haram 1995, Wamoyi et al. N.d.(b), Varkevisser 1973).

Sexual activity in children in Tanzania tends to be unacceptable for most parents and caretakers and seen as a violation of social norms and values. Unlike Western societies, this is not due to a perception that sexual activity in children is a violation of childhood as a time of
protected innocence. This reaction follows because social rules for engaging in a sexual relationship are not observed. The boy or man has not been introduced to his girlfriend’s family and therefore, the girl’s behavior is considered as inappropriate behavior for a woman. Sexual behavior in children is seen as highly disrespectful to the parents or caretakers. Yet if the rules of discretion are observed and the activity does not lead to pregnancy, a child’s parents or caretakers might be more permissive. Most parents and caretakers are concerned about the negative consequences of sexual activity for their children. It can ruin the child’s opportunity to finish their education or to find a good marital partner, both of which are key factors for the hope of a better future. This contradiction between norms and expectations results in an ambiguity that has an impact on Tanzanian children and young people’s sexual actions. This ambiguity will be described and analyzed in the next chapters.
PART 2

CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS
Introduction: “Because of temptations”

This part of the book explores how boys and girls in Tanzania understand and explain their sexual behavior and that of their peers. There is a discussion of the reasons given by Tanzanian boys and girls about their choice to engage in or refrain from sexual activity and the contexts in which this behavior takes place. As explained in Chapter 2, the information about norms, personal experiences, experiences close to the child or assumptions depends on the research setting, the methods used and the relationship between the researchers and the child informants. Initially dominant themes from group consensus that arose during group discussions will be reviewed. These themes play an important role in the children’s decisions about sexual activity, even though the children who were interviewed were not referring to personal experiences per se. From the dominant themes I will give accounts that reflect the children’s personal experiences and opinions. There will be an investigation of social patterns and individual patterns of sexual behavior. In addition, how individual behavior conforms or conflicts with local norms and expectations will be elaborated in Part 3. Unless stated otherwise, quoted conversation is from group interviews in a school setting as described in Chapter 2. I do not specify the children’s names, ages or the location of the school, to enhance readability and because the quotes illustrate the dominant themes and perceptions that arose in many group discussions. I add the composition of the group, gender, age and/or the location only if it is critical information for interpretation. Personal accounts from the children are introduced by a short description of the key informant.

In the introduction of this book some dominant themes are presented that emerged in the many discussions we had with children about the reasons that boys and girls engage in sex:

- Boy: Because of temptations
- Girl: Deception
- Boy: Learning from friends
- […]
- Girl: Maybe they are being deceived, maybe their friends are telling her she should get a boyfriend to get material gains
- Boy: Maybe because of poor backgrounds, if the parents can’t fulfill their needs, girls have to seek for other means, they need money
- Girl: Some are just tempted to have sex…
- Boy: Some want to find out what it is like and then they become addicted
- […]
- Other boy: You feel like there is a need of making love when physical changes occur
- Girl: Some have sex before physical changes take place…
The reason why boys and girls engage in sex, according to children, is “because of temptations” (vishawishi). For boys, ‘temptations’ refer to the feeling of desire (tamaa) described as feeling the need to make love (tamaa ya kunfanya mapenzi) or a ‘pushing’ of the body (kusukuma) in response to a girls’ physique. Most boys describe these feelings as very powerful, sometimes hard to ignore or control, and the general opinion or expectation was that satisfaction of desire is addictive. The temptation of desire starts when they go through what the children called ‘physical changes’ (-badilisho: to change; -balehe: to reach the age of puberty). Both boys and girls described feelings of desire and attraction as ‘natural’ and belonging to the process of physical development: “Sex is something natural and no one can avoid sex”; “Boys chase after girls, that’s just nature”. Yet going through those physical changes is not a prerequisite for some children to engage in sex. As the girl above indicated: “Some have sex before physical changes take place…” Indeed we found that some of our key informants had sex or tried to have sex before the onset of puberty.42 Curiosity and peer pressure seem to be the main motivators for boys. Tumaini, a 15-year-old boy from Nyahali stated:

I started when I was 13. [...] I learned to do sex from my [older] brother and his friends. I learned from the stories of the group, that’s what made me wanted to try. But at that time no hormones yet, but I tried. I wanted to check how it felt, what would happen. But I was not matured at that time. I managed when I was 15.

Tumaini shares a room with his brother who is three years older. Their father built them a hut to sleep in next to the one where he and his wife sleep. One night Tumaini woke up hearing sounds. His brother had smuggled his girlfriend into the hut and was having sex with her:

I saw my brother using a condom because we are sharing a bedroom. He was having sex with his girlfriend. [...] I felt stimulated and I felt like I wanted to do it too. So I asked my brother everything about it and I started learning everything about sex and condoms, because I wanted to do it also.

When girls start having sex before the onset of puberty, the consensus was that this is mostly due to poverty. In general, we did not come across personal accounts of girls reporting pre-pubertal sex. An exception was girls living in the street whom we had interviewed in earlier research: “I first had sex when I was ten years old. [...] Because I was hungry, I used not to get food from my aunt, so I accepted the 2500 [€1.50] and slept with him”. Hunger and poverty ultimately drove these girls to live in the streets. But as argued earlier, children who

42 See also Zimake in Chapter 1.
live in the street should not be taken as representative of the youth of Tanzania. There could be other factors involved in girl’s pre-pubertal onset of sexual activity. We heard stories from boys who told us they tried to have sex with an equally young girl while playing games like ‘father and mother’, ‘hide and seek’ or ‘the chicken game’. For example ten-year-old Jimmy stated:

[...] When I got back home, I know my sister plays with her friend, I convinced my sister to tell her to believe that I am the father, the friend of my sister can be my wife and then I told my sister: “You are my daughter, you better go to sleep now”. Then I went somewhere with the friend of my sister and had sex.

Games like the chicken game are actually sexual games: “You do like the chicken do, or like the cows and goats” [mating]. Imitation was also mentioned in relation to seeing parents or older siblings having sex as bedrooms are frequently shared or having watched a pornographic movie or images.

Like boys, girls acknowledged having feelings of desire and curiosity as well, but described themselves as better able to control these feelings compared to boys. Feelings of desire in girls were described more in terms of increasing the chance for a girl to give in to a different kind of temptation - money (tamaa za pesa). An important motivator for girls, according to both boys and girls, is the money or gifts boys offer girls during their courtship in their attempt to seduce girls and convince them to agree (-kubali) to have sex. As described in the previous chapter, receiving money or gifts for non-marital sex is the norm in Tanzania and boys quickly learn they will not succeed in seducing a girl if they have nothing to offer. Girls learn to expect the boy to offer something when he is ‘chasing’ and that by accepting his gift or money, a boy will expect to have sex with her. The girls told us that boys and men approach them beginning from a young age and then it is ongoing. When they walk back from school, fetch water or firewood or when they are send to buy something in a shop they are ‘approached’ (kufuata -literally: to follow-) by boys and men who tell them “I like you” or “I love you” (nakupenda) and offer them a bit of money or bring them a gift. In school they are approached by messengers, often a friend or sibling of the pursuer, or receive letters from boys offering them money and making promises like “I will take care of you”, “I’ll get you anything you need” and “After we finish school, I will marry you”. The promises that boys make to girls are often referred to with the term ‘deception’ (danganyo). Girls are of the opinion that the majority of the boys are not sincere and do not live up to their promises. Boys
acknowledge this and easily admit that they use the tactic of lying to persuade girls to have sex with them. Still, children, teachers, parents and caretakers mentioned that money and the prospect of support are the strongest temptations for girls, especially for girls from ‘poor backgrounds’. We were presented with many stories about parents turning a blind eye or encouraging girls to engage in sex because of economic hardship:

Some parents influence their children. For example, they might send the daughter for a fish without money, at the same time telling her “go and bring us fish. You will figure out where to get the money, don’t come back without a fish”. When a mother like this says this to her, the child will go to those who are selling fish and she will tell them to give her fish but she doesn’t have the money. Those selling fish will ask her to go and have sex and after they will give her the fish. If that girl agrees to have sex with them, they give her fish. That girl can get pregnant or [get] HIV and other STD’s.

[Girl during FGD]

So money and desire are important motivators for boys and girls to get involved in sex. But do boys randomly approach girls? Do girls initiate courtship? Is there a role for romance, love and attraction? Why do boys lie? And if all the girls complain about boys’ deceptive words, how do boys still manage to get girlfriends? Although temptations, physical changes, desire and money were often identified as being an important motivations for children to become sexually active, the children explained that these motivators often ‘work’ in combination with other influences, most notably in relation to family members, friends and potential partners. How such influences work within the context of children’s everyday lives will be investigated in the coming chapters.
When I was probing the topic of temptations in a class discussion with the 80 pupils of Standard 7 of Nyahali primary school, the children asked me if they could ‘show’ it to me instead of trying to explain it to me. The next fragment is a summary of the play that lasted an hour and a half and was performed in the classroom by 60 of the pupils the week after the class discussion and without any guidance from us. School benches were used to represent houses, the school, the marketplace, the disco and the hospital. About a third of the children had lines. The other children were watching the play from the sideline and sometimes jumped in to play market salesmen, school students, disco-goers and funeral audience.

Nyahali Play

At dawn a cock crows in a village between the shores of Lake Victoria and the main road from Mwanza to Shinyanga. In one of the houses Penny wakes up and prepares tea for her family. After respectfully greeting her father when he gets in, she politely asks him for some money to buy a pen for school. He replies: “Tell your mother, I don’t have money!” Penny is disappointed and leaves the house. She walks to a nearby house to pick up her friend Asha and they walk to school together. The girls complain to each other about the lack of money they receive from their parents to buy things they need for school.

At school the girls are ordered to clean the classroom. They don’t find this fair since it’s the boys’ turn to clean and start quarrelling with the boys. The teacher interferes: “Asha clean the classroom!” The boys laugh. In class the teacher teaches them about HIV and AIDS. The teacher tells them to bring the information home and tell others about it as well, including their parents. “Are there any questions?” One of the boys asks the teacher who brought HIV to Tanzania The teacher doesn’t know the answer and feels a bit embarrassed about it. “Truly, me, I don’t know him. Those things, you are supposed to go and ask your parents at home, okay?” The students start giggling and the teacher becomes upset: “Don’t you be asking questions without thinking!” Then the boy replies: “Why are you saying that we ask our parents while you just said that we should educate them?” The kids start laughing again and the teacher becomes furious at the boy for being so disrespectful: “Nowadays, you have grown, haven’t you? Report to the head teacher’s office, he will teach you a lesson!” Some of the students receive corporal punishment and the teacher threatens the class that he will inform their parents about their misbehavior. In the back you can hear one of the kids whispering: “My parents are already dead”. The pupils challenge the teacher some more and when he completely loses control, he dismisses the complete classroom, sending all boys and girls home.
The students leave the classroom. Penny and Asha meet up with another friend, Doto. They wander around in the streets, complaining about the stupidity of the teachers and the unfair corporal punishment they received. Penny says to her friends: “I don’t want to go home yet, let’s do something else”. Doto doesn’t want to go home either, but is afraid that her father will become very angry with her if she gets home late. “Dad will beat me if I don’t come home straight”. Penny tells her not to worry: “Your dad is already old, he won’t do anything”. But she’s unable to convince Doto and Doto goes home. Shortly after Doto left, two boys pass by. They spot Penny and Asha, elbow each other, walk over and greet the girls.

Boys: What’s up?
Girls: Cool man.
Boys: How are things?
Girls: Just cool
Boys: Where are you coming from?
Girls: We are coming from school.
First boy to Penny: For me, I have liked you.
Penny: You have liked what? Do you have money?
Boy: I have truly liked you.
Penny: Now you have liked me without money, bring that money and let me see it then.
Boy: How much do you want? (He gives her a little bit of money)
Penny: Just add. If you don’t want, then that’s it.
The boy adds some more money and asks when he will see her again. They agree to meet again the next day, at the same spot, after school. In the mean time the other boy started talking to Asha, but Asha’s not interested in his smooth talk and tells him she wants to focus on her studies first. When the boys leave, Penny shows Asha the money that she got from the boy. “Tonight me and my family are going to eat meat, not just veggies, we are not goats!” Asha is seemingly impressed and asks Penny if she could have some of the shillings. Penny refuses “Why can’t you find your own?” But then she agrees to lend Asha 500 shillings, saying she can pay back the money later. The girls split up and both go home.

When Asha comes home, her mother is very upset with her for being home late. Asha makes up a story why she was delayed, but her mother warns her that her father will be very angry with her. In the mean time, Asha’s sister has discovered the money Asha is holding in her hand and exposes Asha to the mother. The mother demands to know where she got the money from, but Asha refuses to tell. Suddenly the door bashes open. Her father walks in, he is drunk. He threatens to beat Asha if she doesn’t tell him where she got the money from. Asha tells him she found it on the way home. “You, since you got taller than me, you have started to disrespect me?” He raises his arm to give Asha a beating, but then her mother steps in between. “My husband, how come you are late, you expect the children will eat what? You are leaving the children for me [to take care of], just like that. You expect the children to eat what?” The father gets angry with his wife: “You are the one who should take care of them, you find the money for food yourself!”

After the father disappears from the scene, Asha’s mother gives the money to Asha’s sister and tells her to go to the market. On her way back Penny’s father crosses the road and greets her:
Penny’s father: How have you been, I haven’t seen you for days.
Sister: I am fine. I have not come to the market for a month.
Penny’s father: You know, me... I like you.
Sister: *You like me in what way?*

Penny’s father: *You, you know, you are a grown up person now.*

Sister: *Grown up person?*

Penny’s father: *Come and we talk.*

Sister: *We talk what?*

Penny’s father: *Come then.*

Sister (upset): *and do what hum?*

Penny’s father: *We meet tomorrow then?*

Sister: *Tomorrow? I can’t come tomorrow!*

She hastens to get away from him and hurries back home. Penny’s father continues his walk back to his house.

In the mean time, at Penny’s house, Penny lies to her mother that she is late, saying they had extra classes. Her mother suspects Penny is lying and tells her she should not have such a big mouth, that she will check with Penny’s teacher in the morning. Penny says: “Fine, I don’t care. Look mother, I found some money. Let me go to the market and buy meat”. They discuss where Penny got the money from, but in the end the mother is relieved with Penny’s contribution and sends her to the market. Penny buys the best meat she can find while the market salesmen look at her with suspicion. Back at home, Penny’s mother tells Penny she is not feeling very well and asks Penny to cook dinner. Penny gets upset: “I bought the money and now I have to cook? Tell father he should cook! Tell him he is too much nowadays”. The father overhears this and enters the room. Penny’s mother asks her husband where he has been and he mumbles something back. Penny turns to her mother saying: “Mother, I have forgotten to tell you, I saw him with the sister of …” Penny’s father quickly interrupts: *You child! You don’t have respect!*

Penny: *I saw you hunting for her coming back from the market!*

Father: *Shall we go to her and ask her if this is true?*

Penny’s father no longer tolerates Penny’s disrespect. He takes the meat and sends her to bed without a meal as punishment.

The next day, after school, the girls meet up again in the street. Asha tells Penny that her father took her money. Penny tells her to hide the money in her bra the next time. But she also demands that Asha pays back her debt. While they are walking, the two boys are waiting for them at a corner.

Boy: *Hello Sista, how are you doing?*

Penny: *Cool. How is your condition?*

Boy: *What’s up? Today, you didn’t show up, you ditched me.*

Penny: *My dad has become stricter on me, he didn’t let me go.*

Boy: *So now then?…*

Penny: *Today they got me tight, maybe tomorrow.*

When Penny wants to leave, the boy follows her and grabs her by her shoulder.

Penny: *You are hurting me, why are you hurting me like that?*

The boy and his friend start arguing with each other and Penny and Asha take advantage and leave them to hurry back home. While they are walking back, there is an announcement heard in the streets: “Today we are going to have a disco from six o’clock until twelve at midnight!! We are inviting all of you, boys, girls, men and women. My name is Kwiza MC, you will find me at my place, Kwiza MC. You are welcome!!!”

Asha’s mother decides she needs to talk to someone about the bad behavior of her daughter and the problems she has with her husband. She visits Penny’s mother and
they discuss the trouble they have with their daughters, how they lie to their mothers and how they don’t receive any help from their husbands, quite the opposite.

In the mean time, Asha, Penny and a few of their classmates are making a plan to escape their houses that evening and to go to the disco. When the time is right, they sneak out their bedrooms, meet up at a corner and all go to the disco where they start dancing. The boys who Asha and Penny met earlier are also there. Some of their classmates are smoking marijuana. The boys and girls are giggling and having fun, dancing body to body.

A few weeks later, we find Asha at home. She is feeling nauseous. Her parents are concerned and collect some money to bring her to the doctor. The doctor has bad news for Asha and her parents: Asha is pregnant. Her mother is upset and her father is furious. Asha will have to quit school. But at Penny’s place the moods are even dimmer. Penny’s not been able to eat and has been sick for some time now. She has been diagnosed with HIV and she is dying. A few days later we see the village carrying a coffin through the streets and people weeping. Penny has died. In a corner of the street a silent boy is sitting. He knows it’s his former girlfriend who they are carrying to the burial site. He knows this will be his fate as well, sometime in the near future.

Defiance and disrespect

In the play we are presented with a combination of circumstances that lead the two main characters (Penny and Asha) to engage in sex. The children show us how poverty, or a lack of food, or having to eat the same food every day and a lack of school equipment are the basic components of a process that leads to tensions and disputes between parents and children and between fathers and mothers. Deprivation and arguments increase girls’ vulnerability for the attraction of money boys offer for sex. The strain of poverty is exacerbated by the antagonism present in poor relationships between parents and their children. The actors in the play drew specific attention to the children’s disagreements with fathers, their fathers’ unwillingness to provide food or school equipment and the unfair and harsh punishments fathers mete out. Children show how their disrespect for their fathers increases when they see them drunk or ‘chasing’ other women and girls.

The actors showed the desperation of the mothers and their inability to change the situation or do anything about the behavior of their children or husbands. In Penny’s family this leads the mother to ‘give up’ and accept the situation (remember the quote of the parent in the previous chapter: “If they do not listen, you leave them; there is nothing you can do”). She implicitly
allows Penny to have boyfriends by accepting the money that her daughter brings home. Through the play, the children also showed us their disagreements with teachers and how this leads to conflict. The children illustrated the unfair treatment and punishments they receive from teachers and parents. The children’s reaction to this unfair action is recalcitrance, defiance, and disrespect. The children start coming home late, lying to their parents and escaping the house at night to go to the disco. Some of the boys in the play showed how they provoked teachers and parents and willingly undergo punishment as a way to show their parents, teacher, and peers that even harsh punishment would not make them obedient. Shilling, the boy quoted in Chapter 2 confirmed this, “It’s like a game; we have a champion in class who holds the record of being whipped most.” This behavior may give the insubordinate children the respect of their peers. In some cases, it may even strengthen the child’s defiance or lead to group defiance. In Penny’s case, she is no longer trying to hide her ‘bad’ behavior, she is openly disrespectful and disobedient to her parents, now that she is taking care of herself and providing for her family. Although the play (and summary) focused on the two girls Penny and Asha and their families, families of the girls’ classmates were also present in the play. Parallel to the main storyline was a story about Penny’s brother Funguji and his mates and their families. For reasons of brevity, this was left out of the excerpt. In the play while Penny’s disrespect and defiance grew, Funguji, a member of the same household, expressed his disrespect and defiance by secretly starting to smoke marijuana with his friends and within this group pushing each other into chasing girls. Unlike Penny, Asha was not as openly disrespectful to her parents. Although we assume Asha is having problems with her father spending his money on alcohol instead of food for his family and treating her, her mother and sisters in a bad way, we did not hear Asha talking back to her father. When approached by the boys, Asha’s first reaction was to refuse them because she wanted to focus on her studies. It is Penny who encourages her and lends her money that she has to pay back. Asha’s story illustrates the role that peers can play in combination with problems at home and at school.

‘Lack of guidance’ and parental encouragement

Extrapolating information from children’s dramas as representative of real situations should be done with caution. However, the storylines from the Nyahali drama correspond with reports from children in discussions, interviews, and storylines in dramas performed by
children in other areas. The Jabali group of children who were out of school created a play that also included a drunken father. We showed the Jabali group a videotape of the Nyahali play and asked them to give us feedback on what they saw. They spoke about Asha’s father. One child stated:

There are a lot of fathers like that [in Jabali]. They just smoke weed, get drunk and only come home for food. Children feel bad. They can’t do anything about it. To fix him is to beat him up, but you can’t hit your dad, you just leave him and one day he will see it, one day he will wake up. Mothers can try to do something about it, but men don’t like to be advised by women. [Sammy, age 13]

When we reviewed the play with the Nyahali children who originally performed it, they engaged in a fierce discussion about who should be ‘blamed’ for the so-called ‘bad behavior’ (tabia mbaya) of children; the parents, the children themselves, those who seduce children or poverty:

1st girl: A parent is not to be blamed because a child is the one that likes to do the act of sex
2nd girl: It’s not the child who should be blamed, but the parent because s/he allows that behavior, so it’s the parent who should be blamed.
3rd girl: It can’t be the parent, because a parent won’t know the acts done by his/her child in the streets.
1st girl: When a girl is at school, s/he can be going in the toilet and acting bad acts, while the mother doesn’t know, s/he can’t look after the child.
2nd girl: It is the parent who should be blamed, because it is due to the upbringing, truly those complaints fall [are the responsibility of] a parent only.
4th girl: The parent should be blamed because s/he knows the child’s behavior because s/he is raising the child.
Boy: The parent should be blamed, because s/he is the one raising the child, s/he is supposed to follow a child and at least teach him/her [about sex and the risks]

There was consensus among the children of this research that parents could influence their children’s behavior by being bad role models:

For example you find a parent is an alcoholic, he/she doesn’t sit down with her/his children [to discuss] even things of HIV, now for example if this parent gets told by people about his/her child, s/he cannot warn this child. And some kids, a lot of times they copy [the bad behavior] from their parents.

In Magu town this topic came up as well during a group discussion with girls:

Sometimes we can observe our own fathers when they go to the bar and then they start showing that kind of behavior [flirting, courtship]. Or when you attend a wedding there must be music and that is when you can observe that style [dancing and other body language that
Even if parents oppose their children’s sexual activity, like the parents of Asha, children believe the parents are still to blame for not giving sufficient guidance to their children:

The parents should have discussed with the children about the dangers and consequences of their behavior. They should have done that even before the children were showing that kind of bad behavior. [Nyahali boy commenting while watching the video of the play] They [children] have less guidance nowadays. They are free to walk into bars, to see videos [porn], discos. They see a lot of people and learn. [Other Nyahali boy during playback]

The lack of parental or caretaker guidance, indifference or encouragement of children’s sexual behavior were all acknowledged as major influences on children’s sexual decision making by children in this research and during interviews with parents, caretakers and teachers. It was said by children and adults that some parents or caretakers do not to see the bad behavior of their children, because they do not practice proper vigilance and they do not know what other children are hanging out with their children. These parents or caretakers are seen as not strict enough with their children and therefore easily manipulated by their children who lie to them about their activities and whereabouts. This was said to be the case particularly with parents or caretakers who are frequently away from home (e.g., to do business), or when there is significant conflict between the parents or caretakers. Some of these parents or caretakers are blamed for not attending to their child’s school performance and therefore, their children do not focus on their studies but on sexual relationships instead. Some children and adults thought that parental or caretaker indifference was a result of poverty and hardship:

The parents take more time to think about “what shall we eat, what shall we wear”, than to think about raising their children with good behavior. Because all their time goes to worrying about poverty. [Grace, Nyahali, 22 years]

However, others disagreed and stated that some parents or caretakers simply are bad role models and actively encourage their children to have sex. According to Blessed, a 13 year old girl from Magu town:

It has nothing to do with poverty, if the mother is involved with men or the father with women, the child is more easily tempted to follow in their footsteps. And some fathers actually send out their sons to bring home girls!
We found boys whose stories endorsed this opinion or observation. For example, Kosmos from Nyahali had moved in with his grandmother and uncle after his parents died. When Kosmos was 15 years old, his uncle encouraged him to look for a girlfriend:

At first I tried to approach girls myself, but they always refused and I got pissed off with them. Then my uncle told me not to get pissed off and that he would show me how to do it. […] My uncle spoke to me about girls. He said: “now you have grown up, it’s time to get a girl”. We went out and I had to show him a girl that I liked. I approached one that I had pointed out, that I liked and I tried to seduce her. But she was aware that I was under some sort of supervision, so I didn’t succeed. The next time I went alone and then she agreed. […] For the first time I did use a condom, but the second time my uncle advised me not to use. He said: “No need to use with this one. But with others you have to be careful”.

When girls are directly encouraged to have sex by their parents or caretakers it appears to be related to the parents’ or caretakers’ opinion that the girl should use her sexuality as a resource to contribute to the household or to look after herself, or to get a man to look after her:

| Girl: Some parents, it's the parents' fault. They give the girl a basket to go to the market, but no money… “You know what to do”. So if you go out there and meet a guy and he shows interest in you. |
| Other girl: Some parents send their daughter to have sex with a rich guy and then trick him and tell him that because he had sex with their daughter, he should take care of her. |
| Third girl: Some parents will go out to look for someone who wants to be with their daughter. And they accept the cash and send the daughter to the man. |
| Girl In some cases a girl would go home and report that someone is bothering her, and her mother would say 'what is wrong? Just go get more of it'. |
| Other girl: And then the parents will say, you know, we're broke; we don't have food in the house… |

[FGD girls Magu town]

Parents, peers or personality?

Some children clearly considered parents and caretakers as responsible for the control and guidance of their children and to be strict in their upbringing. However, there were children who said that no matter how strict the parents or caretakers were some children would still engage in sex: “It will not keep girls from finding boyfriends!” We asked one of our key informants in urban Magu, a 13-year-old boy nicknamed “Shilling”\(^{43}\) if he thought parents ought to be stricter with their children in order to prevent them from engaging in sex:

\(^{43}\) For more information on Shilling, see next paragraph
No! Children will play the hero. The more the parents become strict, the more they want to prove themselves. If they are calm and less strict, children are more likely to listen and to consider what the parents have been telling.

One of the girls we got to know in rural Magu, Zawadi, and 14 years old in Standard 6, was especially adverse to become involved with boys. She had a strong conviction to stay a virgin until marriage (she said she was ‘saved’, meaning religiously converted). She described her parents as very strict, hardworking farmers who managed to send most of her older sisters to secondary school. However, one of her older sisters, Shafira, had dropped out of school when she was 12 years old because she got involved with boys. “I think Shafira was 10 years old when she started getting out of hand”. Her sister is now 17 and according to Zawadi involved with different partners and most of the time she stays with a boyfriend. Zawadi believed that parents couldn’t do much about their children getting involved, “…look at my sister. They whipped her a lot in the past, but it didn’t help, so now they have decided to leave it.” According to Zawadi, the reason her sister got involved and dropped out of school was that, “Personally I think she was involved with friends who were involved with boys and they pushed her.”

The Nyahali drama, and plays performed in Magu and Jabali areas, show that parents and caretakers play an important role in the development of children’s sexuality. However, parent and caretaker influence cannot be seen as detached from the socio-economic context in which children live, with peers and with others, nor apart from the individual physical and mental development of the child. A recurring theme in all the dramas was the struggle children have with their parents or caretakers and the adults’ rules. This is particularly problematic if the children disagreed with adult behavior including alcoholism, refusal of necessary school equipment, or unfair corporal punishment. In the plays the children would perform how they coped with this struggle by using recalcitrant behavior or showing disrespect by eluding parents and caretakers or even using open resistance and disobedience. In addition, we observed the children’s defiance towards teachers, for example, Shilling’s resilience towards the threatening teachers described in Part 1, Chapter 1. We also observed some boys and girls wearing their uniform in a certain way:

There is a girl inside [the classroom] who likes to wear her clothes in the boy-style. The sleeves of the shirt are rolled up to show the shoulder. It is a way to express resistance that the teachers know that they cannot control her.

[Girl during FGD in Magu town]
In group discussions and personal interviews the children spoke about how they elude their parents and caretakers. Girls in a Nyahali group discussion were interviewed during the follow up research and thus were a year behind those who originally performed the play. They told us about the strategies girls use to escape parental or caretaker control to meet up with a boyfriend. The girls told stories about how sisters cover for each other and how they made up excuses to go out, for example to borrow a book, or to go to church or sleep at a relative’s place, but perform these actions after meeting up with a boyfriend. The girls appeared resourceful and ingenious in developing strategies to escape even strict parents.

[Girls] give a reason to escape from the house, for instance they say they go fetch water or go to a shop. But then they arrange to be with the boyfriend and do their thing. When she comes home late and her parents ask, she will lie and say there were many people at the shop or that the water was dirty and that she had to wait for it to settle.

Tumaini, the boy who started with sex because of the stories of his brother’s friends and watching his brother with his girlfriend, told us about how he met up with a girlfriend the weekend before we interviewed him and why he would disobey his parents:

I approached a girl in the disco. I took the girl to my room. I have a room away from my parent’s home [on the same compound, but not attached to the main house]. [My parents] didn’t know [that I went to the disco]. It was in the evening. I told my parents that I was going to sleep in my room. […] My parents tried to warn me [not to get involved with girls] but desire is what made me disobey them. Because of hormones I cannot be respectful. Everything changes; you have to do like a man, not like a child.

As Tumaini argues, disobedience and resistance against parents’ wishes and control is also related to puberty and children’s wish to be grown up and make decisions independent from parents. This wish for independence increases if children disagree with their parents’ ideas or behavior and might lead to a search for money. Having money provides the children with the freedom to make their own choices and as a consequence with the ability to disobey parental or caretaker rules and regulations. In the play, Penny’s access to money, from the boy, enabled her to take control and change a situation that she experienced as bad. Remarks that girls say they are told by friends or older sisters include, “If you want to succeed in getting what you need, then you should get yourself a boyfriend”. Remarks like this suggest that money gives girls an opportunity to take control over their lives and that boyfriends provide girls with their needs that parents or caretakers cannot or will not provide. These ‘needs’ do
not necessarily have to relate to subsistence. Deusi, a slightly older girl, 17 years, in the Standard 7 group that performed the play and who lived with her grandparents, mentioned that her boyfriend supported her with money:

*Does that mean that the money you get from your grandparents is not sufficient?*
*It is sufficient, but sometimes you want items like body lotion…*

As one of the parents remarked in the previous chapter: “Boys give girls a sense of being mature, being grown up. A sense of maturity is important for girls.” Perhaps beauty products give girls a sense of maturity, of femininity. This wish of being grown up or being regarded grown up seems to be important to Tanzanian children entering puberty and even younger children and can lead to competition between peers.

*Why is it so important to be considered big?*
*When a person grows up, they have self-control, they can make their own decisions, they can move wherever they want, so that’s why a lot of girls want to act grown up, to have the respect. [Nyahali girls, FGD]* 

The children consider being less economically dependent on one’s parents or caretakers as a sign of maturity and therefore both money and disobedience might symbolize a certain level of development. Remarks made in the plays supported this. Children who played adults responded to disrespect by referring to the child’s assumption that he/she has grown up enough to think he or she is in a position to do that:

*So you think you are really grown up now, don’t you! [rural Magu play]*

*Nowadays, you have grown, haven’t you? [Nyahali play]*

*You, since you got taller than me, you have started to disrespect me? [Nyahali play]*

I think sexual activity is seen as a sign of maturity because it represents grown up behavior and because it implies access to one’s own money. This holds true also for boys since it is difficult to get a girlfriend without money. The pick up line of the boy who was playing Penny’s father who tried to seduce Asha’s sister illustrates this, “You, you know, you are a grown up person now”. And in Kosmos’ story his uncle encouraged him to get sexual experience, saying: “Now you have grown up, it’s time to get a girl”. In general, an expression

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44 It is difficult to distinguish between the motivation to be given money or gifts for subsistence or for non-essential consumption. See forward Wamoyi et al. who illustrate that in practice these two motives are sometimes inseparable because beauty products might be needed to attract sexual partners to meet subsistence needs.
I often heard from parents and caretakers as an answer for my question why a boy or a girl would engage in sex was: “S/he has already grown up”.

Concluding remarks

Parents and caretakers play an important role in the development of children’s sexuality and sexual behavior. They are frequently blamed for children’s sexual activity. Parents and caretakers are said to encourage children to have sex by being bad role models. They are sometimes accused of promoting their children to engage in sex because they believe they should take care of themselves since the family faces economic hardship or because they perceive that the child is grown up. Parents and caretakers are also blamed when the children perceive them as indifferent or providing insufficient guidance to their children. But based on what the children told us, parental or caretaker influence on their sexual activity cannot be separated from the family’s socio-economic context and the personal relationship between the child and the parent(s). Peers and the children’s community also have an influence. Sexual decisions are also dependent on the child’s physical and mental development. Disobedience and resistance against parents’ wishes and control are related to puberty and children’s wish to be grown up and make decisions independently from their parents or caretakers. Money provides girls with a means to take control over their own lives and become more independent. Since girls have limited options for obtaining money, boyfriends often provide girls with needs that parents cannot or will not provide. The wish to be grown up and independent increases if the children disagree with their parents or caretakers. Sex can be used as a form of resistance against parental misbehavior and control.

Being regarded as grown up is important in the peer context of boys and girls. They compete with their peers in the domain of maturity and sometimes encourage each other to disobey adults or to become sexually active. As the examples of Tumaini (encouraged by his older brother and friends) and Asha (encouraged by Penny) show, peer influence can be a significant factor or co-factor in children’s decision to engage in or to refrain from sex. Temptations, desire, parental influence, money and poverty are often mentioned in combination with a reference to the influence of peers; friends, siblings and classmates who directly or indirectly encourage or discourage boys and girls to get involved or to abstain from sexual relationships. Yet not all children who have disputes with their parents or caretakers or
who are encouraged by parents or peers engage in sex. This remains true even if these children share the temptations of desire and curiosity as described by so many boys and girls. The next section will investigate the children’s opinions and experiences in regard to the influence of peers and consider children who refuse to engage in sex despite encouragement of their peers and others.
V PEERS AND PRESSURES

The case of Charlie

Charlie is 15 years old and in Standard 7 of Kijjii rural school. He lives with his grandmother; his mama mdogo (aunt) and his older sister a half an hour walk from his school in a rural village approximately 30 kilometres from Magu town. Charlie’s parents passed away, first his father in 1998 and then his mother in 1999. He tells us that he doesn’t know what caused their deaths. His grandmother and aunt are farmers and they use the products from the farm for their own needs. Charlie helps them with farming and fetching water. If the family needs money, they sell firewood. Charlie has no money of his own. If he needs something he goes to his grandmother and asks. Although he says his grandmother and aunt are not very strict, he has to come home straight after school, to help them. He is not allowed to ‘hang around’.

Charlie: “I eat at 8pm and then I revise my homework, then I go to bed. The only time I can leave home is when they send me to buy or do something. I don’t hang out with friends, I don’t hang out with girls, but some of my male friends come over sometimes to study with me.”

Charlie’s friends sometimes ask him to come with them to look for girls. If he does not want to, he cannot tell them no, because they will argue with him and he’s afraid he will lose the argument. So normally he just keeps quiet, not answering them. But some time last year, one of Charlie’s friends (17) who had a girlfriend himself, wanted Charlie to have a girlfriend also. After telling Charlie he should ‘try it’ too, this friend approached a girl from another school and talked to her, telling her about his friend and offering her some money, which she accepted. The friend went back to fetch Charlie and brought him back to his house, where they met up with the girl. The parents of his friend were not at home and Charlie had sex with the girl. According to Charlie “The one who hooks you up normally tells you what to do”. He didn’t know much about the girl; only that she was a schoolgirl at a nearby school. He sometimes sees her walking by, but they did not have sex again. Charlie now decided he really wants to wait until he has finished studying and tells this to his friend, who continues to try to push him into getting a girlfriend again.

Charlie’s story is not unique. Most boys and girls mention their peers as one of the main sources of information about sex. Sometimes talking with peers about sex is enough to encourage boys and girls to look for a sexual relationship. This was the case for Charlie’s classmate, 13-year-old Daniel. Daniel told us that three years ago, when he was 10 years old, he had a “temporary chick” that he took to his house where he was “chatting her up” in an attempt to seduce her to sleep with him. His dad came home however, caught them and whipped Daniel who then “had to give up”. Although Daniel did not succeed having sex with the girl, he clearly stated to us that he wanted to have sex with her. When we asked him why he wanted to sleep with the girl, he said: “Because of talking in a group with friends about the taste of a girl and the joy you can get”.

80
Peer pressure can also be experienced more directly, as in the case of Charlie, when peers actively try to involve their friends in sexual encounters. Boys frequently described how male peers or older brothers attempt to involve them into ‘approaching’ girls by looking for a girl for them, offering their skills as negotiators, and sometimes even providing the money needed for sexual negotiations. The dominant norm among male peers is to ‘try out’ sex and corresponds to the more general cultural notion that expects Tanzanian men to be knowledgeable and experienced about sex. Although the dominant norm for Tanzanian women is to be sexually restrained girls too experience pressure from each other to get involved.

They say like “that guy has a lot of money! I slept with him”. [...] They've tried to get me involved. They say "shall we find a boyfriend for you or is it because your boyfriend finished school that you are not interested anymore?" Sometimes they send boys to me.

[Seba, 14 years, personal interview, Magu town]

When her boyfriend left, my friend would tell me what they were doing and then she would tell me to give it a try as well. I always said no, but one day I thought 'okay, let’s give it a try'. [...] This girl found a boy of the same age for me. I had sex with the boy, that is how it started. I didn’t really like the boy. I just did it to impress the girl, but I wasn't ready for it yet.

[Shani, 15 years, personal interview, Nyahali]

Both the boys and girls we interviewed bragged about being popular with the opposite sex. Boys try to impress each other by being knowledgeable about courtship and sex. According to Imani who was 15 years old, in rural Magu: “They will say don't be old school, you're growing up, you need to know about those things”. And in a small group discussion with four boys who were friends in Nyahali, one of the boys showed off his experience and ‘maturity’ by claiming that the boys in his class who do not have girlfriends: “[...] are not grown up, they are not matured”. Again this remark shows that children see sexual interest and activity as a sign of maturity. Girls also compete with each other in the domain of maturity and sexuality. Girls consider it positive to be approached by boys and regard it as attention or as confirmation that they are attractive. This is despite that fact that sometimes girls reported that the approach was a nuisance or irritant and upset them because they feared punishment by their parent or caretaker.

Me: How does attention of a boy make you feel? (Girls giggle)
Girl 1: I like it if a boy impresses me and brings me things
Girl 2: I will not take anything from the start; it is harder to turn him down at a later stage
Girl 3: It makes you feel good!
Girl 4: I feel excited if a boy approaches me
During the research we noticed a competition between the boys and girls because the girls made a distinct effort in group discussions to tell us their stories about being approached by a boy, how often it happened, and what they were told and offered. Children in this research valued being regarded attractive as a man or a woman and this was cause for jealousy, competition and pressure among peers. Much of the pressure for younger children came from older children and siblings. Because enrollment in primary schools occurs at various ages, primary school classes have pupils with a range of ages. In Standards 7, for example, we found 17 year old pupils sharing books and benches with pupils who were 13 years old. The older classmates and siblings were said to influence the younger ones: “If older sisters have a boyfriend, younger sisters say like, oh, if my sister is getting all this, then I want to do the same thing” (FGD with girls in Magu town).

**Keeping it secret**

Although it is clear that peer pressure significantly contributes to the boys’ and girls’ motivations to become involved in sexual relationships, at the same time this pressure is not clear-cut. Many boys and girls who are involved in sexual relationships want to keep it a secret out of fear of parental, caretaker, family or teacher repercussions. The information they give to others is therefore often limited and kept general, unless they are speaking with close friends or within a kinship group. Charlie told us for example, “I won’t be able to know when these guys get involved, because they will keep it a secret, to prevent parents from finding out”. And Tumaini stated,

I didn’t tell anyone [about the girlfriends and the sex], because it is my own secret. If I tell one, they all know. If they find out I will refuse to admit that I have a girlfriend or have had sex, I will deny it.

And Deusi (17) who has a boyfriend told us,

Nobody in school knows. Only my best friend, who is my neighbor, she is the only one who knows. If I would tell my friends, the teachers will also know and I’ll be kicked out of school
For girls it is particularly critical to keep their sexual relationships hidden, out of fear for their reputation. When we interviewed Salim, 15 years old boy and in Standard 7 in Nyahali he mentioned that his friends have girlfriends; “But I don't know if they have achieved sex with these girls, I can only guess, I don't know for sure”. He added, “Girls are embarrassed about it and don't want others to hear about it, so they ask the boys not to tell anyone. And the boys don't.”

Girls do not always have a relationship with a boyfriend that is sexual because girls sometimes receive money from a boy before or even without having sex (this is sometimes called “skinning” see next paragraph). So girls can pressure other girls without having to reveal their sexual involvement with boys, although this involvement will be suspected. Out of fear for punishment or for getting a ‘bad reputation’ that might decrease a girl’s chances of getting married or undermines her negotiation position in courtship, few girls will admit to others, including me, that they are involved with boys. The children believed that their relationships had to be kept secret. However, knowing a friends’ secrets gave children power over the friend since they could disclose the secret. Therefore, the children did not share their secrets easily. If they did, they did it in the context of trust, with close friends or siblings. Furthermore, if a boy directly pressured another boy to have sex with a girl, he would have to offer his help in respect to negotiations and sometimes with money. Abdalla, an out of school boy of 15 who lived with his grandmother because his parents could no longer take care of him told us his friends would not talk about their girlfriends with him. “Because they think that you don't have money. They don't see the point of including you if you don't have any money.” When I asked him if his friends didn’t try to show off about having girlfriends, Abdalla explained, “No, their aim is to use their own money on a girl. If they include you, they are afraid that otherwise they'd have to share their money, or spend it also on a girlfriend for you.” Abdalla’s remark shows why it is important for boys to have access to money. Without money it is difficult to get a girlfriend and you will be excluded from the group; you don’t belong.

‘Positive’ peer pressure

Peer pressure can also include discouraging others to engage in sex. This kind of pressure was most noticeable during the group discussions because of the normative character of group
discussions. Boys and girls valued a peer’s statement, example or answer as good or bad, or asked the other student to justify why he or she had behaved in a certain way or had made a particular decision. This feedback often reflected the dominant norm in Tanzanian society; that sexual behavior among children is bad behavior and that sex should not be allowed before a certain age. Most children indicated that someone should not have sex until they reached 18–20 years. Children would point out that they had a responsibility to warn other children not to do something ‘bad’. We often found in peer interviews that if the interviewee described “bad” behavior in others the interviewer would ask why he or she did not attempt to stop the other person. An example is an interview between Shilling and his friend Zazi, both 13 years old:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shilling</th>
<th>You, maybe you have your friends; you have your friends involving themselves with these things? [Referring to sexual involvement]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zazi</td>
<td>They’re there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Now you, have you ever advised them, that like, “you homie, leave that!” What have you ever advised them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zazi</td>
<td>No. Meaning if you advise them they can say that, “you, don't interfere with my things! What, you are jealous of me? You want to seduce, come after this girl [yourself], you seduce her …what…?” That's it and you, you only leave [them alone].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>There is where you see where they are coming from or…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zazi</td>
<td>Yes, there is where you see where they are coming from. Tanzania, that's why it's failing to develop fast because of words [I guess disputes or ignorance]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Right, […] if you stay with that boy, maybe he has chicks, and you, you will learn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zazi</td>
<td>They’re like, if it’s your friend, if he is following chicks and you, you will copy that behavior. But if you are smart you can be dodging him, you be like, if he wants to talk to you [persuade/encourage you], it will be hard. If you don't want, even him, he will notice that you don't want. You will be dodging him; you join with the group that doesn't involve with those things of getting involved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Strategies to deal with peer pressure**

Zazi tells us that to withstand pressure from friends who are getting involved in sexual activity, basically means you will have to make a choice not to hang out with them anymore, but to ‘join with the group that does not get involved’. Two sisters from an Evangelist family, who had told us that they were strongly against sex before marriage, said:

45 The quotes are a literal transcription because they come from a videotaped child-to-child interview
There are four groups: boys who say no, girls who say no, boys who get involved, girls who get involved. They [those who want to postpone sex] have refused the other groups and chosen for the group that chooses education.

Tumaini, belonged to a group of friends who had or wanted to have girlfriends. He appeared to confirm this division of peer groups as those who choose education or those who chose sex:

The group [his friends] may be talking about love/sex while others like to talk about studying.

Although we wondered if the peer groups were really that clear cut, we did find many informants who spoke about the choice of education versus sex. Those informants who said they were not (or no longer) involved in sexual relationships justified their decision by saying “because I want to focus on studies”, “education first”, “I do not want to be distracted from my examinations” or similar reasoning. The majority of our interviewees actually said they chose to postpone having sex until after finishing Standard 7. However, it was difficult for us as researchers to determine the reliability of such remarks. Yet some boys and girls strongly argued finishing primary school and trying to get to secondary school, convincing us that finishing school was so important to them that it outweighed any encouraging influences to have sex. Juma, a boy and Neema, a girl are examples of children with strong personal motivations not to get involved in sexual relationships despite an encouraging context:

The case of Juma:

Juma played the father and headmaster in the Nyahali play and was prominently present in the debate46, arguing strongly for the boys’ refusal to take responsibility for pregnancy. Juma has the habit of taking his time before answering a question, creating the impression he thinks his answers through carefully before speaking. Juma is 16 years old. He lives with his mother, older brother and sisters, seven in total. He has not seen his father since 1996: “He was accused of murder, together with his brother and had to flee the area. I have not seen him or heard of him since.” The family survives by buying products from town and selling them in Nyahali. They do not have a lot of money, so he never asks his mother for anything and does not turn to her when he has problems: “She won’t be able to help me”. He prefers to go to his friends or older brother. When I asked him if his mother has told him anything about sex or girlfriends Juma hesitates: “…. Not really.” He says: “You learn automatically, like from an older brother.” Juma’s older brother is not married, but has many girlfriends. He tries to convince his younger brother to join him in chasing girls and tells him about his experiences with girls. His brother would tell Juma: “I met a girl, you probably know her… like so and so… we went there and there… to have sex.” Or he would say: “Can I call that one for you?” Juma’s friends have girlfriends too and they try to persuade Juma to get a girl as well or to come and watch an X movie (porn) with them. But Juma refuses. He is sometimes jealous of his friends: “It has happened that I

46 See later under Responsibility: Pregnancy and Condoms
went to the beach with my friends and they all had girlfriends with them, except for me. So I would sit aside." Juma admits that he finds it difficult not to get involved, especially when his friends or brother bring him a girl or if a girl approaches him. He finds it difficult to turn the girl down, "So what I do, I will not focus on her and in the end she will give up, but then nobody got hurt". Like his friends, Juma has feelings of desire but deals with that in a different way: "I realize that desire gets away, if you don’t concentrate on it. My friends can’t control themselves. And once you have tasted the honey, you want to taste again. So it is better to not yet get involved, but to postpone." Although Juma is interested in girls, he tells his brother and friends that he wants to study. The reason for his decision: "I learnt from my brother, because my brother was in Form 2 when he started getting involved with girls and he became too much [out of hand], like going to nightclubs and discos and stuff. Then he asked our mom for a private room to rent, near his school, so that he could use that ‘to study’ and mom believed him. But instead he used this room to be with girls. And in the end he failed his Standard 4 exams. I don’t want that to happen to me." Juma is number two in his class and badly wants to go to secondary school. "It is one of my fears that my mom cannot afford to send me, but she has already been asking all her friends and relatives to contribute to help us.”

The case of Neema:

Juma’s classmate Neema is 14 years old and one of the youngest girls in her class. In the class or group interviews she likes to tell stories and she encourages the other girls to share their stories as well. During the break you can see her move around the school compound with a group of female friends. One of her best friends is Nuru and Neema is very protective of her. Neema is an attractive girl; she has beautiful features and behaves in a feminine way. The boys look at her but somehow seem to keep a respectful distance. In the debate she was one of the girls fiercely attacking the boys, creating a sense of group identity for the girls, who were encouraged to stand up against the boys. One time when we visited the school, she came out of the classroom with a test that was just returned to her. She proudly showed it to us: she had scored 95%. Neema does not live with her parents, but with her Mama Mdogo (the younger sister of her mother) and her husband and their two daughters of 8 and 9. She moved from Bukoba to Nyahali when she was five years old. Her parents could not afford to raise her and had asked Neema’s aunt to look after her. Her older brothers and sister continued to live with her parents in Bukoba. Neema would have preferred to stay with her parents and she does not like living with her uncle and aunt. However, she says, “the choice was not mine to make”. Her aunt and uncle are strict with her; she has to come home straight after school to help with the cooking: “They never allow me to play. I get a lot of tasks, more than my cousins. It's unfair. And even without making a mistake they shout at me.” If she has problems her aunt and uncle are not interested in hearing about it. “They say I should write a letter to my mother.” Her aunt never spoke to Neema about sexual issues, except to tell her that if she got involved, that it would be her own problem: “They don’t care, they would be okay with it. Even if boys walk with me to the house and come up to drink some water, my aunt says it’s my own problem if I have boyfriends.” Neema is in a situation that does not discourage her to have boyfriends. Her aunt and uncle refuse to give her money and do not treat her well. She is not discouraged to have sex by friends who sometimes have boyfriends themselves. She is regularly approached and boys offer her relatively

47 Nuru will be introduced in the paragraph on Courtship: expectations and force
large amounts of money. However, Neema said she never had a boyfriend and refuses to agree to one. Her behavior in class and remarks in discussions and interviews support her statement. The reason Neema gave for not wanting to engage in sexual relationships with boys was: “I know I’m from a poor family. So it will be very important to finish school first. If I would have a boyfriend now, my mind would go out to him and I would be thinking about him too much. Then I could not concentrate on my studies or what the teacher is saying. But it is important that I pass examinations with good marks, so that I can go to secondary school. Only if I finish secondary school I could get a job and help my family.”

Children who chose not to comply with the peer pressure or expectations had various strategies. For example, Zazi and the Evangelist girls would distance themselves from the friends who were pushing them to become sexually active and look for new friends who made the same choice, as they had to abstain. Assertive boys and girls such as Juma and Neema were able to postpone sexual activity without having to break friendship ties by convincing their friends of their firm decision. Other children lied about achievements or denied having a girlfriend or boyfriend, depending on the context and where the pressures or expectations were coming from:

*Do your friends push you?*
Yes, they are trying to convince me. They told me ‘find a girl!’ I can’t tell them I don’t want to. So I say ‘okay, I’ll try to find’. But then I delay, I don’t want to find right now.
[Yussuf, 14, Nyahini]

More than once we heard stories from boys who told us that they wanted to have sex and managed to seduce a girl but did not succeed in having sex. They were thwarted because they were ‘caught in the act’ and punished by a parent. The parent then kept such a close eye on the boy that he didn’t get a chance to try again. Or the girl they had seduced had ‘moved’ somewhere else because one of her parents was transferred, just before they had a chance to ‘do it’ (have intercourse). It was difficult for us to assess how truthful these stories were and this must also be true for these boys’ peers. These strategies appeared to be successful if a child wanted to belong to a group that focused on having sex but if the child themselves did not want to be sexually active.

**Observations: Competition and popularity**

In addition to collecting firsthand accounts from children about how they experienced peer pressure, we observed how the children influenced each other and what made a child popular
within a group. As described in the methodology chapter, our research exercises were sometimes used as a means to gain popularity or strengthen a child’s position in the group. After working with groups of children over months, we got a good idea what kind of behavior or traits children thought of as ‘cool’ and which classmates had the most influence on others. Girls, as well as boys, who displayed boldness, cheekiness and humor were appreciated by all groups. The dramas were an excellent opportunity to display one’s skills as a performer, which appeared to be highly valued by the class as well. Other personality aspects that appeared to influence a student’s popularity and status were doing well in class and “attitude”. Attitude included actions such as daring to trespass rules, especially towards teachers, but also daring to speak one’s mind in the group. The ability to speak slang, to rap, dance and how they walked (“bouncing’) and dressed reflected their status as “cool”. This was explained by the children as an influence from the media, especially “bongo flava” music.

Having access to money was experienced as something to be jealous of, as well as being clean, having a neat uniform, good shoes and school equipment and money to spend on snacks and candy during break. Some children got cash from their family while others managed to gain access to money through other ways. Boys, for example, would make money through doing small jobs like farming for others, or making bricks. One of our key informants, “Shilling” was skilled in ‘cutting’ money by self-report and also according to his friends. ‘Cutting’ money involved running errands for his parents or neighbors, but going to a different shop than where he was told to go where he could negotiate a cheaper price. He would then bring the item back to his parents, not tell them he paid less than expected, and he would keep the change for himself. This way he managed to accumulate quite a sum of money thereby earning the nickname Shilling. I emphasize the significance of money for children because it has both a practical and a symbolic meaning. For girls, there are fewer options to get money of their own, since most parents and caretakers do not allow them to work for others. So girls only have access to money from parents, caretakers or boys. This is why money plays such a significant role in courtship, sexual relationships and peer competition.

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48 Measured by rankings based on marks. Informants often mentioned their ‘number’ first in personal interviews. Children who did well in class, would indicate this, by saying for instance: “I’m number 3 in my class”.
49 Bongo flava is the name used for Swahili rap music, originating from the streets of Dar es Salaam. It is a mix of hip hop with native dance music. Bongo flava is very popular, especially among youth, because the lyrics are often about the lives of youth in Tanzania or other issues that are relevant to them. The music is often played in local bars, nightclubs, discos, television channels and radio. Bongo flava is associated with ‘urban youth culture’ and a certain ‘lifestyle’ that is expressed through language and clothing (see also The Foundation of African Hiphop Culture Online: www.africanhiphop.com).
Concluding remarks

It appears that for children in Tanzania peers are not only the primary source of information about sex but they also have a central role in the onset or refusal of sexual activity. Peers influence each other by example, direct encouragement or discouragement, using peer norms and expectations or by competition in a variety of domains, like the domains of maturity and independence, school performance, sports, skills etc. Sexuality is a crucial domain in which to prove maturity and to win popularity and status among peers. Yet this is contradicted by many children emphasizing the importance of keeping sexual interest and activity secret. There is a tension between keeping it secret and showing off to friends. Yet children find ways to ‘show’ their sexual achievements. Their behavior is enough to create peer norms and exert pressure on others, yet at the same time these children keep their true sexual achievements unclear even from their friends. This allows the sexually active children to deny sexual activity whenever it might lead to trouble for them. It also provokes lying about achievements or sexual activity in order to cope with peer pressure. At the same time this lying reinforces the dominant norm in a particular social context and contributes to peer pressure.

If children have an intention to postpone sexual activity, or say they have, this is almost always linked to the argument of wanting to finish education first. These children reason that a sexual relationship before reaching graduation will jeopardize their educational goals.

Peers, parents, personality, physical development and socio-economic contexts are important influences on children’s decisions to engage in or abstain from sex. Yet whether a boy or girl intends to engage in a sexual relationship or to abstain, the real decisions are made only when the child is presented with a situation in which sex is a real possibility. In the following chapters I will give a description of children’s explanations of courtship and how decisions are made during an interaction with a potential partner.
VI COURTSHIP: DECEIT AND SKINNING

Drawing from a primary school student in Magu town

Seduction

From the drawings, discussions, dramas and interviews the boys and girls drew a consistent picture about courtship. Boys who want to pursue a girl approach her either directly or indirectly through letters or messengers. The letter or messenger will tell the girl that ‘so and so’ is interested in her and asks to meet her at a certain time and place. If the girl agrees to meet up with the boy, or if she is approached directly, the boy will typically tell her ‘nakumindi’50 or ‘nakupenda’, “I like you” or “I love you” and offer her money or a gift. Most girls say that this signals that the boy wants to have sex. The girl now has to decide to say ‘no’ and refuse the money/gift or to start negotiations. When the boys and girls ‘showed’ courtship to us, the boy would often take the girl’s arm or wrist and hold on to it to prevent her from walking away. This was something that could be observed in the streets and bars among adults as well. If the girl says no, most boys will try to make her change her mind, by

50 Slang word or ‘street talk’, derived from the English verb “to mind”.

90
persisting and ‘following her’, while trying to persuade her by sending her letters and continuing to offer her money or gifts.

Girl: Why don’t you give up when a girl refuses you? Even after I don’t know how many times, but you are still following me. But you don’t get fed up. Now what am I to do?
Boy: Now to be annoyed that’s when you agree.
Girl: Why are you following me, I have already refused, you are following me still?
Boy: Because your answer does not stand [is not fixed, you might change your mind]
Girl: I answer you that I don’t want you, not so? After I have answered you, why follow me tomorrow?

[Debate between a representative of girls and a representative of boys in Standard 7 Nyahali primary school]

Boys admit they are persistent and say it is part of their strategy. According to 16-year-old Kosmos from Nyahali, the best way to do pursue a girl is:

You call or approach a girl. But she refuses you or she will curse at you. The trick is not to give up. You will go talk to her and follow her over and over again, so that she will think that you find her special.

A boy will try to convince the girl about his dedication and that his feelings for her are real. He will tell her about his ability to support her and his willingness to invest in her. The amount of money or the value of the gifts that he offers is a symbol of this. Boys normally offer between 100 to 1000 Tanzanian Shillings\(^5\), depending on the geographic area. A larger amount of money is offered in urban areas compared to rural areas. The amount of money also depends on how much a boy can get his hands on, the reputation of the girl and how much he ‘loves’ her. However, money is not easy to come by and many boys try to convince girls to sleep with them for as little money as possible. They often promise the girl that money, more money, or gifts will follow later. Boys generally promise girls that they will support them with money if they become their girlfriend or that they will buy them prestigious items like soap, body lotion or even a mobile phone. In order to convince a girl to accept their offer, they might tell her that they are from a rich family. Some boys tell girls they are so much in love with them that they will marry the girl after they are done with their education.

They will say that they have a lot of money or that they are from a rich family. Or that they want to marry you.

[Mayega, 12, rural Magu]

\(^5\) At the time of research 1000 TSh was about 0,70 Euro or 0,80 Dollar and could buy you a simple meal or 2-3 sodas.
Deception

A girl will be more susceptible to these promises or to “agree” with a boy if she believes his feelings or promises are genuine and if she likes the boy back. However, most girls warn each other that many boys do not actually mean what they are saying, that they tell lies, do not live up to their promises and will leave a girl the moment they have achieved their goal to have sex with her. Other reasons for a girl to be abandoned following sex is when a boy sees a better looking girl or when the girl gets pregnant: “Some boys intend to make love to you but after they make love to you they deny you, it’s like they only want to hurt you”. This is what girls (and boys) refer to when they mention ‘deceptions’ (danganyo) as a reason for girls to engage in. When Shilling was interviewing his female classmate Blessed (13) about boys and courtship, Blessed told him:

Maybe he will even buy her, if she doesn't have school shoes, maybe she is a student, he will buy her shoes. If she doesn't have a school skirt, he will buy her, you see? If she doesn't have a shirt, she will be bought a shirt or other small things, like a soda, sweets, watch, take those. And you, now, those small gifts, they make like that girl, hah! For what I shouldn't like that boy? He gives me small presents, things, aren't they nice? Let me also agree, to have sex with him. She enters into deceptions. [...] Normally a boy would dump the girl because he got what he wanted.

[From a child-to-child interview, Blessed and Shilling].

Sarah, a 14 year old out-of-school girl who lived in my neighborhood in Mwanza city mentioned that she regretted her sexual debut because she was promised money and never received it: “I felt really bad, because I was a virgin and... and the man was cheating, he promised me 500 and he didn't give me the money....”

While girls mentioned that boys deceived girls with false promises, boys actually admitted to what the girls said. The boys acknowledged that they have to be smart and use ‘tactics’ like telling lies to girls in order to convince them to have sex. Fifteen year old Charlie from Kijiji rural school elaborates:

The boys lie. They would be saying to the girl that their parents have a really good job and give the girl the little money they have at that time. The girl believes that more will follow, but the boy only wants sex. It’s not that these girls want these boys, they are being deceived.
‘Skinning’

But boys are not the only ones who are deceptive. Many boys are frustrated by girls who make false promises and ‘steal’ the boy’s money without living up to their part of the agreement. The children commonly referred to this as ‘skinning’ (kuchuna). Skinning was one of the reasons why boys told us they had to be smart and lie to girls in order to prevent losing their money without getting anything in return.

Some boys didn’t manage [to have sex] because the girl is saying ‘kesho kesho kesho’ [tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow] and in the mean time they are taking your money! So that’s when you break up. Because you are being skinned. So you’ve got to be smart, you will have to make her offer first and then you offer next. First you would give some money and she promises, but then you don’t give money next time. She knows you have money because you gave to her the first time, so the next time you wait for sex first, before giving money again. Because she knows you have money, she will have sex with you.

[FGD with Nyahali boys]

[…] the girl is smart; she takes the money, but won't give anything back. The boys sometimes gossip that they had sex, while that didn't happen, because the girl was so smart (mjanja). He just wants to cover up that his money was taken. To show he's a man.

[Seba, 14, Magu city]

Girls will often try to postpone sex in order to find out how truthful and dedicated the boy is (as expressed in gifts and money). This is also a strategy to gain as much as possible from the encounter before or without having sex and to prevent getting a reputation as cheap. Boys respond to the girls’ strategy by being persistent and making promises. During courtship both boys and girls are trying to find out how truthful the other one is about his or her feelings and promises. They are also trying to determine if the other is committed to a relationship or if they are only after money or sex. A boy often insists that the girl agrees to a place and time for sex while many girls will tell the boy to wait for her answer or invent an excuse as to why they did not show up at the agreed time and place. In the Nyahali play Penny used this approach with the boy she met in the street and from whom she had accepted money:

Boy: What’s up? Today, you didn’t show up, you ditched me.
Penny: My dad has become stricter on me, he didn’t let me go.
Boy: So now then?...
Penny: Today they got me tight, maybe tomorrow.

From a videoed interview between two friends, Omari (15) and Issa (14) from Nyahali, we hear about Omari’s personal experience and frustration with being kept on a string:
She told me: “I have already died for you, I like you a lot now wait for an answer, I will send you an answer, wait and get an answer”. Now I waited, waited, like how many days, a week like this, I saw no answers. She told me a period like two days, but two days passed, it reached like two weeks, two weeks...!

**Expectations and force**

For the majority of boys and girls who we interviewed it was clear that accepting money or gifts resulted in the expectation of having sex. If a girl refused to have sex after she accepted money or a gift from a boy, the boy was ‘entitled’ to ask her to return the money to him. Yet if he does make such a request, it is clear that he was only after sex. Sometimes boys use this strategy to convince a girl to have sex:

> When a boy, when he goes after the girl, he brings, he gives her a gift as well. So when you have given her the gift, you tell her 'I love you' and I want you to do this and that with me. Now if she refuses you tell her that she should give back what you have given her. And she can decide now to agree with you, because when she thinks of what she has to refund. Normally you do not tell what amount of money you have spent on her; you will give her a higher amount.

*[FGD boys Magu town]*

If the girl is unable or unwilling to return the money or gift, boys can put pressure on her to live up to the agreement. This pressure can range from emotional blackmail to insults, threats or even physical force. If a girl postpones too long or accepts too much money or too many gifts without having sex, there was a consensus among the majority of boys and many girls that the boy has the right to have sex with her. To this end he could beat her to make her change her mind or even force her to have sex.

Boy: Sometimes you give something to a girl and in the end she denies that she knows you. She refuses you despite of what you have given her.

Me: *how would you feel about that?*

Boy: it can happen that the boy gives something to the girl because he wants to do something with her, but then she ends up refusing him.

Me: *What would you do?*

Boy: you decide to just leave her

Me: *is there anything you could do to prevent this from happening?*

Boys: you can beat her

Boy: yeah, you can decide to beat her so that she can change her mind and you can tell her 'you think I'm a fool? I give you my gifts and then you say no!'

*From a Focus Group Discussion with boys in Magu town*
She will be beaten up. Because the man spends all his time earning money and then the woman spends it, after agreeing. That is not done. Maybe he is a fisherman, risking his life to earn that money!

[15 year old Bo, out-of-school boy in Jabali during discussion of drawings]

Many boys get skinned when they first start approaching girls especially when the girl they approach has some experience with courtship. The girl will take his money or gift but then refuses to have sex with the boy or denies that she ever got anything from him. Boys mentioned their frustration with skinning. Informants who were a bit older told us that they were not successful at convincing a girl to sleep with them when they were younger because at that age they were not ‘confident’ yet. We got the impression that confidence, in this respect, meant having skills and self-confidence as well as physical strength. If a boy is smaller, a girl could take his money and there would be nothing he could do about it. Only when a boy becomes stronger does skinning become more ‘risky’ for girls.

Some boys and girls said that it was forbidden to rape a girl or that a girl had the right to change her mind. But many children, including girls, shared the assumption that a boy could beat or force a girl to have sex if she took his money but did not have sex with him in return:

[Shilling interviewing Blessed]
Shilling: She changes the conditions, she says give me time to think, she is given time. Now that boy, he pushes to go to a place, maybe a bar or what, maybe there she has already drunk a soda [seen as gift or investment] and then she says: “For me, I have thought much to myself, I have seen it’s not possible [to have sex]”. And the boy, what is he going to do?
Blessed: That boy, he has loved a girl all those days and then this day, a girl, instead of satisfying him she refuses, dah! I see for the boy it’s a must, even to rape her, somewhere he will rape her.

This shared attitude among boys and girls corresponded with the attitude we found in Tanzanian adults. According to a group of young men in their early 20’s including some who had a schoolgirl as a partner:

If a girl would accept money from the man but refuse him later, he will beat her. It’s according to the amount of money, for little money you can leave her, but for big money you can beat her. When she takes the money it means she has already agreed. Why then refuse? You have to beat her. It depends on the girl, sometimes you can beat her and then later she comes back and apologizes and you can have sex with her. Sometimes you can beat and then force her to have sex with you.

[FGD Nyahali five young male adults]
In Tanzania there is wide acceptance that within a marriage a wife cannot refuse to have sex with her husband. Boys and girls refer to this as the ‘marriage rule’, or the ‘marriage obligation’. It is possible that this marital understanding influences the children’s belief that a boy has the right to beat a girl who takes money and then refuses to have sex with him in order to get the money back or to force her to fulfill her tacit agreement to have sex:

Based on what we learned from science class, I can tell that if a man has a wife and he wants to have sex and she refuses, then he can force her. He has the right because they are married.

Me: But if she just doesn’t feel like sex? Can she refuse?

It depends on the reason, if she has personal problems. It's a misunderstanding between them. In a marriage, if a woman doesn't want to have sex with her husband, she is breaking the rules of marriage. She has to explain well to him to make him understand why she refuses.

[Neema in a personal interview]

The children said the reason that a man had the right to force his wife to have sex was related to the payment of bride price. According to the boys in Magu town: “The main reason to have a wife is to have children; it doesn't make sense if she doesn't want to have sex with him.” The boys and girls in Magu town had a debate about this assumed male right and they made a link between the male’s rights after paying a bride price to a male’s rights after giving a girl money during courtship:

Boy: She does not have the right [to refuse] because that man married her and he has given bride price and money, for that she is not allowed to refuse.

Girl: She might have the right because, in the afternoon she might have done a lot of work maybe in the night she is tired.

Second girl: Maybe the man when he would have given out bride price for her, the woman doesn't have the right to refuse, even if she is tired, that's her husband, she must ...ammh... [have sex]

Second boy: Us, we are the grown-ups with responsibilities, for that a girl can’t refuse if this is what the boy wants.

Third boy: It's a must to agree, because she has eaten [spent] his money and then to come to have sex it's a must. He first gives her money, it's a must she agrees.

How long a girl can postpone or how much money she can accept without being pushed or forced into sex depends on the context and is not always clear. Most boys and girls learn about the expectations, ‘rules’ and possible consequences and dangers of courtship through peers. Some girls learn through experience when they are forced to have sex with their pursuer without realizing beforehand that this is a potential consequence of accepting money and ultimately refusing sex. Boys stated clear assumptions such as: “Once a girl is in your bedroom, she can't back off, she's got to stick to it, so it's too late for demands then.” Or:
“Some [boys] can seduce without money. They persuade the girls to come to their house. And if she follows you to your house, you know she wants to [have sex].” On the other hand girls told us: “Some guys take you to their house without you knowing what is going to happen and before you can even scream it is done.” One girl told us she followed an older boy to his home because she thought they were going to play a game: “For me, it was a joke, I didn't know what was going to happen. The boy was older and he forced me and I was not willing and I was really hurt.” Afterwards girls can feel responsible for what happened or their peers or adults tell them that they ‘should have known’. According to a female teacher in Nyahali:

Children learn about sex because it is nature, they follow their bodies. With a young girl who really doesn't know anything about how the body works and what it [sex] is, if it happens to her, then you can call it rape. But a girl who knows a bit more knows what it is all about, you can't call it rape anymore.

This is often the reason why girls do not report such experiences; the idea exists among children and adults that she should have been aware of the possible consequences and that the boy interpreted her actions or words as consent. According to 13-year-old Daniel from Kijiji in rural Magu if a boy physically forces a girl to have sex with him after she has taken his money and she reports what happened, they will both get punished:

According to the law, they both will be punished. Because the girl has accepted money but has not fulfilled her promise. The boy will be punished for taking the law in his own hands. If the parents get involved, they will punish both of them. They will punish the girl, because the boy will say ‘she took my money and promised sex’. She'll be beaten for accepting money and promising to the boy. The boy will be punished for destroying their daughter.

The following case of Nuru from Nyahali illustrates what can go wrong. Nuru is 15 years old girl and in Standard 7. She lives in Nyamalango, about five minutes away from the school. She lives with her father who used to be a driver, but who is now retired and unemployed. Her mother died in 1994. She has seven siblings living in her house; three girls, four boys. Only one sibling goes to school. The rest finished primary school. The family all depend on Nuru’s older sister for money and food. Her sister works in a fish factory. Nuru helps with household tasks like fetching and drying firewood. She then sells the firewood on the streets. She makes 500-700 Tsh per day and gives the money to her grandmother who gives her 200-300 Tsh back. Nuru uses this money to buy soap and small items she needs. Nuru was interviewed and recorded on camera by her friend Neema without anybody else present. The following story is a transcription of the videotape in which Nuru speaks about the first time she had sex.
This occurred three years earlier when she was 12 years old with a boy from her school who, at the time, was 14.

**The case of Nuru**

Can I be seen from the other side? [Referring to the camera]

*Neema:* Yeah, you can be seen.

Where should I start from?

*Neema:* You start one day at school, when he came and snatched a pen from you, hurry up, we have 40 minutes left.

One day at school, a man, we studied with him but in different classes, he came and took my pen. I told him “give me back my pen!” He said “I’m not giving you your pen until tomorrow!” I left him, that day I had borrowed a pen from people. On the second day he sent his friend to bring me that pen, inside there was a little message “Nuru and Amisi” [probably the name of the boy] and then I went to him to ask him! What did he tell me? “Tomorrow I will look for you”. When he said “look for me!” I told him “when you look for me where are you going to find me?” He asked me “tomorrow are you going to fetch firewood?” I answered him “yes I’m going”. He said “there I will look for you” and me, I went to the wood.

Okay, he looked for me and I saw him, what did he tell me? “Me I’ve liked you”. Okay, now me, I did not tell him anything, I told him to wait for his answer. I had gone home. The second day also he sent a letter, that letter it said: “To you sister Nuru, I love you so much. I want to taste your fruit, what about it? Will you agree? Or disagree?” Me, that letter, I read it. I saw I needed advice. My friend, she gave me advice to write a letter [back]. But who wrote was my friend; she wrote that letter - even I did not read it. She gave it to a friend of that man (Neema: “use the word boy, not man”) she had gone to give him.

Now at school we have a garden, that garden we were watering it. He [the boy] came with his friends telling me “I want to make love to you”. Me, I had told him like “tomorrow”. Now we were closed for the holiday of month 6 [June]. But what did he tell me? “Me until I make love with you...” When I went home in the evening he came and told me: “Me, I want to do it”. Then he send his friend, when he [the friend] came, he told me I was called by his friend, and me, without hesitating, I went. When I went, the guy told me “I want to make love with you, huum!” I told him “Me, I don’t want.” He told me “I’m going first, I’m going ahead, when I go first, you follow me.” When he left I thought to myself and went.

*Neema:* tell me what happened!

When I went I found him sitting. Me, I had been standing. What did he tell me? “Sit down!” and me, I sat, what did he tell me? “Take of your clothes!” Me, I did not undress...

*Neema:* say, don’t be shy, we are running out of time!

Okay I didn’t undress and him, he didn’t undress. He had done what? Suddenly he came to me, uuum...[hesitates] me, because it was my first time, I just stood there [implying passivity]. Then we did it. Later we had separated, he told me you go this way I go this way. Then that man, he went travelling...

*Neema:* that boy, not man...
Yes, that boy was travelling until the time we opened school, okay when he went, that’s it, we did not see each other until school opened. What did he say that man? He called me and told me: “Me, my love with you is finished”. I asked him why? “It’s finished, I have another one, not you, I just have another one.” I said who is it? “It is my secret only.”

Me, I had begged him, begged, he refused, okay, [then] I had left him. I decided to leave him alone. He also went and me I went on, that’s it, I’ve learned from my mistakes I am not going to do an act like that again. I regret sincerely, why did I do it? Something like that I won’t ever do again.

Neema: And me I want to talk [handing over the camera to Nuru] bring it near [closer to me].

Neema to Nuru who holds the camera: That calamity that has befallen my friend is big, I’m begging you a lot my friend, to avoid those things.

Nuru: Thanks my friend, I’ve heard your call.

It is not completely clear from Nuru’s story whether she knew what was going to happen and whether she wanted it to happen, because of the mixed signals she was giving to the boy. A few weeks after Neema interviewed Nuru, we had a personal conversation with Nuru in which she referred to the story above. Because we were confused, we decided to ask her about this, to which she responded: “I didn’t want to have sex with him, I was forced to. The guy said that if I didn’t have sex with him he would do anything to me, or rape me or something!”

But despite the fact that the boy made quite clear what he wanted from her, she gave him positive feedback by saying where he could find her or by complying with his request to meet. Perhaps she did not understand what the boy was after, but when we asked her, Nuru told us: “If a man tells you he loves you and you accept him, you have to allow him sex”. When we asked her why she told him where he could find her, she said “If somebody asks you something like that, of course you tell him”. Perhaps an explanation for this reaction can be found in the way girls are raised in northwest Tanzania. They are taught to have good manners and to show respect to men and to people who are older. To say “no” or to lie is very disrespectful and sometimes girls prefer to respond with answers of avoidance such as, “I told him to wait for his answer”. When Nuru told the boy “tomorrow”, she added that they were closed for the holiday of June and perhaps she was hoping this would help her to avoid him. Nuru’s use of the word ‘man’, despite her friends’ disagreement and repeated suggestions to call him boy, might indicate this respect and the physical maturity of the boy. But it could also be that the boy’s sexual activity and ability to use force (strength) caused Nuru to place the boy in the category of an adult. Despite the fact that Nuru did not want to have sex and her
regret that she did, she expected the boy to be her ‘boyfriend’. She expressed disappointment when he told her that his love for her was over and that he was with someone else. We were surprised to hear she ‘begged’ him to stay with her. When we asked Nuru why his staying with her was so important she said: “The only reason I did that was because I thought I might be pregnant”. If she had been pregnant, she would have needed his support.

I interpret Nuru’s story as a misunderstanding of the ‘rules’ in courtship and communication leading to the use of force. Her statement, ‘I don’t want’ and the boys’ threat to harm her could be interpreted as rape. But in the context of northwest Tanzania, Nuru and probably her peers and others would consider her as responsible for the sexual act despite the fact that she did not accept any money or gifts. Her words at the end of the story: “I am not going to do an act like that [again], I regret sincerely, why did I do it?” appear to indicate that she’s blaming herself. Indeed Nuru told only a few of her best friends about this experience. She was afraid that she might be expelled from school and afraid of punishment from her father: “I would have been punished because I did something wrong”. When we asked her what it was that she had done wrong, she said: “It was wrong having sex. The fact that I told the man that I am going to the firewood, it’s like I gave him permission”.

Agreement

If a girl accepts 1000 shilling from a boy, she…
“Loves him”
“Is deceived”
“Is tempted”
“Makes herself available”
“Agrees to make love”
[Responses to unfinished sentences: FGD with boys and girls in Magu town]

Courtship and negotiations normally result in what the boys and girls call an “agreement” (-kubali: to agree/accept/consent). Often a negotiation and a courtship dialogue conclude by the boy asking: ‘what do you say’ or ‘have you agreed’ (see for example the boy’s letter to Nuru in the previous paragraph or the drawing below). The girl then normally responds with ‘no’ (or perhaps “I’m still a student”) or with “I have agreed”. Clarity about the meaning of the agreement is important to avoid situations like the one that Nuru experienced. Generally, if a girl says she agrees, this means she has ‘accepted’ the boy and agreed to have sex with him.
But it can also mean that she has agreed to see him (in case of messengers and letters) or to meet up with him again for further negotiations. There can be an unspoken agreement, as illustrated by the reactions from the boys and girls to the unfinished sentence quoted above. So how do boys and girls know they have an agreement? According to 13-year-old Daniel in Kijiji rural Magu:

They know through body language, the body language tells them. The girl immediately estimates the boy, if he’s good for money. And then the boy might say ‘There is no need to pay back’ and then she’ll understand that she has got to pay back in a different way. […]

There is also the way that a boy will be straightforward about what he awaits from her and then she will say okay.

Me: Which one of the two happens more? The direct or the indirect way?

Some use body language to show they have an agreement, like holding hands and touching. But it's not a direct agreement, many girls say ‘I'll think about it’, ‘I'll let you know tomorrow’. But he will tell the girl that he is too busy for this and will push to come up with a date and normally the girl gives a date.

Most boys will insist on making an appointment for a certain time and place. This is customary, to meet up for sex or as a way to signal to the girl what he is after. This date may be in the distant future, for instance ‘after finishing school’. As mentioned in the previous paragraph on peer pressure, to say you want to wait with sex until after finishing education is a strategy to postpone sexual activity without having to break friendships. This strategy is
helpful since the girl does not have to turn the boy down in case she is too polite to say ‘no’ outright or if she is not sure about her feelings and wants more time to think about her decision. Depending on her negotiation skills she might get some money from the boy while he waits for her decision. But according to most informants little time is spent between the initiation of a courtship and sexual activity (provided that the girl ‘agrees’), “it can happen the same day”. Boys confess that they do not have much patience, “unless it is a question of marriage”. Otherwise “you can decide ‘no, let me move faster so that I can get her’.” According to one of the girls in Magu town:

If a girl and a boy consider becoming boy-girlfriend, the first thing they discuss is when they will have sex. The boy would ask that on the first day of the relationship.

**Kissing**

Boys and girls did not indicate signs of a gradual process towards developing intimacy, e.g., kissing or non-penetrative forms of sexual conduct in their stories about courtship and agreement. When we probed the boys and girls said it was “just about sex”:

It's like they only like things of sex, I don't know things like kissing. These, him, he likes only to… like….do sex… that’s it.
[FGD Girls Magu town]

Kissing or ‘snogging’ (‘French’ kissing or ‘deep’ kissing) was frequently regarded as ‘wrong’, ‘dirty’ or as a sign of ‘real love’ and therefore said to take place only in long term relationships, “Only those who are married can do it.” Boys and girls as well as young adults related kissing to the exchange of saliva and through that, “some airborne diseases that can spread, like polio” or HIV. Although a few boys stated that they were willing to kiss a girl in order to show love, others, like Charlie, would not kiss: “I just can’t get myself to do it.”

When a baby is born, the saliva that comes out its mouth, it's called udenda. So kissing is called denda, meaning someone is leaking that saliva [saliva dribbling from the mouth]
[Same FGD Girls Magu town]

Furthermore, kissing was regarded as disgusting because the mouth is used for eating and food particles can be left in the mouth. According to the young men in Nyahali village this is
also a reason why oral sex is ‘not done’. These young men watch pornographic videos to learn ‘new styles’. I asked them if that included learning to do oral sex:

_Hamma kabisa! (absolutely not!). According to culture, tradition, it is impossible to do that! It is dirty. There can be some food left in the mouth._

[FGD with young men in Nyahali]

According to the group of girls in _Magu_ town, normally people do not like to kiss or have oral or anal sex: “_They get very disgusted. Those who do copy from the video_” (pornographic video). In addition to being disgusted, girls said that they were too shy to do any of this, reflecting a norm of female sexual inhibition. If a girl shows too much assertiveness, sexual knowledge or pleasure she can damage her reputation and negotiation power.

**Flirting**

From the examples of courtship that boys and girls gave, it became clear that boys initiated most courtship. The boys were actively trying to convince girls to have sex while the girls seemed to have a more passive role as recipients of the boys’ courtships. The main reason for this clear division of roles is that girls have to show sexual reticence in order to guard their reputation. Another reason for the girls’ behavior is that in order to increase the amount of money that is offered to them by the boy they need to play ‘hard to get’. Furthermore, if a girl approached a boy and showed interest it would be difficult for her to bail out if she changed her mind. According to various boys during several FGD’s:

_You don't have to give anything, because she came to you. The only thing you can give her, is to have sex with her._

_If the girl approaches the boy because she wants to have sex, then you would give it to her, but you wouldn't feel sorry if there were consequences, she should have been wiser._

_If a girl initiates [the courtship] it is easier to have sex with her, because she is attracted to the boy and she has sex on her mind. She is less likely to be interested in building a house with you or living together._

This does not mean that girls are completely passive recipients however. After being approached by a boy, a girl can initiate the negotiation of money. Although girls will not readily approach boys themselves, there are ways by which a girl can try to make a boy approach her, without losing negotiation power. She can flirt:
A girl can show interest in a guy, by for instance taking his belongings and running away with it, so that he would follow her. Or by doing things for him, like bringing him his books. [According to boys in Magu city]

She starts giggling and touching you, that indicates that she is interested. [According to Charlie in Kijiji rural Magu]

…every morning, those signs, I started noticing them, in the morning she would walk by, like parading. She would come to pick me up you see; she would wait for me to go to school. [Iddy (16) to Mathias (16) while interviewing each other in Nyahali]

In Africa it is very hard for a girl to approach a boy, so I try to impress the boy in the hope that he will make a move. I will be passing in front of the boy, pulling up my skirt a little. [Shani, Nyahali, 15 years]

The boys in Magu town refer to these signs and signals with the slang word “beeping” (kwanza bepa, to begin beeping): “She will ‘beep’ you, like a phone. And then, depending on who beeps, you pick up. This is the way a girl can show interest in a guy.”

Other ways of beeping that are used by girls to communicate interest are through clothing, walking and dancing if the opportunity exists. Clothing in general seemed to be an important way to express ones identity and status. A person’s background and social economic status is determined by whether their clothes are clean or dirty, shabby or new. Certain ‘styles’ of dressing, like wearing jeans or baggy trousers indicate modernity: “that one is from the city”. Wearing a kanga (wrap) is a traditional way of dressing. The boys in Nyahali call this a ‘dress-code’: “it can tell you what kind of girl she is”. A girl who wore pants and especially jeans was often interpreted as shocking, although this style was associated with a western style of clothing and therefore with modernity and status. The girl wearing pants or jeans was often viewed as a mhuni. The term, mhuni used in this context refers to promiscuous behavior and was often translated by my interpreters as ‘slut’ or ‘prostitute’. Clothes that show skin, especially knees, thighs and shoulders, were also associated with prostitution or ‘looking for men’. Men who dressed in a certain way (“like rappers”) could be indicating that they are trying to seduce women or that he is a ‘thug’, smoking marijuana and chasing after girls in the street. Children were asked to comment on the next two drawings and their answers are next to the drawings.
Clothing and physical appearance in general can make one more attractive but clothing can also communicate a more specific interest. The girls from the primary school in Magu town performed for us in front of the video camera and demonstrated how they communicated interest in boys by wearing their uniforms in a specific way and by standing, moving and walking in a certain manner (‘like a model’). One of the girls pulled her blouse out of her skirt, put it over her bottom and made a knot in the front and showed how the shirt accentuated the movements of the buttocks. She walked in a sensual way. When I asked the girls if the teachers allow them to wear their shirt like that in class, they said: “No, it is absolutely forbidden to wear it like this, because the teachers are aware of what it means.”

The one wearing trousers is inappropriately dressed. The two in the middle are not appropriate. They are bad girls. They are dressed like that to attract boys. [Siti, 14 years, out-of-school girl in Jabali]

They are showing their ‘nakedness’ so that men can like them. [Mixed FGD in Jabali]

The two boys on the outside are thug. They smoke bangi [marihuana]. They hang out in the streets and they call at girls, trying to have a talk with them. The two girls in the middle of the other picture, they will feel attracted to these kind of guys. [Siti, 14 years, out-of-school girl in Jabali]

They are thugs [the two men on the outside], because they smoke weed. The Rasta man is a weed smoker. The left one is arrogant and evil. Because of the way he is dressed, he is showing his muscles, ‘I’m the man’. The two men in the middle are dressed nicely, neat. They have good manners, friendly faces. [Mixed FGD in Jabali]
Because that is a style which is used in the streets.” Another girl added: “This is a way to indicate to the boy that you are available. That is why she [the girl who is performing in front of us] is showing her buttocks, to tell him she’s got something to offer.”

Aside from covert and overt flirting, assertive girls sometimes write letters or send a female friend over to a boy they like so she can pass on a message. Girls might even ask a boy for a soda, a favor or directly for money. However, if a girl made these requests the children considered that she was ‘looking for a boyfriend’ and they understood that these girls were prepared to have sex. The children also identified a group of girls who approach men directly in order to seduce them, but they said that these girls had experience:

Some girls go to the extent of actively seducing men. They can do that because they are so free [lack of parental guidance]. These girls are used to having sex and getting money in return. So when they are broke, they know the only way for them to get money, is through men. So that is why they need to know how to seduce.
[Blessed, personal interview]

Concluding remarks

Courtship is a complex interaction between boys and girls in Tanzania. Overall, it can be said that boys are usually the ones who take the initiative to engage in courtship, although girls too have strategies to show their interest in a boy. Although some boys attempt courtship to impress their peers, the main aim of courtship for boys appears to be an effort to convince a girl to come to an agreement and to settle on a place and date to have sex. Boys try to convince a girl by being persistent, offering money and gifts and sometimes by deceiving her with promises and lies. If a girl does not reject the boy outright, she may try to gain as much as possible from the boy before or without having sex (skinning). Playing hard to get increases her negotiation power. The expectation of sex when a girl accepts a boy’s money or gifts can lead to situations of harassment or coercion depending on the amount received, the power differentials between the boy and the girl and the setting of secrecy. In the process of courtship boys and girls try to figure out the intentions of the other person and they negotiate the meaning of the courtship and the relationship that might follow.

Remarkable about courtship of the children in Mwanza and Magu districts is the ‘deal-like’ character of the courtship. The children rarely speak about ‘just hanging out with each other’
or ‘doing things together’ to get to know each other as a strategy to determine if the other might be suitable as a partner. The reasons for the form of this courtship will be discussed in the next chapter. The preference for partners and how they are selected are central topics. The roles of secrecy and love and how this influences the characteristics of relationships between boys and girls in Mwanza and Magu districts will be addressed. The section that follows will consider how these relationship characteristics influence children’s ideas about responsibility and the use of contraceptives.
VII  SECRECY, PARTNER CHOICE AND RELATIONSHIPS

My parents would punish me for talking to a boy or a man, even if it is just talking. Because they might have wrong ideas about what is going on between me and the boy.

[Theresa, 14, rural Magu]

Interaction and punishment

Courtship between boys and girls of primary school age in Tanzania is elaborate with many signals and specific ways of communicating. It is imperative for the boys and girls that adults do not see this interaction because they will be punished. Many parents and caretakers limit or forbid interaction between boys and girls outside the school context in order to prevent their sexual activity (see Chapter 3 Parental views and concerns). They are especially strict with their daughters who they do not allow to have male friends or even to talk with boys in the street. An example is the father in Chapter 3:

I do not allow my sons and daughters to have friendships with the opposite gender. Pregnancy spoils the education and the reputation of the family, so you have to monitor the behavior of your daughter; for instance with regard to when she comes home. I’m strict on my sons too, but with boys it’s a bit difficult. If you tell them this, they will do the opposite. My son likes to play football outside and gets influenced by his friends and then he doesn’t want to come home in time and comes home late. Girls do not do games outside, they are kept inside – that’s the culture. So for girls it’s harder to escape.

[Father, mid 40’s, raising 6 children]

Some girls are annoyed that boys follow them on the road between school and home. They are afraid someone will see them and tell their parents or caretakers who will punish them. Therefore girls actively try to avoid boys when they are not in school. Girls think it is unfair that parents or caretakers are much stricter with them than with boys when according to the girls it is the boys who show the most ‘bad behavior’. This does not mean however, that boys can get away with ‘bad behavior’. According to boys, parents or caretakers punish boys too when they find a son’s interaction with girls suspicious and warn them about the consequences. In a discussion on this topic with the boys from Nyahali, the boys said “parents will kill you if they find out”.

108
Most parents will take action if they catch you. They will talk with you. They'll find out if the girl is a student or not and warn you about being kicked out of school if others find out, or ending up in prison if she gets pregnant. It depends if the parents are uneducated or not. If they are uneducated they don't seem to mind much. But educated parents will kill you if they find out. Because they understand the law and the consequences; prison, paying cash to the girl’s family. Or if the parents of the boy and the girl are somehow related [like in a friendship, neighbors or working relationship], it can cause a conflict between them. Also, if the girl has already finished primary school, if you get her pregnant, you will be forced to marry her.

[FGD Nyahali boys]

Boys and girls have strategies to manage parental or caretaker control and punishment and they do this mainly with lies and secrecy. But they have to be careful not to get caught lying or in the act of courtship or having physical contact with a girl. Punishment primarily includes stricter rules and further limitations on freedom, being shouted at, corporal punishment and even ‘being kicked out of the house’ or ‘being sent to a relative in the village’. If the children are caught in school having a courtship both the boy and girl receive corporal punishment. The corporal punishment may even occur during a school assembly, which is a public disgrace for the child. Teachers will likely involve the parents or caretakers of the children:

Of course we would inform the parents of the pupil so that they can take appropriate action to discipline their child.

[Interview with male teachers of Nyahali primary school]

If a teacher catches the children there is the risk of being expelled from school.

Secrecy as a strategy

In order to prevent being caught and punished courtship takes place in secret. Dialogue is often short and direct and the rules and expectations are clear to most boys and girls. The children use messengers and letters to prevent attracting attention or getting caught. Boys approach girls only away from the presence of adults or in situations where they are allowed to interact with girls, e.g., in school, church or festivities. However, even on these occasions the children have to be careful. Therefore, boys prefer to approach a girl when she’s alone, for example on the way between home and school, the shop or the shamba (farm field) or while fetching water or firewood. If the girl is on her own, the boy has the additional advantage of not having to face the judgment or insults of her friends and without their influence it might be easier to convince a girl to have sex.
The best place to approach is somewhere quiet
Follow while fetching firewood
At the market
At occasions of celebration
At the see or lake side
[FGD with boys in Kijiji rural school in Magu]

A place and date need to be arranged in order to have sex which then happens at ‘hidden’ places such as the bush or in unfinished buildings. This context of secrecy can actually facilitate coercion and force. Since courtship occurs in secret and girls are approached in places where they are alone or meet boys in hidden places, the boys are less likely to get punished if they use force. Courtship is kept secret to prevent punishment, but for girls it is also important that others do not know about it in order to safeguard their reputation. The children therefore believe that courtship should be kept hidden from adults as well as peers and classmates who might tell parents, caretakers or teachers. As some of the girls in Magu town gossiped with us:

The word in the streets was that these two had sex…

Boys and girls may use fear of punishment or a bad reputation when they are fighting or as blackmail even if no courtship or sex has transpired. As mentioned earlier, the ability to disclose private information that makes someone else vulnerable is a form of power. The information may not be true but the victim is made vulnerable nonetheless. Boys and girls told us that gossip (‘spreading words in the streets’) was perceived as negative because of the consequences it could have for the victim. Nevertheless, the children generally admitted that they themselves participate in gossiping. For Zazi gossip and suspicion were reasons not to become friends with girls. This is despite the fact that he was open to the possibility of having a female friend:

| Shilling | Do you have a female friend? |
| Zazi     | Here in the class?          |
| Shilling | Yes, like here at school, do you have female friends? Friends, not your lover, a friend only. |
| Zazi     | No… A female friend… we can say every person can have her, but there are some they suspect that you are doing what? You are seducing her. But it is rubbish; she is only your friend. You will be helping each other like in mathematics, science, different lessons, but something else there, they will start taking that, his lover, they never leave each other, I don't know what, but it's friendship only… |
Boys and girls stated that it was hard to become friends with each other because of punishment and gossip. Furthermore, girls avoided boys because of the assumption that a boy wanted sex if he showed interest.

Us girls, [we] keep separate from the boys because boys in most cases want us girls for sex. We avoid being close with them, that’s why we are isolated. There are some of the boys who have bad manners. A large percentage of boys have dirty behavior. They don’t get taught well by their parents, they get bad influence. These boys are normally distant from their parents, that is why they like sex and bad behavior. They have a lot of bad habits. Those with good behavior don’t like sex that much. I have contributed an opinion on these issues at xxx primary school, by the name of M.E.

[Essay by female student in Magu town]

Friendship and assessment

Me: Can you have female friends?
There is nothing like that around here.
[Personal interview with Abdalla in Jabali]

Children have interactions in secret because of parent, caretaker and teacher suspicion that such interaction is motivated by an interest in sexual involvement and therefore the children need to be punished. Due to the fact that children’s interaction is so limited there is little space for a boy and a girl to ‘hang out’, to develop friendships or to get to know each other better. Godfrey and I believed that direct interaction between the children was automatically charged with underlying sexual meaning since there was so little opportunity for ‘neutral’ interactions. It is possible that parent, caretaker and teacher interpretation of interaction between boys and girls as sexual causes boys and girls to ‘learn’ to interpret their interaction as something sexual as well. The Nyahali boys who were interviewed in 2007 confirmed this assumption. These boys had the opinion that friendships between boys and girls could only occur between small children (before puberty). When you grow up “your ideas are changing, you get matured, you use this chance to approach her.” To my question whether the friendship could not continue while being lovers these boys said:
They cannot go together! It stops [the friendship] when you continue with love. You cannot take time to do things together, like walking or talking. If you fall in love you keep busy with more serious issues. Because you get into a different condition\footnote{What ‘condition’ entails precisely and what ‘falling in love’ means to the boys will be discussed later in this chapter.}.

[Discussion during the card exercise]

Since space to get to know each other is limited the children’s ability to make a direct assessment of the suitability of a potential partner is difficult. Therefore, boys and girls rely on indirect ways of getting information about the other’s personality and intentions. They try to get to know the other person through ‘observation’, ‘investigation’, ‘research’ or ‘spying’. As mentioned earlier, boys and girls ‘read’ other people by looking at their clothes, the way they walk and talk. Physical appearance, important for many people anywhere, becomes especially significant when there is less space to win someone over with personality. For boys and girls, clothing is an indicator of family background, wealth, sophistication and respectability. Further details of these criteria can be learned through observation, ‘spying’ on the person or through actively asking about him or her. Girls said they used friends to find out about a boy’s behavior, “Especially friends who live around his neighborhood. But not close friends, because they might lie to you.” Boys would learn about a girl’s behavior “in the street, by asking others about her.” Mathias, a 16-year-old boy from Nyahali, told his friend Iddy in a personal interview about his interest and courtship with a particular girl:

I followed her, the chick, I wanted to see if she was honest… until I investigate and all, so that I can understand what she is like, and that’s when we can make love you see. […] and then she said okay, I have investigated [too], you are cool and all, for that I am ready to be with you. Now I told her ‘cool, for you have accepted me, that you love me, and me I will love you’.

For girls it is important to find out whether the boy is lying about his intentions and if he is truly able to afford what he is promising. Boys make it a priority to learn about the girls ‘family background’ and her ‘manners’; whether she is respectful and respectable. It is crucial to find out about a boy or girl’s personality, whether he or she is a ‘good catch’ but also to learn about the sexual history of that person for the purpose of assessing the risk of having sex with him or her:
Me: Do you approach more than one girl at the same time, to improve your chances?
That depends on the person. If you try with five girls and they all decide to say yes, that will
cost you a lot of money, more than you might have. And you have to be careful for the virus.
You need to know about her behavior and her background.
Me: Does that mean you have to get to know the girl well?
You can talk to her friends and ask them about her, and to your own friends, what they know
about her. Then you know where you stand.
[Kosmos, 16, Nyahali]

Of course you have to watch out, be careful not getting caught and who you choose. Most
girls don't like it if you ask them if they want to get tested, and you have to be double careful
with girls from the street [out-of-school girls]. The easiest ways of finding out if she's infected,
are rumors. You do research first, because people know if she's been sleeping around or
having a high risk of being infected.
[FGD Nyahali boys]

When we asked the boys and the girls who performed the Nyahali Play, what would have
happened if Penny had first investigated the boy she had sex with, they answered: “The girl in
the play, she wouldn't have died.”

Sugar daddies, money and age

Assessment is an important step in the selection of a partner. But what kind of partner do the
children prefer? From the discussion of temptations, peer pressure and courtship there is
evidence of what is at stake for boys and girls who become involved with each other.
Although preferences are always personal, we identified general themes about what the
children who participated in this research found significant and attractive in a potential
partner. Money has a central role in courtship. Both boys and girls considered money as a
critical motivator for girls to get involved with boys. Boys with money were said to be
preferred over boys without money. According to Bo from Jabali: “If you have money, you
have more chance.” Indicators of money or wealth such as clothing, physical appearance and
family background were therefore significant in the assessment and choice of a potential
partner. These indicators also were important if the girl needed support from the boy if she
became pregnant. The most certain way to determine if a potential partner had money was if
he had a job. According to Charlie: “Most girls are getting involved with people who have
money, so people with jobs.” Girls identified the young men who collected money in the dala
dala (mini bus used for local transportation) as popular. These boys dressed fashionably,
played popular music in their bus, spoke slang and were generally regarded as cool. They
were known to be flirtatious and some girls actually warned other girls to watch out for these guys, because they tended to offer girls free rides but would then ask for something in return. People with jobs were most likely boys and men who were out of school or had finished school and therefore tended to be older than a schoolgirl. According to the teachers at the Nyahali primary school, schoolgirls sometimes had sexual relations with adult men from the villages nearby. According to the teachers, parents and caretakers were frequently aware of what was happening but tolerated their child’s relationship because they themselves needed or enjoyed the material or social profits (if the adult partner was related to them through work, friendship or in another way). There was gossip about one girl in the school in Magu town who was said to be having relationships with older man:

There is one girl in this school, her parents own a local bar in the street of scenes [children’s name for a street in the centre of Magu know for its’ nightlife]. She has to work in that bar. Then drunken men ask her to dance with them and she has to say yes, otherwise they’ll go away and they’ll lose customers. I think she’ll do almost anything with these guys for this reason. [Shilling during FGD with boys]

When we asked the girls what kind of boys or men approached them or offered them money, they said that some were from school and some were from the ‘outside’ (outside meant any boy or man not in their school). “Some are even grown-ups, the oldest are around 40 years old.” Although older boys and men are likely to offer schoolgirls more money than the boys who are in school, in general the boys and girls indicated that the majority of relationships were between boys and girls from the same age. Ordinarily a boy is about 2-3 years older than the girl. The girls explained: “Because they are more confident, a girl will not refuse because the boy is more confident, has more money.” Teachers confirmed that the age difference between most girls and boys who have a relationship is not very large:

At the lakeshore it would be more possible to find young girls with older men. But most students tend to date each other. There was a case of pregnancy of a young girl last year who was impregnated by a boy from one class higher. If they date with persons from outside of school, it's most likely an ex-student.

Most girls claimed to be disgusted by the thought of having sex with someone who could be their father. If a girl had a relationship with a 40-year-old man, even if he was the regional commissioner of Mwanza or rich beyond belief, she would have to hide him: “She cannot introduce this man to her friends, she will hide him!”
Some of these guys [who offer money] are actually parents, they have children our age. You curse him and you tell him: 'you are old enough to be my father, stop following me around!' Before I tell my parents, I'd like to curse him first.\footnote{Whether this should be taken literally is doubtful since it is highly inappropriate to talk back to an adult, let alone raise your voice or call names. This statement is more likely an indication of the aversion the girl feels towards these men and their behavior.}

[FGD Nyahali girls]

Although some girls have relationships with men who are significantly older than they are and who might be considered a ‘sugar daddy’, most girls with boyfriends have a partner who is approximately the same age or a few years older than they are. In the paragraph on courtship it was apparent that young boys normally get skinned because they do not have the ‘confidence’, power or strength to make the girl live up to her promises. This might also explain why girls have relationships with boys who are ‘a bit older’ and physically more mature than younger boys. Boys on the other hand approach younger girls rather than older ones because those girls are easier to convince to have sex and ask less money than more experienced girls.

Although money is significant in courtship and the selection of a partner, the importance of money and how much it influences the choice of a partner depends on how much money a girl needs. For girls who depend on boys for money for survival money might be the most influential selection criterion. However, for many girls money alone is not adequate for choosing a partner. Other criteria such as age are considered.

Age is important because a person with all these traits [traits preferred in a partner] can be as old as your father which means you have to turn him down. Acceptable is the same age or older but by no more than 3 years

[FGD Nyahali girls during follow up visit]

**Partner choice: Preferences and attraction**

*Me:  What kind of boys do you find attractive?*
- Walking style
- Character
- Being calm, gentle, not rough
- Handsomeness
- Ways of dressing

*Me:  What way of dressing is attractive?*
- T-shirt with jeans and sport shoes
- A tie
- Cap without top and worn the other way round
Like a pop star
Plaited hair with earrings
Classic sunglasses
Baggy trousers where you can see a bit of the underwear
I like men with a deep voice
Gap between teeth (my interpreter has a gap between his teeth and I think the girls were playing with him)

[FGD Nyahali girls during follow up visit]

To gain more insight into what boys and girls in Tanzania find pre-eminent or attractive in partners, we asked them to do an exercise. Based on information that we obtained through interviews and discussions we wrote down keywords on yellow cards (see tables and footnote\textsuperscript{54}) and asked small groups of boys and girls to put these cards in order of priority. Some cards were left blank so the children could write their own ideas. Once the cards were put in order, we discussed with the children why some cards were higher in priority than others. During the discussion most of the cards were rearranged according to the newly negotiated order of preference. We also asked the boys to predict the priority that they thought the girls would determine and vice versa. Typically the boys predicted that money and assets would be in the first and second position. But when we asked three different groups of girls (Magu town, Kijiji in rural Magu and Nyahali) to order the cards, money and assets were completely left out or had a low ranking. Top positions were given to cards with Good manners and Character. When the boys from rural Magu saw that the girls left the card with Money off their list they fiercely disagreed saying, “Good manners is not first, maybe some find good manners important, but if he [a boy] doesn’t have money they’re not interested! No money, no respect!” Perhaps the girls were afraid to acknowledge the importance of money in selecting a partner as it might reflect badly on them in our eyes. However, the girls’ choices might indicate that other aspects in partner choice are also valued.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Magu town & Kijiji Rural Magu & Nyahali \\
\hline
Good manners & Good manners & Character \\
Character & Never fed up & Bright \\
Love & Faithful & Clean \\
Family background & Character & Love \\
Never fed up & Bright & Money \\
Gentle & Clean & Never fed up \\
Handsome & Love & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Preferred traits according to girls}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{54} Keywords were: Love – Money – Character – Good manners – Bright/Intelligent – Falling in love – Good looking/beauty – Being cool – Family background – Assets – Lifestyle – Reputation. Added by the children: Faithful (to be with one lover only) – Happy/cheerful – Never fed up (still in love after long time) – Way of walking (Conduct) – Clean – Big chest – Sexy eyes – Normal length – Tall – Gentle.
Girls told us that one of the reasons they have to do ‘research’ about a boy is to find out whether he is a ‘player’, “after her body only” or if he would ‘ditch’ or ‘dump’ her the moment they had sex. Most girls indicated they wanted a long-term relationship, one that might result in marriage. Therefore they valued ‘good manners’ in a boy; that he was respectful to others, serious and hardworking and from a respectable family. If a boy had these qualities it increased the chance that a girl’s family would accept the boy upon introduction. The girls believed that good manners were linked to the boy’s character (*Tabia* means both character and behavior). Girls said they preferred a boy who is gentle, honest and nice to them. If a boy did not have a nice character or good manners it was one of the primary reasons the girl would refuse him. Girls wanted a partner they could talk with and have an exchange of ideas. Therefore they preferred a partner who was intelligent and educated (*Bright*). But education was also important since it was seen as ‘the key to a good future’; increasing the chance of getting a job, earning money and moving up the ladder of social status. The first group of girls added a card with “*never fed up, still in love after long time*” and it was placed in the top five for the other groups as well. This appeared to indicate the girls’ wish for a long-term relationship or their fear of being dumped shortly after sex. It was believed that if a man or boy got fed up or bored with his girlfriend or wife, he could become unfaithful. Therefore the card with *Faithful* held a position near the card ‘*never fed up*’. The first group of boys added the card with *Faithful* to the pile. Because they followed after the girls had done the exercise, the girls did not have this card. This is most likely the reason why Faithful is missing from the list of the first group of girls (*Magu town*). In the interviews and discussions with girls unfaithfulness did emerge as a topic of concern:

> Most of them cheat and some of them act like they can be trusted only at the time when they are with you and at the time when you are not around they will cheat on you.  
> *[FGD Nyahali girls]*

> You can have a boyfriend or a man, when he comes to you he is telling you that ‘oh you are the only one I love, I only share my love with you’. But when he is outside, he is with other women. That’s why I don’t want one. Even the old men, they are not faithful.  
> *[Ayubu, 14, Magu town]*

While girls complained about boys and men being unfaithful, boys complained that they perceived girls’ to have a tendency to be disloyal as well. Girls and boys found faithfulness to be one of the paramount criteria in the selection of a partner (see table 2). Both boys and girls considered trust and faithfulness as requirements for a good marriage.
Me: What do you think are the basic ingredients for a good marriage?

Trust, peace and love.

Me: So you expect your future wife to be faithful to you?

It will never happen like that. Once you don't earn enough, she will get involved with a rich man. If you get married to a woman when you're kind of low, then she will kind of stick with you. But if you are rich and you marry someone and she gets used to a high-class lifestyle, once you get broke, she will clearly leave you. You will have to keep on making money; otherwise she'll leave you.

Me: How about yourselves? Are you going to stay faithful?

If she starts to see others, than so will I. The moment you leave the house in the morning, you don't know what she will be up to.

[Second boy] If you think that she is cheating, then so can you.

Me: But I thought you said that one of the most important things in a good marriage is trust?

When a man is married, all that will keep him busy, how can I say it? He is possessed, always thinking about with whom she might be sleeping, where she is, what she's doing, who she's seeing. So you will be very strict on her and that might lead her to look for somebody else.

[FGD Nyahali boys]

Despite their dim view of the prospects of finding a partner who would be faithful, boys and girls insisted on the importance of faithfulness in their selection of a partner.

I want to marry somebody who I can trust.

Me: What do you mean with that?

Even if he is poor, I want him to be faithful [probably meaning rather poor and faithful than rich and unfaithful].

[Mayega, 12, Kijiji Rural Magu]

I want a girl who won't be able to go for other men. Some girls, once you step out of the house to go to work, she brings in another man ‘to cool down her thoughts’.

[Imani, 15, Kijiji Rural Magu]

Unlike the girls, the groups of boys were more varied in their priority lists of preferred traits in a potential partner.

Table 2: Preferred traits according to boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magu town</th>
<th>Kijiji Rural Magu</th>
<th>Nyahali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faithful</td>
<td>Good manners</td>
<td>Beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty</td>
<td>Family background</td>
<td>Good Manners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy/cheerful</td>
<td>Faithful</td>
<td>Faithful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good manners</td>
<td>Bright</td>
<td>Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Clean</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The boys from Kijiji in rural Magu valued good manners, character and family background more than did the boys from Magu town and Nyahali. The two latter groups found physical appearance an important criterion for a girl to become a candidate for selection. The boys in
Nyahali first rated money highest even for a girlfriend, but then became outspoken about beauty. “Money is the most important thing. You get everything through money; you can’t do anything if you don’t have money”. But then they added: “But looks are even more important than money! When you walk into a nightclub or a disco with a beautiful girlfriend, many boys appreciate you when they see you with a girl like that.” When I asked whether ‘real love’ was not more important than beauty and money, the boys were resolute: “Beauty is important, but if she doesn’t love you, you might get problems. God made love automatically. But if she’s not beautiful I don’t love her. I’d tell her: ‘Don’t follow me, you’re not beautiful’.” Next the boys fought passionately over the importance of ‘real love’ versus ‘good manners’. In the end, good manners won: “It means that a girl respects you, that she’d do anything for you. Your family and your guests will be respected. It’s more important than that she loves you for real.” Good manners were mentioned by all three of the groups and it was significant for boys that potential girlfriends, or at least their future wives, would be well behaved and show respect and obedience.

Her behavior should be good and she should be beautiful. She should be committed to you for a long time. She should respect your parents and help them as well.

[Daniel, 13, Kijiji rural Magu]

I am planning to get married after school, when I have found a job and have built a house. I will look for any woman as long as she has good manners and good behavior. You can just look at a woman or girl and see if she has good manners. For example if she listens to her parents.

[Charlie, 15, Kijiji rural Magu]

It is interesting to note the high ranking of ‘Clean’ in the list of the Nyahali boys. The word clean (safi) was written on one of the blank cards by the boys from Kijiji rural Magu and added to the list of important traits, but only ranked in 11th place. When I asked them why they added ‘clean’ to the list, they said that cleanliness is a sign that the girl is growing up and respecting herself. The boys in Nyahali initially ranked ‘Clean’ in third position, higher than ‘Faithfulness’. “Clean is more important than faithful because it means that she’s sophisticated.” But after extensive discussion the boys decided to move ‘Faithful’ and ‘Love’ higher than ‘Clean’. The fact that the boys valued cleanliness and that it was seen as attractive and a sign of maturity and sophistication was in accord with the girls’ demands for soap and
body lotions\textsuperscript{55}. Being clean is seen by boys and girls as increasing a girl’s attractiveness, her bargaining power and her self esteem.

Also noteworthy was the fact that ‘Reputation’ was left out of the lists by all the groups. This was despite the fact that the boys and girls indicated in their discussions and interviews that reputation was of central importance. Perhaps our translation did not resonate with the children’s understanding of reputation. Another, more likely, explanation could be that the card ‘Tabia’ (good manners/behavior/character) already covered this topic. The children never spontaneously mentioned virginity when discussing reputation, good manners and other related topics. We had to actively ask about its importance and both boys and girls appeared to have a realistic view of the subject:

\textit{Me: } Will you wait until marriage?
The way it's going I might manage, but I could be carried away.
\textit{Me: } Is it important for you that your future wife is a virgin before you marry her?
Yes, it's important. If you are both virgins, then you are chosen by God. But the way the world works, it is impossible. I am going to convince the girl to be honest with me, but if I find out that there is someone else in her life, I will not marry her. But I understand that the majority of the girls lie, that they are not honest about this.
[Shilling, 13, Magu town]

\textit{Me: } Do you find it important to stay a virgin until marriage?
It depends. You don't know what kind of temptations will face you when you grow up. Personally I'd like to hang in there until marriage, but I can't promise.
[Imani, 15, Rural Magu]

A few girls and one boy mentioned they wanted to wait until marriage to have sex. These informants had strong religious convictions.

**Meaning of love**

Interestingly, the card with ‘Love’ initially always ranked in the bottom half of the cards together with the cards for ‘Physical appearance’, ‘Lifestyle’ or ‘Being cool’. Only when I questioned this ranking would ‘Love’ gradually move up in priority. The card ‘Falling in Love’ was hardly touched at all. Initially I thought the informants misunderstood our

\textsuperscript{55} This demand for beauty products is also mentioned in other research findings, such as in the article (forthcoming) of Wamoyi et al (2007). In this article the authors explain the importance of beauty products for attracting a partner, improving a bargaining position, as a non-essential consumer product and for reasons of subsistence.
translation of love (Mapenzi), which can also mean sex. However, in discussion we learned that the boys and girls did understand that the card represented love. Perhaps our ideas of love differed from that of the children? One of the reasons why we designed the yellow-card-exercise was to learn more about the meaning of love and the role it plays in partner choice and relationships. Our aim was not to quantify preferred traits but to use the exercise to facilitate a discussion to clarify key topics, such as love. The children frequently spoke of love in the discussions and interviews prior to the card exercise. However, they rarely made a direct connection between love and romantic feelings, strong affection, a need to connect or a feeling of falling in love. Love, of course, is a complex concept and every individual’s experience is unique. In general, in the Western world and literature feelings of affection and bonding are considered to be important aspects of love. When I asked the children about the meaning of love or the feeling of falling in love the boys explained love by describing what it does. They said if you love a girl you would feel anxious if the girl did not feel the same and it would hurt if she turned you down. This would hurt more if you were in love than if you were only after sex. The children linked love with feeling vulnerable. When we talked in-depth about feelings of love we seemed to cause discomfort for the children especially for the ones in a group but also in personal interviews. The boys would laugh at each other; “It is amusing […] because he is caring about the girl”. We gained insight by watching the videotapes of close friends interviewing each other as for example, the story Iddy told his mate Mathias who was filming and interviewing him (both 16 years old and in Standard 7, Nyahali).

**A conversation: Iddy and Mathias**

Me man, let me give my story okay, in this story of mine, I did not reach my target the way I was expecting okay, I didn’t reach it at all, and the reason is because that one [the girl] moved. In the beginning, the way we started, I first started loving her and her, she had the same signs…

**Mathias: Explain better man, why didn’t you reach your target?**

Because that one, since she moved I have never seen her again, you hear. Me, I was loving her a lot and me when I love, I love one girl, that’s my formula. I never mix drinks [have more than one girl at the same time, be unfaithful]. I loved her a lot and the way we started our relationship, we started in the class. We were passing our houses, we were not living far apart, like minutes, let’s say five minutes, half a kilometer from ours to theirs.

**Mathias: Does it mean, lets say in total, that girl, you were neighbors with her? And then you were in the same class?**

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56 See for instance Sternberg’s triangular theory of love that characterizes love in three components: Intimacy, Passion and Commitment (1986).
Yes, that’s the meaning, we were studying with her and we were living near her, like I told you, a distance of half a kilometer from theirs to ours. For that, every morning, those signs, I started noticing them. In the morning she would walk by, like parading. She would come to pick me up you see; she would wait for me to go to school. We go to school and we become, getting used, we started getting used to… [that / each other?]

We carried on like that. Then it reached a period man, when we were meeting like this face to face. A person … you feel shy. Shy towards your friend [the girl]. You want to tell, start, but she suspects [your feelings for her], you see for that we are scared of each other in a way [too shy to tell how you feel]. Okay, like every time you want to tell, she suspects, or her when she wants to tell, you suspect. But me, I did not manage to ask her why, ‘why are you suspicious?’ Or her, she did not ask me ‘why are you suspicious?’ For that man, we continued like that for about a week like this. Every time we sit in class man, when I answer a question, she looks with that kind of an eye, like that eye, like that. When she was looking at me in that way, you hear, I had suspected her [I suspected her feelings for me], but I was… when I look at her, when I see this, I cut corners [not sure how to translate] and so on, but I don’t show I like her much, but in fact, in my heart, I was in love with her. I did not show love and all, but I showed direction [I gave her hints] you see.

In the end Iddy found the courage to tell the girl how he felt. When one day the girl wasn’t waiting for Iddy to walk to school, he got upset. He found her at school and told her:

... ‘How come man, how come you are not picking me up? Eh, what problems do you have nowadays? Let’s tell each other the truth man, eh? We put our problems open. We are friends like a ring and a finger, you know like, how a ring is close to the finger? Now that’s who we are, became like that. But that friendship now wants to produce something else you see’.

Mathias: There you have to simplify for us so that we can understand from the inside more…

Man, okay, now there, that day was the day of finishing off our problems [feeling desire, love or interest in someone is frequently referred to as ‘problem’]. Me I had explained my problems to her, I told her man, this friendship of ours man, we were friends a lot, now I want that friendship like, a closer one, like… You see, I told her, she asks me what friendship man? I told her ‘You, don’t you understand? I want like, a physical friendship, also not only a friendship’. Now, she had been refusing there...

Luckily for Iddy, a few days later the girl changed her mind and told him she was testing him and that she had the same feelings. They made an appointment to meet up a few days later on the beach at the lake, to talk some more about ‘how they would develop their love’. The girl ‘had prepared herself, she took a bath’ and on the beach they agreed to meet again at another place later that week. But when they met again, the girl had bad news; her father was suddenly transferred because of his work and she and her family had to move that same day:

...‘I am very sad’, she told me. She was shaking, ‘Dad is being transferred’, okay, she told me ‘Dad has moved’ and for that she is moving [also]. I told her ‘Now what? Why don’t we go faster, faster…?’ But what she told me, she doesn’t have time, she
left their numbers, she had her phone numbers, she left me her numbers so that we can be communicating. Our relationship had been broken there, we were communicating by phone, and me, time, not a long time, I had moved from there, so the contacts had been cut. When I call the phone numbers, they are not found.

When Iddy said he did not reach his target, he was likely to be referring to having sex with the girl. He then told her he wanted the relationship to become physical to which she agreed. Once again the topic of cleanliness and bathing arose which seemed to indicate to Iddy that the girl was ‘prepared’, perhaps for a more physical interaction. When she told him that she had to move, he tried to speed up the process and (indirectly) proposed that they have sex. However the girl told him she didn’t have time and Iddy failed to reach his target. The couple tried to maintain a long-distance relationship, but that too failed. Interestingly, Iddy referred to his relationship with this girl as a friendship. As argued earlier, friendship between boys and girls among the researched group of children was said to be difficult to maintain because of parental or caretaker control, punishment and gossip. Yet Iddy and this girl managed to develop a friendship by walking to school together. This in itself is interpreted by Iddy as signaling a romantic or sexual interest on the part of the girl. Although we can only guess what the girl was feeling, Iddy clearly was aiming for sexual intercourse. ‘How they would like to develop their love’ can be interpreted as a negotiation. Based on what the children described about courtship, I speculate that if this couple had had more time this girl would have asked to meet up on several occasions. She would have expected Iddy to bring her something while she postponed sex, perhaps even negotiating to postpone until after she finished school. However, as mentioned earlier, sometimes stories about the sudden disappearance of a girl who agreed to have sex is a strategy to manage peer pressure if one has failed to convince a girl to have sex. Iddy might be telling his story this way to demonstrate to his friend, Mathias, that he is interested in sex and managed to convince a girl to have sex with him but had an excuse as to why he had not succeeded achieving his goal. There is no way of knowing for sure. What makes Iddy’s story an interesting one is the filtering of certain feelings that appear to be connected to Iddy’s statement that he loves the girl. He indicates anxiety, shyness and bonding in ‘friendship’. Iddy’s attempt to maintain a long distance relationship with the girl and his expression of disappointment when the connection fails appear to confirm his feelings for her.
Other boys tried to explain love by expressing their willingness to pay a high bride price despite a girl having certain shortcomings. Some boys illustrated what they meant by love by indicating a willingness to forgive:

When I see her with other boys I will feel bad because I love her. But I cannot beat her. When I see my girlfriend talk with other boys, sometimes I can refuse, sometimes you forgive and continue… because it depends on how much you love her.

[Tumaini, 15, Nyahali]

But most boys explained love by contrasting it with sex.

Me: How about love, falling in love?
When you really like a girl, normally you would fall in love
Me: So how does it feel?
It’s the real thing, it’s only tricky if the feelings are not returned
You can love each other even without engaging in sex
You can wait even for 10 years without sex, but you have to make an objective, like to clear Standard 7 and wait until then
It depends on the girl, if she agrees, we will go for testing and we will make love
There are girls who make you feel having an urge to make love, like how they dress, like tight clothes, provocative clothing, that drives me crazy!
It depends, you have to be self disciplined, if she dresses like that, you will have to restrain.

[FGD Nyahali boys 2007]

Boys explained love as feeling vulnerable and by their willingness to invest in a girl by giving her money or showing patience. Girls appeared to know this and tested the boys during courtship by postponing sex while collecting money and gifts. In a way a boy runs a higher risk of getting ‘skinned’ if he cares deeply for a girl. It makes sense that for girls, money is seen as a sign of love: “A girl won’t walk away if a boy gives money. You can’t leave that easily, because it is a sign that he loves you.” On the other hand, girls explained love by contrasting it with money. When I asked the girls in Nyahali during the card exercise about the meaning of love, or mapenzi, they answered:

Money is not real love, mapenzi is real love. It means truth and being faithful. To be together even in bad condition, in bad times. It does not depend on money.

And in an earlier group discussion with the same girls they told us “the way of walking and whether he is from a poor family doesn’t matter if love is involved!” The female headmaster of the primary school in Magu town spoke about romantic love and agreed with the girls:
Me: Can you elaborate a bit more, what does romantic love mean to you?
Love is automatically, education and money don’t matter. Like a girl from a rich family can fall in love with a poor boy – she cannot marry him, but it is love.

During a discussion with a small group of young unmarried mothers in the village of Nyahali the topic of multiple partners arose. The ladies laughed and giggled when they admitted that they were involved with more than one partner in order to get some money to take care of themselves and their young children. I asked them: “But how about love?”

For example you can have three boyfriends, one is real love, you can even have sex with him without getting money. Then the other two, they are there for the money.

Me: Is it is true then, that there are cases where there is no money exchanged for sex?
No. There is no sex without money. They first have to pay! (all laugh)

Although the women contradict their own first statement I believe they were indicating that for them when you love a man, money is not the main motive to have sex. However, for other partners the main reason for sex is the money they are offering. Despite this distinction, according to the children even in a love relationship, there is exchange. Exchange is sometimes even seen as strengthening a relationship:

Some girls have permanent boyfriends. Some focus on each other and the boy won't even pay. But then there is no investment, so the boy can turn his back to her at any time, without losing anything! Girls normally fulfill all the boys’ desires and get back money or presents, so they are more likely to stick together.

[Shani, 15, Nyahali]

So ‘love’ to the girls and women quoted above is that which makes a girl stay with a boy or man even if he is poor and has little to offer. If there is love, you stay with him even in bad times. For the young women in Nyahali this does not mean that you cannot have other boyfriends at the same time. But for the girls we interviewed, love is also about monogamy. The boys agreed with the idea that love is about faithfulness and not about money:

Me: How do you know a girl loves you?
You can learn from her behavior. They take not money as a first priority, she’s not a mhuni. Love comes first. Then you can learn from the family that she is more faithful than the other girls. You have to compare her to other girls. If she has many boyfriends she is a mhuni. But my girlfriend only has me, I hear nothing bad.

[Cards exercise with boys in Kijiji, rural Magu]

The question of what love means is not an easy one to answer. The informants made an attempt to illustrate the meaning of love by contrasting it with other reasons for sexual
relationships. For the boys and girls we interviewed love was about exclusivity, although not for the young single mothers we interviewed. The informants did not describe what it is exactly that makes you love someone. Rather, they described love as something that just hits you, it is there or it is not. In their own words: “Love is automatically”, “Love is like an accident”. Experience of love were attributed to chance, fate or luck. Descriptions of intimacy, a need or desire to be close to someone, to share, to connect or to bond were not explicit. Perhaps the girls’ wish to be able to talk with a boy, to exchange ideas, could be interpreted as a wish for intimacy. But in the case of the boys such feelings were not described. Again, it might not be easy to express such feelings or talk about them with others or me. On the other hand, this might be a reflection of the limited space boys and girls have to be with each other and develop friendships to get to know each other. According to Iddy:

Me: What would be your main interest if you would be with a girl?
Having sex.
Me: How about friendship and love?
That comes at a later stage. Because when you meet with her, your mind is on having sex, but later you might find out that she is an interesting person.

A Tanzanian friend of mine, Vincent, an attractive young man in his early ‘30’s spent most of his childhood and teenage years in Tanzanian boarding schools for boys. He told me that he only found out about ‘the real meaning of love’ when he was 30:

Men don’t know what love is. The whole attention asking thing that girls do is annoying to us because we don’t understand that the girl is actually asking for love. When guys talk they always emphasize other things of a relationship, not the cuddling parts, that is seen as uncool. For years I have been chasing girls, falling in love because of their beauty and getting bored with them when they started to complain that I wasn’t spending enough time with them. Even with Susan (an ex-girlfriend), I was with her because of the admiration I got through her from my friends. It wasn’t until I got 30 and really fell in love with a girl, that I understood how it feels to actually want to be with someone every day. That is what love is about. It’s not until then, that I started to understand what women want and what love is about.

Vincent blamed his late discovery of ‘real’ love on the boarding schools. “Because I was always in the presence of boys, I never learnt to understand women, how women work, how women think.” Furthermore, through the ‘macho’ talk of his friends he thought that relationships were about sex and selected his partners on basis of his friends’ approval and envy even for years after leaving boarding school.
Psychological theories of love categorize love on the basis of ‘types of love’ or a combination of elements. In Sternberg’s triangular theory of love these elements are intimacy, passion and commitment (1986). Although hints of intimacy among our informants were scarce, references to passion were abundant in the boys’ descriptions of love. Passion in this context referred to intense emotions the boys felt when they experienced “love at first sight”, but without the intimacy and commitment of love. An infatuation was characterized by the children as anxiety during the phase of anticipation about how the relationship would develop. In addition, infatuation included feelings of despair if the other person did not return the same feelings. The boys’ vulnerability is an example of this. Feelings of passion were absent in the girls’ descriptions of love. Instead, the girls linked love with commitment. They expressed a desire for long-term relationships, trust and faithfulness. They would stay with a partner they loved even during bad times and even if he had little to offer. Despite talk of passion and love, we also learned from the previous sections that money plays an importance role in relationships and selecting a partner for children in Tanzania. How do children explain this contradiction?

Selecting a partner: Temporary versus permanent

With a temporary chick you don't waste time, you just lie to her [deceive her in order to have sex]. The permanent one is the one you should be honest with, hoping one day you get married to her.
[Daniel, 13, rural Magu]

When asked to identify important traits that are preferred in a partner, children in Tanzania valued personality traits like intelligence, trustworthiness and other qualities of character and behavior over attributes like physical appearance and social status. Girls indicated a wish for a long-term relationship with a partner who they want to be faithful. If they also loved this partner, his external traits such as a low social status or appearance did not matter. To find out about a boy’s traits (both personality and external attributes) the girls ‘investigated’ the potential partner to try to figure out his intentions. Courtship and negotiations were seen as a way of testing a boy’s intentions and love. Patience with the timing of sex and a willingness to invest in a girl by giving her money were indicators of love. A long-term relationship was characterized by a boy’s continuous support of the girl with money, gifts and exclusivity within the relationship.
Sometimes you go to a girl with intentions just having sex and then that's it. And sometimes you go to a girl with the intention to make her your girlfriend. If you go with the intentions of just having sex, you can offer her once and then, just leave. But if you want her to be your girlfriend, you have to commit yourself and keep on giving, give her more.

[Simeo, 15, Magu town]

Sometimes these relationships are without sex, or a promise that sex will happen after finishing school or when married.

[A relationship on average] ...lasts for a week. This is the type of relationship when the boy succeeds to have sex with the girl and then after that, the relationship is finished. But some stay very long together, like three years. But they haven't had sex together. But they call each other boy/girlfriend. This type of relationship is very rare. They have already decided to get married to each other.

[Neema, 14, Nyahali]

Boys consider external traits like beauty, sophistication and even money to be essential. Beauty and appearance are important reasons for boys to fall in love. Another reason external traits are important is to gain approval from friends or to impress them, which leads to feelings of self esteem for the boy. On the other hand, traits for a girl that indicate a potential partner’s respect, obedience, and faithfulness are highly valued. This is especially crucial for potential wives. Having a respectful fiancée or wife will gain the approval and respect from others in the community including family. For the boys in this research, the selection of a partner was influenced to a large extent by the opinions of their family and friends about a girl. Just as girls do, boys research a potential partner to find out about her qualities. They particularly investigate her behavior, including her sexual behavior in order to assess the risk of contracting diseases. Boys hope for a partner who loves them and whose first priority is not money. However, boys have a strong impression they are mainly selected on the basis of what they can offer. Therefore they will try their best to convince a girl that they have access to money, even if they cannot offer much.

Which partner is chosen depends largely on the goals of the boys and girls and whether they want a long-term relationship or a short term one. If the aim is a long-term relationship then a partner is selected with the prospect of staying together and raising a family. Internal attributes like character and behavior, intelligence, honesty, cheerfulness, and for girls, modesty, respect and obedience become more critical. These attributes are expected to be important for a long-term relationship. Virginity is not considered as important in the
selection of a partner, but faithfulness is. There is hope for love, or the development of love, but love is not a prerequisite in a choice for a long-term partner.

Partner preferences reflect an ideal partner but it do not necessarily mean that Tanzanian boys and girls choose a partner with those traits. The partner who is chosen depends on the reality of everyday life and having a choice might be a luxury. A widowed woman gave the example that when she was young she had seven men propose marriage to her. She chose the one whom she loved the most. Other people might not have the luxury of choice. Choice is further limited through the involvement of families. A bride price has to be paid to the family of the bride in Tanzania and if the partner or his family do not have adequate resources, then the couple cannot marry\(^57\). If the family of a boy or girl deems a chosen partner as not good enough the couple’s relationship has a low chance to survive. A family may put pressure on their son or daughter to get married as soon as they are found to be ‘ready’ in the eyes of their parents or caretakers. Therefore boys, girls, young men and young women might not have the luxury of time to wait for someone they can fall in love with. Love appears to be a bonus or a luxury rather than a condition for marriage in Tanzania.

Short-term relationships are described as a ‘deal’ where the boy aims for sexual gratification and the girl aims for money. Money is paid, sex takes place and there are no further commitments. A partner is chosen on basis of a boy’s ability to offer money or on a girl’s physical attraction. Generally, long-term relationships between boys and girls of primary school age are said to be rare. Most boys and girls say they know that relationships\(^58\) often end after the boy and girl have sex, generally after a few days or weeks. Some relationships end due to jealousy, for example seeing one’s partner talking to another boy or girl. But it is said that most relationships end because the boy finds a better looking girl, the boy is broke, the boy’s gift giving is not maintained or if a girl gets a better deal.

\[Me: \text{Who ends it normally?}\]
\[The\ \text{boy.}\]
\[Me: \text{Why is that?}\]
\[Because\ the\ boy's\ interest\ is\ to\ have\ sex\ with\ you,\ once\ he\ has\ achieved\ that,\ he's\ gone.\]
\[\text{[Girl\ during\ FGD Magu\ town]}\]

\(^57\) Although the man can ‘kidnap’ the woman, see Chapter 3 on gender and sexuality.
\(^58\) Children seem to interpret ‘relationship’ as ‘the agreement’ between the boy and the girl and thus starting when the girl ‘agrees’ to the boy during courtship.
Me: On average, how long does a relationship last, the relationships you see around you? It lasts until the girl finds someone with more money or better offers. Or if a boy finds a girl who is better looking. Then it ends.

[Boy during FGD Magu town]

One of the reasons that relationships do not last long, according to boys during group discussions, is that boys cannot get married until they have started ‘a life of their own’. Boys and young men become independent from their parents by establishing a regular income to enable them to build a house and to support a relationship and family. Therefore, boys say they cannot get married until they have finished their education and have found a job both of which are highly uncertain. Most of the boys we interviewed therefore did not consider a long-term relationship. But most boys also did not want to wait to have sexual relationships until they can get married which might not happen until their 30’s. Thus boys try to make a girl believe they are willing to invest in her and marry her while in reality they are aiming for sex only. Even if the boy wants to maintain a relationship with the girl he might not be able to due to his inability to support a girlfriend. Boys are of the opinion that girls know they are being deceived: “she can see that I am depending on my parents” and therefore call girls “fools” if they believe the boys’ lies and their promises to marry them. They do not feel responsible or committed to ‘stick’ with a girl. Furthermore, a girl who qualifies for marriage needs to have ‘good manners’ and a good reputation. If a girl agrees too easily to sex it is implicitly clear to the boy that she will only be a temporary girlfriend.

… this is just for temporary use (boys giggle)

Me: What is temporary use?

You know, they are different, you cannot marry her. Because if you want to marry, you have to be prepared, you have to build a house and then maybe finally you can get married. But for students the issue of marriage is not there.

Me: And the girlfriends, the lovers, they know that? They know that they are temporary?

No, you see, you must be more clever than the girls. So some boys, they will just cheat them by saying, 'aah, don't worry, I shall marry you'

Me: So can you explain to me why you have to be clever?

So that she can agree, you have to say that so that she will agree to be your lover.

Me: What do you say exactly?

'I will give you money'. Some of them are poor, where they come from, especially the girls. So you can tell them I will give you money. That will become their income.

Me: It becomes their income?

There are some who are told by their parents that they have to fend for themselves. So if then a boy comes and says 'I give you money', then they can agree. [...] So you give them money. And many gifts. Maybe say that 'at my home we are very rich and ultimately I am going to marry you'.

Me: Okay... but do girls actually believe you?

Only the fools. (boys laugh)

[FGD with boys in Magu town]
Most girls are aware of the deception of the boys and the likeliness that the relationship will cease after sex. Therefore, most boys and girls say that girls’ main motive to engage in a relationship is money. However, some girls truly hope for a long-term relationship and say they feel dumped, hurt or used if the boy moves on after sex. Some boys said they were upset with a girl who tested their love (skinning) but did not return any feelings of love or sex. The length of a relationship can be limited because of the risk for punishment. Relationships are kept secret and there is not much space for boys and girls to just spend time together. A time and place for sex need to be settled upon quickly. Each sexual encounter has to be negotiated, giving both boys and girls an incentive to change partners quickly.

Some boys and girls have multiple partners, one permanent partner in whom they invest and whom they think they might marry. However, if this partner is not around, lives far away or is unavailable one or more temporary partners can be sought. If a permanent boyfriend cannot adequately support his girlfriend, she might look for temporary boyfriends for additional support. And if a permanent girlfriend wants to postpone sex until marriage or after finishing education, a boy might look for temporary girlfriends for sex.

There are two kinds of girlfriends: the one you prepare for marriage and the one you prepare for sex. You can have them at the same time and you have sex with both. You have the temporary one for when you are travelling or in boarding school or when the permanent one is not around. If the permanent one is there and available, then one is enough.

A temporary one is like the one you have for sex only once. Then they will part. The girl will take this as a sign that she can go for another man. The permanent one is a girl who has self-respect and a guy will be scared to approach her. A couple who are permanent know what they’ve got and will say no to others. (Hesitates).... They might have sex with others, if they are separated. But then they meet up for holidays and act like they’re together.

Short-term relationships normally involve a one-time sexual encounter and each subsequent encounter needs to be negotiated. Because there is usually no expectation of commitment boys and girls can have multiple partners in a serial-monogamous way. This is not true for girls who hope or expect commitment from boys in case they become pregnant. So if a boy or girl has sex twice with one partner, but with another person in between those encounters, it might not be seen as behaving in an unfaithful way even if it happens over a period of a few weeks as it depends on ‘the agreement’. Due to the children’s perceptions of temporary relationships boys and girls sometimes have multiple partners. Tumaini, for example, had two girlfriends at the same time. Tumaini was presented earlier in this book. He is a good-looking
fifteen-year-old boy from Standard 7 in Nyahali primary school. Tumaini first tried to have sex when he was 13 after seeing his brother having sex in the bedroom that they share in a hut their father built for them next to the parental house. The week before I interviewed him, Tumaini had sneaked out of his room to go to the disco without his parents’ knowledge. At the disco he had persuaded a girl to come with him to his bedroom where they had sex. Tumaini is a popular boy and the girls in his class told us they find him attractive. Tumaini is part of a group of male friends, about five boys, who are all in the same class and have tight friendship bonds. This group is dominant in class and the boys are proud of their reputation of being womanizers.

Tumaini:

I like girls kabisa! (totally, absolutely). I have two girlfriends but I want to add more after I finish examinations. They are not in this school, I don’t like to seduce girls in this school because then they’ll distract me in class. I love girls, but I don’t like to get married, not even when I’m thirty or forty! Because when you get married you must give your wife the best needs and sustain her. I don’t like that. But I’d like to have children. I will take responsibility over my children, but I won’t be living with them.

I asked him why he needs more than one girlfriend:

Because of my desire to have sex, I want to change from one girl to the other also to see the difference. I need to experience. If one girl is cold, another might be hot. You cannot eat the same food every day. The same counts even for girls, they are changing the boys.

Me: How often do you have sex?

It depends on how much money I have. Maybe once every 2 or 3 months.

It is clear that Tumaini’s interest in girls is not to start a long-term relationship. Although he has only enough money to have sex with one of the girls every 2-3 months he does call these girls his girlfriends. The girl from the disco is his new girlfriend, but Tumaini indicated that he might have sex with his old girlfriend again. If she was unavailable or did not agree (is ‘cold’), he would go to the girl he met at the disco, or perhaps look for a new girl.

Concluding remarks

Boys and girls in Tanzania differentiate between temporary and permanent partners and relationships. While temporary relationships were described as a one-time agreement that
generally ends after sex, the boys and girls shared the idea that a long term relationship should be based on commitment, trust and faithfulness. Yet at the same time boys and girls seem to have negative expectations about their future partner’s faithfulness. Boys in all four research locations shared the opinion that in the end, if a boy was not be able to offer enough money his girlfriend or wife would look for other boys or men. Because most of the boys we interviewed were still in primary school they had only intermittent access to money to maintain a relationship. These children saw marriage as something distant and perhaps because of their negative views on girls’ faithfulness they were mainly interested in temporary girlfriends. In relationships with temporary partners there is no commitment and boys justify their deceptions and lies by saying that the girl could and should know that she is temporary. Beauty and cleanliness were preferred in temporary girlfriends, as these qualities would impress male peers. In contrast, behavioral characteristics, ‘good manners’, were found to be most significant in a future wife. Boys also described feelings of infatuation as a reason to pursue a girl but did not think of love as a prerequisite for marriage, rather as a bonus that might develop over time. Girls said they preferred to be in a permanent relationship with a partner who was committed and that money was of less importance. This was in contrast to the boys’ opinion that girls were only after money. Faithfulness and not being fed up with a partner after a long time together with good behavior and a nice character were mentioned as important aspects in the choice for an ideal partner. Girls too hoped for love, yet did not consider this to be a prerequisite for marriage. Experience of love, to boys and girls, was attributed to luck, fate or chance. Love was seen as an accident, or a bonus, not as something one can or should pursue or aim for\textsuperscript{59}. The girls complained about the boys’ deceptions and lack of commitment, perhaps because marriage for girls is less distant in the future as compared to boys. Girls’ hopes might be for a longer-term relationship and therefore they fall for the boys’ promises. On the other hand, girls might justify their relationship with a boy by saying that she was deceived. There is not much space for boys and girls to develop non-sexual aspects of a relationship because many parents and caretakers punish their son or daughter when caught interacting with the opposite sex. The perception that love is not something one can or should pursue in a relationship might contribute to limiting development of non-sexual intimacy.

\textsuperscript{59} In psychology this is referred to with the term external locus of control, or the belief that events that affect a person’s life are outside of his or her control. A person with a high internal locus of control believes that events primarily result from his or her own behavior or actions.
In their choice for a partner the children have to conduct ‘research’ about the potential partner’s background and behavior often with the help of friends. The courtship and relationship have to be kept secret. This secrecy contributes to the characteristics of courtship and relationships. Courtships are kept short and to the point with boys pushing to come to an agreement for a time and place for sex. Most relationships that follow are temporary and the goal of the relationship seems to be mainly instrumental; the boy wants sex and the girl receives money. Because every new sexual encounter needs to be negotiated, such relationships can follow up on each other quickly, sometimes with the same partner(s), or exist simultaneously with a longer-term relationship.

There is a apparent discrepancy between the children’s descriptions of the reality of deceit, skinning, and temporary relationships characterized by secrecy, transaction, short duration and multiple partners versus the described ideal (and norm) of long term relationships based on commitment, trust and faithfulness, and if lucky, love. In the last part of this book I will analyze this discrepancy and hypothesize how Tanzanian children attach various meanings to sex and relationships and cope with conflicting norms and expectations. First I will explore children’s opinions of responsibility for pregnancy and contraceptives and how this influences sexual relationships and is prejudiced by taboo and sexual education.
You find that families are poor, do not have better ways of life. That is when girls take a step of getting involved in sex.

You find that a girl does not have all needs, that is why they reach this level, you find that the parents of this girl normally do not fully support her, that is when she decides to use this method hoping to get what she wants.

Once she has decided to do this, now she has to overcome the following
(a) Getting pregnant
(b) Contracting sexually transmitted infections

Once she gets pregnant she will get kicked from the home, even losing her chances of getting education and she will be isolated from the community. The community does not want anything to do with it and you will give birth to a baby in struggle, the first reason is
(a) A baby will need needs of a father and a mother
(b) It will have no decent needs like, soap, clothes, baby powder, food and care.

[Essay by an anonymous student of the Primary School in Magu town]

Responsibility for pregnancy

Fear for unwanted pregnancy was a topic of great concern, especially for the Tanzanian girls. According to the girls we spoke with, if a girl becomes pregnant, there is a great chance that the boy who made her pregnant will ‘refuse’ the pregnancy thus denying his responsibility. In the eyes of the informants this is a disastrous event because without a father for the baby the girl would be a burden to her own family. Furthermore, the community would see the girl’s illegitimate child, which brings shame upon her family. In this case, her damaged reputation is likely to decrease a girl’s chance of getting married. Pregnant girls have to leave school and rarely return because they have to take care of their baby. One option for these girls is to be sent ‘out of town’ to live with her grandparents. This is the scenario girls have in mind when they say that a boy ‘only wants to spoil her life’ when a boy approaches a girl. The consequences of pregnancy are obvious for girls in Tanzania. Girls in school see what happens with their classmates who become pregnant. In the schools where we did our research, cases of pregnancy and subsequent dropout occurred every year.

Hope, a young woman (21 years old) whom we met while walking through one of the villages near Nyahali, got pregnant in school and had to drop out. A friend of Hope’s mother had brought us to her house to introduce us to Hope’s mother whom she thought we could interview. Hope’s mother is a widow who sells tomatoes at the market and shares her small
mud hut with her five adult children and Alfonso, Hope’s 5-year-old son. Hope’s mother was absent when we arrived and we found Hope sitting in front of the little house wearing only a *kanga* (wrap). We explained our presence to her, which she understood as she spoke a bit of English. She had learned English in secondary school before she dropped out when she became pregnant.

*The case of Hope*

When I was in secondary school, I met a man, a businessman, and I fell in love with him. He was nice to me and he supported me and we had a relationship. He promised to marry me after I would finish secondary school. But when I was in form 2 [at age 15] I became pregnant and I had to drop out of school. And then he told me that he could not marry me because according to *Sukuma* custom [local tribe] he had to marry someone from his own tribe [Hope is Mchinga]. I felt heartbroken. Then I delivered Alfonso. Because my family is very poor and food is hard to come by, I tried to get a job. To get a job I wanted to follow a course in computer technology, but they did not allow me without proper secondary school papers. So I saved up money for two years and then I went back to secondary school. But life was so hard for me and for my family without money and food that I constantly worried about my son and his well-being. So I could not concentrate and did not perform very well in school and again I dropped out. Now the main problems that I am facing are the care of my child, finding food to eat and clothes to wear. My mother is a simple tomato saleswoman in the market and cannot take care of all the people in the household. But I find it very hard to find work without schooling. It is very hard to find a man who wants to take care of me and my baby. People in the village see me as a prostitute, because I got a child out of wedlock. So nobody wants me anymore, except maybe for some older men who are desperate to marry and can’t get anyone else. In this village there are many girls like me. The problem is men, they don’t take responsibility. They don’t care. Girls should be warned about this and both [boys and girls] need to be told about the consequences. Boys should learn to take responsibility and that will only happen if leaders will start talking about this problem. But they don’t. It’s taboo. And men are being misinformed about condoms, so they do not trust them. They rather take the risk of getting infected.

Girls blame the problem of pregnancy and its’ consequences on boys, but boys too have a fear of unwanted pregnancies. If it becomes known which boy is responsible for a pregnancy he will be forced to marry the girl. If he has no house of his own, the girl would move in with him and his parents. The boy risks being ostracized by the community if he or his family is unable to support the girl and the baby or refuses to take the girl in. If the pregnant girl is a schoolgirl, the boy might face charges, “you can end up in prison.” If he is in school, he will be expelled. If his parents are strict, they might “chase him from the house”.
Sometimes parents, they will tell you ‘Now, we don't have anything to do with this matter, it is your problem. Because we only wanted you and that is the end of it.’ But you, you can’t take care of her. So you refuse [to admit that the pregnancy is yours]. But the moment it becomes known that the girl is pregnant from you, you would have to leave the area. In fact, you could even have to leave the country.

[FGD with boys in Magu town]

After the pupils from Standard 7 of Nyahali primary school performed their play for us, we showed them the videotape and discussed certain themes from the play. One theme was ‘responsibility for what happened to Penny and Asha’. The boys opined that the girls themselves were to blame for what happened to them and denied any responsibility on the part of the boys in the play. “They knew what the consequences of such behavior could be.” I asked if they would not feel sorry if a girl was kicked out of school because they made that girl pregnant. They said: “You don't feel sorry, the girl knows what risk she's taking. Especially if the girl approaches the boy because she wants to have sex, then you would give it to her, but you wouldn't feel sorry if there were consequences, she should have been wiser.” One of the boys added: “Also girls know that boys are depending on their parents as well, that they won’t be able to support her and a child if she gets pregnant.” I asked: “But isn't it true that you tell her, when you want to seduce her, that you will give her anything she needs?” The girls of the class cheered supportively, when I asked this, keen to hear the response of the boys. The boys answered: “Yeah, but the girl can know I don't have a lot of money, I'd give her only 1000 or 500 and she knows I don't have a job.” Then the girls and boys started a fierce, but chaotic discussion that resulted in the proposition to organize a debate. And so it happened that a week later the class was split in two, the boys on the left and the girls on the right side of the classroom. The theme written on the blackboard said ‘Responsibility for Pregnancy’ and both groups took 15 minutes to prepare their viewpoints and select a spokesperson.

Nyahali debate on pregnancy

First the representative for the girls, Jeni, came forward accompanied by the loud applause of her female classmates. When she stood in front of the class, she started:

Our group, we have discussed these issues. First we want to ask a question: Why does a boy not take the responsibility of raising a baby? Us, we have seen that a boy has the responsibility of raising a baby because they both wanted to go and have sex, they agreed together. And raising the baby that has born, this act concerns all. Because they worked together to do that act [sex], a boy has the responsibility of raising that baby because a baby needs care of a father and a mother. If a boy refuses that pregnancy, a girl will take the responsibility of removing it [abortion], and then
she can see herself not being able to produce for life [become infertile]. We mean that act was done by both, that act involved both. Lastly we advise boys to stop involving themselves with girls and lying to them and we warn girls not to be deceived by those things.

The girls in the class give her a big applause again and then Salim comes forward for the boys:

It is that we have discussed as follows: The boy has the responsibility of raising a baby? He doesn’t! Because we cannot know her period when they do that act [whether she has had her menarche and can conceive and/or is in her ‘safe days’ of the cycle]. The period the girl was seduced, she knew if she would get pregnant. For that she was supposed to tell the boy that, this child that we are going to have [might get], should be raised by who? She didn’t say, (the boys give applause to support Salim). First a child is supposed to be raised by its mother because the father, he doesn’t have breasts to raise it. If you give him that child that you have given birth to, and then you take it to its father, how is he is going to breastfeed it? Another point follows that that pregnancy was on purpose. She says ‘somebody has a child, I don’t and I, I am going to find one’. For that she is supposed to find a boy to get her pregnant (the girls start boing and yelling). There are some girls they want it for themselves, by seducing a boy, some like money, her she knows. Okay, like me here okay? (Pointing to himself) Me I have money, like if I get her pregnant she knows she is a survivor on me [depend on me]. Some get pregnant because of being disturbed by menstruation [have become fertile]. I don’t know if that pregnancy is mine, I did it once, now, I did once. If she did it with another, how will I know that it is mine? (Meanwhile the boys and girls in the group are starting to respond to Salim and each other). Somewhere she herself wanted to get pregnant, while they were doing that act, they did not agree to whom the pregnancy will belong, or the child who will be born will be whose. This girl and that boy, they did not agree on whom the baby will belong to, because there when they are doing it, they don’t know if there is an objective that will happen, a boy doesn’t know, I don’t know today I will get a girl pregnant, or the girl won’t say that today she is on her period.

One of the girls from the group stands up and fires at Salim:

How can you get a girl pregnant and then, you refuse to raise a child, while you know... Why don’t you agree with her that we will raise the child, why you get her pregnant and then leave her struggling, why? That pregnancy is for both; you contributed both until that girl got pregnant.

A boy from the group stands up and says to the girl:

Now wait; let me tell you, there, when you do that act, there must be an objective. Now you, your objective was not a baby, your objective was pleasure, you, you wanted pleasure, you didn’t know there was a baby...

The girl: If he knew he didn’t want to raise the child, he should have used protection. Because he is supposed to raise that child, because it is his blood!

The boy: Why did she not advise him? If you had advised him ‘you there, you, wear a condom’ (both girls and boys start to laugh). Even you, you could have worn [referring to female condom], you were only carried away.
Then another girl stands up: You are saying that they did not arrange to whom the child belongs. So a father and a mother, when they are doing that, do they arrange [beforehand] for each other that the one we are going to give birth to is for the mother, and the one we give birth to tomorrow is the father's?

Then Juma stands up: They [a father and mother] will already have agreed that ‘We want what? We want a child.’ Now you, you have only taken each other. You are not like a father and a mother, for that, when a baby is born, it is not like it was planned. A father and a mother have given birth by agreement, for that we say you; you have not given birth by agreement. Therefore it will be hard to accept that pregnancy.

The girl: A father is not there when you tie a knot [marriage]; he is there when you have given birth, when you have gotten a child, that is when you are called a father [a man is called a father not when he marries, but when he becomes a father by producing a child]

Juma: How has he given birth?

Girl: Hasn’t he given birth with that girl?

Juma: Being called a father that is not a problem, but the problem comes when raising a child, because to raise a child, is it like a father’s responsibility? Have we married one another? We all have sins you see? [Referring to lust or sex before marriage] The responsibility has to be yours, what do you want me to do?

Girl: You are only supposed to give, because the girl might need food, okay. Now that food, she is not the one who needs it, it will be the creature inside that needs that food [the unborn baby, the foetus], because she will be protecting that creature.

Juma: There, the boy and the girl, they did not know that a baby might come, they only wanted to get pleasure, okay? Pleasure, you, the girl, you can’t ask me to take responsibility because for example me, I live with my parents, I depend on my parents, now where will I get that money to bring you and use?

Another girl from the group rushes in to respond to Juma: Haaha, how about that money that you gave to her, where did you get it from?

Juma: Are they going to seduce you by money, you?

Girl: Didn’t you say you are getting pleasure, now when you are getting that pleasure aren’t you giving her money? Where are you getting that money if you are not given it by your parents?

Juma: For that, that day, were you looking for money or…?

The girl is getting upset by Juma’s personal attack. He is trying to trick her by making it seem like she, as a representative for girls who get involved with boys for money, is a mhuni:

Girl: … Some women have the greed for money, okay? Now I ... they are there, they have the greed for money. Those that you said have the greed for money, they go with the intentions of finding money, they don’t know if they will get that pregnancy.
For when she has gotten pregnant, you are supposed to work together to raise that baby, and a child you raise it?

**Juma:** It means you are doing business? Or…

The boys in the class start to laugh and the girls are getting upset, shouting at the boys. Then Salim asks them to calm down.

**Salim:** You, Neema, don’t you understand Swahili? Shut up!

The class decides to get organized again. Salim sits down and a new girl, Aneti, comes forward to the front of the class and turns her body to face the boys:

When you say that, I don’t have the breast to feed that baby, is it fed by breasts only?

**Boys:** Yes!

**Aneti:** No, there are many ways of raising a child and besides breasts, there are many ways in which a child can go through and grow. It is not a must, to breastfeed using breasts. Children whose parents are patients of HIV, how about those? It is not that the child needs breastfeeding only; there are important needs that s/he needs, from the father.

**Boys:** What needs?

**Aneti:** Taken care of; clothes… [To Salim:] For you, what needs do you need from your father?

**Salim:** You are saying taken care of, a father, can he truly bathe that child?

**Aneti:** You, you there, what does your father normally give you?

**Salim:** My father? He never gives me anything. (During a personal interview Salim had told us that his father had left home a while ago, so his mother is the one that takes care of him).

**Another girl:** And those clothes you are wearing, who buys them for you?

**Salim:** These ones? My mother.

**Another girl:** Where is your mother getting that money without being given by your father?

**Salim:** Oy, now those aren’t married. Oy! One at a time now [girls are shouting]

**Juma:** [responds to the turmoil] You, stop arguing. You, when you say that, it’s because you don’t know the rules of marriage.

**Neema:** Mention them if you know them.
**Juma:** I can’t mention… If you want to make sure, go and get the book, a book of rules.

From this debate and other similar debates, it becomes clear that boys not only deny responsibility for pregnancy out of fear of the consequences but also because they do not feel responsible. Since most relationships are short-term the boys argue they cannot know if the girl has had additional sexual relationships around the same time. Therefore there is no proof that he is the father. The boys further argue that it is the girl who is responsible for the pregnancy because the girl knows if she is menstruating or not and therefore if she is fertile. Due to the age that boys and girls get involved in sexual relationships in Tanzania some girls might not have experienced menarche. Therefore the boy’s claim of not knowing whether the girl they are having sex with can become pregnant is legitimate. It is the boys’ opinion that a girl should mention their menstrual status to them. The boys may have referred to what they called ‘the safe days’. The boys assume that a girl knows when she can conceive by counting the days of her cycle. Indeed a group of boys from the same school who were interviewed a year later told us that girls are responsible for pregnancy because they know whether or not they can get pregnant as well as when they can get pregnant. “*Normally the girls turn to us when they know they are safe, when they know they can’t get pregnant because they check their cycle.*” It is possible that the significance of agreeing to a place and time for sex during courtship is not only related to privacy issues but also to a girl’s assumed awareness of her chances for conception. Like Salim, the boys of this group interviewed later argued that a girl might purposely hide her menstrual status from them in order to become pregnant. Salim’s introduction appeared to indicate that he thought girls conceal their menstrual status in order to trap a boy into a long-term relationship. A long-term relationship would allow her to ‘survive on him’ which means he would have to support her financially. More than once the boys raised the point that pregnancy was not part of the ‘agreement’, that it was not the ‘objective’ for having sex. The purpose of the sexual encounter was pleasure, not to have a child. They pointed to the kind of relationship in which ‘the act’ took place. The sexual act between the boy and girl was not like a marriage in which sex takes place to produce a child. They emphasized the short-term character of their relationships with girls and that these relationships are about pleasure and without commitment. The boys elaborated on this argument by implying that women are biologically responsible for raising a baby because they have breasts to feed the child. The boys beliefs of conventional gender tasks are illustrated by remarks such as, ‘can a father truly bathe a child?’. So in the boys’ eyes girls
have a natural commitment to a baby while boys do not. The girls tried to point out that a baby needs more than breast milk to grow and that the boy has the responsibility to support the girl by providing money, which traditionally is the task of the husband. But the boys parried this argument by saying that they were depending on their parents, implying that they did not have the money to support a girl and a child. They also stated that the girls should and could know this. We sensed that the girls were cornered in the debate and the only argument left for them was to remind the boys that if a boy wanted to have sex he should be aware of the potential consequences. If a boy was not ready to face the consequences of sexual activity he should at least use a condom.

**Nyahali debate – continued:**

The boys start to repeat their argument that they cannot know if a pregnancy is theirs, because they do not know if the girl has slept with more men.

Girl from the group: If you do not know if it is you only, why did you not use protection? So that all of that wouldn’t get you [so that you wouldn’t have to worry about pregnancy or diseases]?

Juma: Are there for boys only? There are for girls too [he is referring to female condoms]

Girl: You could have bought and taken them to her, aren’t you the one who wanted [to have sex]?

Juma: Couldn’t she have advised me to use?

Girl: So you don’t know? [Cynical, as if he doesn’t have knowledge about condoms]

Juma: (becomes agitated) You, don’t you have a brain?

Although the girls have a point, Juma again emphasized the responsibility of the girl. If a girl knows she can get pregnant she should advise the boy to use a condom, or better, use a female condom. The girl suggested that the boy should have brought a condom. From other women we learned it is inappropriate for girls to bring a condom because it implies too much readiness for and experience with sex. It is interesting that in this debate the boys seemed open-minded towards the discussion of the use of condoms. At least they had not discarded the option of using a condom. This was remarkable because from other interviews and discussions we learned that boys have a negative opinion about the use of condoms and therefore girls find it hard to negotiate using them.
Attitudes towards condom use

Condoms spoil sex!

[Boys during many FGD’s and interviews]

The attitude of our male informants towards the use of condoms was outspokenly negative. First, all but a few of them were of the opinion that condoms reduce pleasure. We suspect that some of our informants who said this were not speaking from experience. Therefore this opinion might reflect a peer-influenced norm for condoms. Boys further based their reluctance to use condoms on arguments that condoms have side effects; they can cause cancer, infertility and even HIV. Some had moral obligations for using a condom while others mentioned that they personally were literally “too small to use condoms”. These boys said that condoms did not fit them: “I am a little bit young, so no way the condom would have fitted”, said one of the boys in Magu town during a group discussion with boys.

It is impossible for me to agree to use a condom: First: condoms cause cancer. Second: it spoils the fertility rate of the man. Third: it is like abortion; maybe you spoil the existence of a baby who could become the next president of Tanzania. (Other boy adds) The bad quality of condoms; often they are expired so there is no longer lubricant and friction will cause wounds in the skin of the genitals.

[FGD with Nyahali boys]

Some of the arguments that boys and men posited to reject the use of condoms were based on misconceptions. For example: “Virgins cannot fall pregnant so no need to use with them” and “Condoms are carrying the HIV virus”. These boys said that Europeans or Americans put the virus in the condoms as a way to counter African population growth. Some boys believed they were too young to cause pregnancy: “You can only get a girl pregnant if you are 18 years or older”. Although the boys we interviewed were quite knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS, the men we interviewed in Nyahali village (who were in their 20’s) said they could see if someone had HIV: “After 2 or 3 months you can stop using because then you can see if she is showing symptoms of HIV infection, like fever, diarrhea, bleeding, skin disease.” The most frequently heard misconception was that condoms had little invisible holes that allowed the virus to go through. The entire class of Standard 7 in Nyahali primary school believed this was true, “because the science teacher has said it” (more on this in the next chapter). Furthermore, one group of boys said, “the people in the movies [porn] never use condoms either”.

144
Since pregnancy is seen as the responsibility of the girl the reason for boys to use condoms is not as much for contraception as for disease prevention. However, it was claimed that if you trust a girl or if you had done thorough investigations this reduced the need for condoms: “Using a condom is out of order, because it means you don’t trust the girlfriend and if you don’t trust her, why would you have sex with her in the first place?” The boys in Magu town argued that “if you assume that the girl is infected, then you use a condom.”

Some boys indicated that they did not mind using a condom but had unsafe sex because they were ‘too excited to use’ one or couldn’t afford to buy a condom. After Iddy had told his friend Mathias about how he fell in love with a girl (see previous chapter), the boys swapped places and Iddy asked about Mathias’ first time:

_Iddy: How was it man? Start the story._

_Mathias: We were studying together in the house. There was music and we started to dance and test one another. Then we left the house and we passed a mini shop. I bought some sweets, she ate them. Then I bought her a soda, she was drinking that soda. After finishing that soda she followed me. I, myself, I prepared myself and we started dancing again and I felt bad [excited]. After feeling bad I touched her and she refused. After refusing she said that we will be caught. We left, to the house. She went to the bedroom and for me, I saw this one has accepted. Also me I went and we did what? We laid and covered ourselves and started things involving sex. But after that... A person might not do...do what? Care if you don’t have.... you ca... you can’t think like ‘I have a condom’ … Once you rise [get an erection] you just go for it, nothing can stop you._

_Tumaini, the 15-year-old boy with two girlfriends and a wish for more, mentioned “I had unsafe sex last Saturday; I didn’t have money to buy a condom, so I did it without.” We asked him if he considered himself to be at risk for HIV:_

_There will be a risk. Sometimes I use a condom, sometimes I don’t. If I have a condom I’ll use it, but if I don’t have one, if I don’t have money, then I don’t use. I am afraid but it is a result you can get or not. I don’t have money to use condoms. I am not convinced to use. The desire takes away the rationality. It is hard to be convinced to wait with sex until I have enough money to buy a condom. Because of the desire._

_Me: Are you not afraid she might have become pregnant?_  
_No, I’m not afraid of that, because the girl was a virgin. So she can’t get pregnant. Also, pregnancy is like an accident. I felt hungry [for sex], so I had sex without a condom. I’m taking the chance._
Girls, on the other hand, said they want to use condoms but cannot convince boys to use them. Other girls told us that they are offered more money if they are willing to have unsafe sex. I asked Shani, one of my female informants in Nyahali, if she thought a girl could tell a boy that she insists on using a condom:

He will listen, but then refuse. Then she will just go on and have sex with him. Because the girl believes that they love each other, so she has to believe everything the boy is saying.

Two groups of girls, from Magu town and Nyahali, independently told us stories about boys agreeing to use a condom, but then cutting or tearing it on purpose:

*Girls in Magu:*
Sometimes, you find that girl is scared to get pregnant. Now, she will tell that boy ‘for me I am scared to do what, to get pregnant’. That boy, he might deceive her to drink tablets or he uses a condom. But even if he uses a condom, there are some boys, they are smart. When he wears a condom, he breaks it in front. For that, a pregnancy, you can just get it. And even if you drink those tablets to stop pregnancy, you might get diseases like cancer, or even STD's. If he has, he can infect you.

*Girls in Nyahali:*
There are some men who say ‘let's use a condom so that you don't get pregnant’, but when he wears it, he tears it. It has something to do with the way it feels like, the taste [feeling]. Some men, the feeling of the condom is not enough, it is not satisfying enough. They want to have skin contact with the girl, in order to enjoy the sexual act. So they use a blade, to cut off the tip, so when he's wearing it, it's not right.

Because many men reject condoms, some adult women opt for contraceptive alternatives like injections and pills. We were also told that if a girl becomes pregnant “she can always go and have an abortion”. The following is part of the interview with the four young women in their 20’s in Nyahali:

*Me:* Who is responsible if you become pregnant?
The girl is the one responsible for preventing the pregnancy. So most girls like to use the condom.

*Me:* Can you bring it yourself?
(They laugh) No, the boys bring.

*Me:* And the boys don’t mind using?
Many boys they cannot agree to use a condom. So that’s why we use injection or if you get pregnant you go for an abortion.

The school children interviewed in this research did not mention any contraceptives other than condoms as an option to prevent pregnancy. They considered contraceptive pills and injections to be risky if you are young and when you have no children. Girls told us that some
girls would have an abortion if they could get enough money. However, they added that these girls run the risk of becoming infertile or dying.

*Boy:* There is nothing you can do to prevent a girl from getting pregnant, sperm goes right through a condom, it won't prevent. Injections and pills are only for grown-ups, because when you grow up it limits the chances of you getting pregnant or giving birth.

*Girl:* I have a friend who got ill because of pills and injections and now she's infertile!

[Class discussion with boys and girls in Nyahali]

According to the boys and girls we interviewed a lack of knowledge is another reason why condoms are not used. Charlie said that condoms are used in towns but not in villages, e.g. where he lives, because “in the villages people are not exposed to the use of condoms and they don't know how to use it either.” Blessed from Magu town thought that: “Children from Standards 5, 6, 7 don't even know the meaning of a condom.” The four young women in Nyahali also mention exposure and knowledge as a problem:

Many men are not educated, they do not agree if you ask them to use. But we girls have to go to the clinic with the little ones and there they teach women how to use a condom and what AIDS is and that we should tell our men to use. But at home, men refuse. They need to be educated too, they need to discuss.

*Me:* How about radio, magazines, AIDS campaigns, schools?

Most people have no radio; there are no NGO’s that come here. At school they only teach this topic one day per month, that is not enough. We need to discuss more to make them able to agree.

**Concluding remarks**

While long-term relationships are based on commitment in Tanzania, according to boys the objective of relationships with temporary partners is for pleasure only. This perception of short-term relationships without commitment influences boys’ ideas about their responsibility for pregnancy and consequently for contraceptives. According to boys, it is only girls who are responsible if they become pregnant. The girl is the one who should calculate the risk of getting pregnant. She is the one who knows, or should know, if she can become pregnant. If she decides to have sex and becomes pregnant, it is her responsibility. Boys argue they do not have the means to support a child and that girls are the natural caretakers. Because short-term relationships can exist simultaneously or in quick succession, boys can claim that no one is sure who the father is. Since relationships take place in secret it is hard for a girl to prove that a particular boy is the father of her baby or that there was no one else. Because boys do not
feel responsible for pregnancy they are less inclined to use a condom for the purpose of contraception. They think condoms reduce pleasure and many believe that condoms have negative side effects or are ineffective. Furthermore, condoms cost money, which is in short supply, and some boys find it hard to think about using a condom when they are excited. Some boys do consider the use of condoms as effective to prevent sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. But most consider their risk for contracting HIV to be low or consider that they have reduced this risk if they have investigated the behavior of the girl including her sexual history. Girls, on the other hand, expressed a strong wish for the use of condoms especially for the prevention of pregnancy. Unfortunately, it is hard for girls to negotiate the use of condoms because boys oppose their use so strongly and sometimes offer more money if the girl is willing to have unsafe sex. Due to local gender norms girls have to depend on boys to provide a condom and this is less likely to happen if the boys are reluctant to use one. Finally, it is not unimaginable that purchasing or being in possession of condoms could be risky for boys or girls considering how their parents, caretakers or teacher’s would interpret this action if they were discovered.

One of the explanations given for not using condoms is a lack of knowledge. But the majority of school children who were our informants had a comprehensive knowledge of HIV and AIDS. This was because the Guardian Programme, which included a sexual education aspect, targeted the three schools. Misconceptions that existed and led to reluctance to use condoms were based on inadequate knowledge or wrong ideas about the condoms themselves or what exactly causes pregnancy or conception. The following chapter examines the role of sex education and taboo in the formation of knowledge and attitudes towards risks and condoms. It will also consider the particular problem of sexual harassment and abuse of students by schoolteachers.
IX TABOO, SEX EDUCATION AND TEACHERS

It is hard to talk about these issues with children.

[Female guardian teacher of the primary school in rural Magu; about sexual education that she has to teach to her pupils]

Sexual education and the Guardian programme

The boys and girls who participated in this research learned about sex mainly from their peers and sexual education lessons given as part of the science subject in school. The schools where we interviewed the children were also participating in the Guardian programme. This program was developed and tested by TANESA (Tanzanian Essential Strategies against AIDS) and was adopted by the Ministry of Education for the schools in Magu and by an NGO in Nyahali. In the Guardian programme one or two guardian teachers (mlezi) are elected by the pupils of the school who “have the task to train and provide health education and counseling services to pupils on issues they encounter in their daily life, especially problems related to sexual and reproductive health; to monitor and advice pupils on safe behaviour and practices” (TANESA Fact sheet Nr. 2, 2003). The students of these three schools were exposed to AIDS education and this became obvious through the dramas they performed. Every drama except the drama performed by the out of school youth in Jabali, included warnings for the consequences of unsafe sex. These dramas included one or more scenes where a teacher taught the children in class about HIV and AIDS. Although these children had access to a guardian teacher and were exposed to the sexual education lessons in their school curriculum, all the groups of children that participated in our research requested that we give them more information about HIV and AIDS. In particular, the students wanted additional information on male and female condoms and they asked for a ‘demonstration’. We decided to honor their request, despite the fact that the teachers requested at the beginning of our research that we not talk about condoms.

60 Because of the children’s right to information and to the highest attainable standard of sexual health and because I believed many of them were sexually active or about to become sexually active in the near future, I decided not to honor the request of the teachers. For ethical considerations and justification see Chapter 2.
Conception of misconceptions

For the group of Standard 7 pupils of Nyahali, during my follow up visit in 2007 I decided to give a condom demonstration and to ask Hope, the young mother (21) who became pregnant in secondary to school (see previous chapter), to talk to this class about unwanted pregnancies. I was interested to see how her personal experience and openness would influence the transfer of information and how the boys and girls would respond to this. I decided to ask Hope because of her passionate declaration to me that she thought boys and girls should have more education on the use of condoms and the consequences of unsafe sex. During Hope’s educational talk, my research assistant at that time, Christopher (early 20’s) who just finished secondary school, assisted her in answering some of the questions. Below is a transcription of a portion of this educational talk to illustrate where misconceptions come from and what kind of questions children raise if they have an opportunity to interact with the educator.

Hope's educational talk

Hope: Back to our topic: you should not do sex when in primary school. I have another question for you: Are condoms the best protection against STD’s and unnecessary pregnancy?

Many: Yes!

Some: No!

Boy: A condom is not the best for protecting, because according to our science teacher, he told that in the condom there are small holes that can make HIV penetrate through and into the vagina.

Hope: So I need to know if you yourself believe this, that if this is so, why does it protect against pregnancy but not against HIV?

Boy: I disagree, it does not protect for 100% because that is what the science teacher has said (more children make agreeing sounds).

Second boy: If you say that a condom protects against HIV, why do so many people die with AIDS?

Hope: Do you have evidence that all these people were using condoms? And still died with HIV?

Boy: Yes! I learned from the radio station.

Hope: They did not say that they were using condoms. They are advising you to use because so many people are dying! I need to tell you that condoms will protect! I need to tell you the truth because today you are no longer children! You must always use a condom. Every time. If you wear a condom, when you remove the condom, you can see the fluid inside the condom. So why, if there are small holes, the fluid is still inside?

Second boy: There are small holes and HIV is smaller than the hole. Condoms cannot protect HIV but can protect from pregnancy [It seems they believe this is so because semen is bigger than HIV]
Hope: Where did you learn this?
Boy: From the science teacher. He did a research and found that condoms have holes compared to the HIV virus.

*Hope takes a condom and fills it with water to show it is impenetrable.*

Boy: You cannot compare water with the small holes in the condom; so I disagree with that example [water particles are bigger than the presumed holes and bigger than the virus].

Second boy: So you recommend us to have sex? To use condom? Or to stop anything?
Hope: It depends on your age. If you are convinced you need sex, you will have to use a condom.

Christopher: What do you think about water compared to sex fluid? If water cannot go through, sex fluid cannot pass either. Condoms protect, best is to use. The benefits of condoms, if you don’t use, you die! So my advice: best to use a condom. The science teacher said he did research?? Here in Tanzania there is no lab where you can see such a thing under a microscope, it’s too expensive! Also, before condoms are sold, they must have an agreement with the WHO, they have to give their permission to sell these condoms. So why does the teacher say that a condom is not safe?

Boy: When a condom bursts, so you can get HIV?
Hope: It’s not easy for a condom to burst. Maybe you are not wearing it correctly. Use it properly. But it is not easy for a condom to burst.

Chris: When wearing improperly then it can burst. That’s why you need to be careful and to follow the instructions on the package. Another reason why bursting is difficult: because of the mafuta; there is some oil on it.

Boy: What is the benefit of the dots on the condom? [We accidentally had used a studded condom for the demonstration]

Chris: It can provide stimulation to the girl when having sex.

(Students laugh)

Boy: Some people say that when you get circumcision it is more difficult to get HIV compared to those who are not circumcised. What are the reasons?
Hope: Not true, everyone can get HIV
Boy: It’s true!
Chris: It’s true when you get circumcised it is a little bit more difficult to get infected compared to uncircumcised. The reasons why is that the boy who is not circumcised has more skin and that skin is more easy to damage compared to the penis of a circumcised boy that skin has hardened and is less big and less easy to damage, so less prone to pass the virus. But it is better to use a condom anyway, whether you are circumcised or not.

Hope: So now I think you understand the importance of using a condom and how to use it.

Class: Yes!
Hope: Is there still someone who thinks that a condom does not protect against HIV?
Boys in class: Yes!!
Boy: I did not use a condom, but I’ve heard through the radio the importance of a condom, but mostly how it prevents pregnancy, not so much HIV. But I was late to use a condom [he already had unsafe sex].
The boys’ determined disbelief in the protective value of condoms was evident from their interaction with Hope and Christopher. It was impossible to convince them that condoms protected the user from HIV. Because the boys and girls claimed to have gotten this misinformation from the science teacher, who they obviously considered a trustworthy source of information, we confronted the teacher:

Me: When we spoke with the pupils of Standard 7 last week, we discovered that they firmly believe that condoms have little holes in them that are too small for semen to pass, but large enough for the HIV virus to go through. They told us this was taught to them by their science teacher. What is your opinion about this?

It’s true, condoms have small holes. Therefore they do not protect 100%. We learned this ourselves in a seminar with xxx (name of an international organization that runs AIDS awareness programs). And because they say that condoms do not protect 100%, people do not believe condoms anymore. And then you see that the pupils in the class will not agree with using a condom. But also in the science syllabus condoms are mentioned, but they do not talk in deep about this. They say it’s one of the ways to protect against HIV.

Me: I’m sorry but I find it difficult to believe that the people from xxx (name of the organization) would say condoms have holes. Who was giving those seminars?

It was done by volunteers who were recruited by xxx (name organization). It was the volunteers who were saying this.

It is disturbing to see how relatively easily miscommunication and misinformation can lead to a large group of people, and children in particular, not wanting to use condoms. The belief about holes in condoms might not be a sufficient reason to avoid their use. However, other perceptions and reasons for non-use such as reduction of pleasure, beliefs of side effects including infertility, difficulty or too expensive to purchase and symbolizing distrust, together with the holes in condoms idea might strengthen the aversion to using condoms. It is only when the children were allowed to interact and discuss the issues or when we asked for elaborate explanations of their decisions that we learned how their misconceptions arose.

When Hope spoke to the children of Standard 7 she was asked to explain in detail how a condom prevents transmission and how it should be used:

You need a condom because during high speed sex the skin can tear and small lesions might occur through which the virus can be transferred. If you use a condom, these lesions do not happen and if they do, the condom separates the blood. It depends on the speed of the sex. When they have high speed you can get HIV from the skin cells and the blood. So with a condom you cannot damage the skin.
It appeared that Hope had put together various parts of condom information she had been given at educational talks she received from an NGO at her vocational training centre. When we prepared Hope for the session with the children this explanation had not come forward. Although her explanation was logical as lesions can occur and increase the risk of transmission, it ignored the fact that there is a possibility of HIV transmission through undamaged mucous membranes. Christopher had a similar idea about damaged surfaces as the causative factor of viral transmission and this was evident in his explanation of circumcision and the risk of HIV transmission. Christopher’s explanation was not incorrect but like Hope’s explanation it could have given the children the idea that transmission only occurs through damaged surfaces and that with careful, ‘slow’ sex no condom is required.

We learned during our research that boys and girls in the three schools know what HIV, AIDS and other STD’s are, and in general terms, how they are transmitted and how one can prevent this. However, the children were left with questions that we suspect are not addressed in the official sexual education they receive at school. This leads to confusion or to misconceptions.

After Hope’s talk the children raised new questions:

- Many porn movies from Europe show people having sex without a condom. Why?
- People said that there is medicine that is increasing lifetime. How does it increase lifetime?
- Who should be taking responsibility to wear a condom? Girl or boy?
- Condoms are reducing pleasure. Why should we use it?
- Why are we told about condoms for girls, but can you not buy them in the shops?

But also:

- Can you become infertile because of masturbation?
- What do you advise me, can I have sex?

**Taboo and Guardian teachers**

Although the children are supposed to be able to discuss questions about sexual relations and risk with their guardian teachers, this did not seem to happen at the schools where we did our

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61 In anthropology this process of developing new ideas or uses from pre-existing ideas or uses is called *bricolage.*
research. We found that teachers and guardian teachers were strongly opposed to any sexual activity of their pupils and this resulted in the punishment of children who came to these teachers with questions or a request for help. According to the male guardian teacher in Nyahali the guardian teachers have three tasks:

First: They give advice to the pupils and listen to their problems. Second: To observe if the pupils break the rules. Third: To bring the pupil to the discipline committee if he or she has broken the rules.

The guardian teacher referred to rules that are written down on a piece of paper and are hanging on the wall of the teacher’s or headmaster’s office. One of these rules says: ‘it is forbidden to have sexual intercourse with primary school students’. Teachers interpret this rule as any behavior that might lead to sexual activity including courtship. After the guardian teacher’s initial explanation, he was eager to add that:

We would not kick the pupil out of school; he or she would just be whipped and maybe expelled for a period of time. And of course we would inform the parents of the pupil so that they could take appropriate action to discipline their child.

It should be mentioned that although corporal punishment is officially forbidden, it continues to be a common way of disciplining children and is part of normal everyday life at schools and many households in Tanzania. Children themselves approve of whipping as a way to punish bad behavior or mistakes. What they oppose is unfair or excessive corporal punishment or being hit, whipped or beaten in places other than the hands or buttocks. Students do not approach guardian teachers if they have questions, problems or are confused about the sexual information that is given to them in the school lessons because guardian teachers are so strongly against any sexual activity of pupils and punish them if they see any indication of sexual interest.

Me: Would you go to the guardian teacher if you have any questions or problems?

Juma in Nyahali: (laughs and shakes his head) … Hamna! [No!] You wouldn’t know what the results would be [whether he would get punished or whether the parents would be told].

Shilling in Maqu town: No, students definitely don’t go there, because these teachers are too strict. They go to other students, like those who are close friends. But if your friend advises you wrong, you can end up in more trouble.
The guardians and other teachers were also of the opinion that openness about certain sexual issues should be restricted. The teacher responsible for sexual education in Nyahali said:

I am against sex education. The deeper you get into details, the more they want to have sex. They pay more attention in those lessons than at any other lesson. I have to tell them, but I would not give the details. And I separate the boys from the girls.

Many teachers shared this opinion. In the Nyahali school I was asked at the beginning of the research not to teach my informants sexual education and not to mention condoms: “you will encourage children to start having sex”.

Children complained about the teachers’ inhibition to speak more openly about sexual issues and reluctance to give more information. According to the students “Teachers do not explain in deep, only in overview”. Facts about conception and HIV/AIDS are given, but this is ‘one way traffic’ and children were scared to approach teachers with questions or problems, just as they were scared to talk about sexual issues with adults in general. This fear caused considerable problems for my research, as described in the methodological chapter. Girls who were involved in relationships especially did not want to participate in this research or chose to stop participation if they started to feel uncomfortable. According to the girls in Magu town:

Maybe they are scared that you may tell the teachers. But it’s not like that… we, we know you don't have the intentions, you don't have the intentions of telling a teacher. But them, they are thinking in their thoughts, they think, maybe if we tell them [my interpreter and me] they will tell the guardian teacher that we are doing these things.

The study by Mgalla et al. (1998) on the Guardian programme reports similar findings:

“That the views of the guardians are indicative of the conservative social context that prevails in the country. Most of the guardians and other teachers were opposed to any sexual activity on the part of pupils and had no problem with expelling pregnant school girls. […] to most of them, giving advice on condoms was the same as encouraging a girl to be sexually active. […] They (the views and attitudes) might also explain why girls tended not to report certain problems more often, especially pregnancy, which the girls considered to be the single most important problem school girls had. […] Moreover, corporal punishment was often used, which might also have discouraged more extensive utilisation of guardians.” (p. 28)

The authors concluded: “These attitudes limit the potential of guardians to give information and advice on contraception and prevention of STDs and HIV” (p. 28). Our own findings illustrate that the taboo to discuss sexual issues with children and the idea that this might
encourage children to engage in sex seriously affects and limits the information that is taught to children in the three primary schools included in this research and likely elsewhere in Tanzania. Moreover, teachers can disseminate misinformation that the children think is reliable and truthful because of the authority of teachers. There can also be gaps left in the curriculum used in the school lessons that leads children to fill in these gaps with information from other sources or speculate about explanations. This has serious consequences for the children’s sexual behavior, especially in regard to their risk perception and use of contraceptives.

‘Bad’ teachers

Me: In case you could trust a teacher not to punish you and not to tell your parents, would you go to him or her if you had questions or problems?
Shilling: Maybe. It depends on the person. Whether he or she can be respected or not.

Shilling’s term ‘respected’ refers to the kind of behavior a teacher displays. In fact, what Shilling is saying is whether it is known or suspected that this person is having sexual relationships with fellow teachers or pupils. Sexual exploitation of schoolgirls is thought to be a common problem in educational institutions in Tanzania62 and one of the reasons the Guardian programme was developed: “to protect adolescent girls against sexual exploitation” and to make sexual abuse by teachers more difficult (Mgalla et al. 1998: 19). The presence of a guardian teacher should make it easier for girls to report harassment and sexual violence.

That sexual harassment of girls by male teachers is a common problem in schools in Tanzania as we discovered ourselves. All parents and caretakers we interviewed talked about their fear of ‘bad’ teachers. In personal interviews with children we were sometimes told about a teacher at the school who had a sexual relationship with a classmate or friend of the informant. But we never met girls who were involved with teachers themselves or who admitted involvement. When we asked the informants to ask their friend or classmate if she was willing to talk to us about her relationship with the teacher the informants reported that

62 In the study performed by Mgalla et al. 37% of the 40 guardians in 40 schools in Magu and Mwanza districts suspected sexual relationships between male teaching staff and school girls and 19% said they had been informed about or discovered cases of sexual relationships between teachers and girls in their school (1998:24)
these girls were unwilling. Hearing about particular teachers from various independent sources made us believe that the stories of these boys and girls were true even though they were hard to prove. In the three schools where we did research we heard stories about girl students involved with male teachers. This occurred even in the school in Magu town where there was only one male teacher:

Within this school, it doesn't happen a lot, there's only one male teacher. But there are teachers that come from training college and they come here for a trial, to gather experience; those are the bad ones.

[FGD with girls in Magu town]

The girls in Magu town who said this could not tell us about a specific case or a schoolmate to whom this had happened and the validity of this information could be doubted. In other interviews the idea that such a story was gossip is less well founded. A girl in one of the schools told us:

There are bad teachers in this school, I know because my friend told me she was approached by one; the headmaster. But she refused. He is married and has children of the same age as we are, how could she agree? The teacher was upset and punished her and made her jealous. She didn't report it to anyone because she is afraid to tell her parents, because they might not take her serious or they will become angry. There is nothing we can do, the other teachers cannot do anything about this either. In one case a girl told her parents and they went to the headmaster and negotiated with him so that she could go to secondary school.

[Personal interview]

And another girl from the same school told us:

The headmaster and another teacher are bad. A girl told me that a teacher came to seduce her and that she doesn't know what to say, if she should agree or refuse. Then others say that you have to agree or else he will give you a hard time. If you refuse you are in a lot of trouble. You will fail examinations. If you agree, you will graduate even if you behave badly. Teacher X [name] is dating a girl in Standard 7. Standard 7 has a lot of extra classes [after normal school hours], the girl knows she will have to stay until it's just the two of them. Then they go to the office and have sex there.

[Personal interview]

We came to suspect the identity of this girl by listening to one of our tape recordings of a group interview with the girls of this class (see methodological chapter). During this interview girls told us stories about being approached. The girls in the group encouraged each other to tell a story about being approached. What was not audible during class time, but what could

63 In one case I asked if an informant could ask her friend, who was unwilling to speak with us, to write her story down for us with the promise that we would not try to find out who wrote it and would not show it to anyone else. We often did essay writing exercises. But the girl refused any cooperation whatsoever.
be heard later on the tape was one girl in the back whispering to another: “I can’t tell my story, he will beat me up.” This was followed by her friend saying: “Teacher [name] is not going to beat you up, he’s not here, he won’t know”. Then the girl said: “Don’t say his name!”

In Kijiji school in rural Magu, Charlie thought there were teachers who were after schoolgirls.

You can tell if the teacher sends you to a girl, that it is about love and not about something the girl did wrong in class or homework. You can see them taking a girl on the side.

Charlie’s schoolmate, 12-year-old Mayega said that some teachers give the impression that they are interested in a schoolgirl by calling over a favorite student to push their bicycles when they are walking home. But Mayega thought that the girls did not necessarily dislike it:

From what I see, it seems like the girls like it. Girls who live in a small town, they watch a lot of TV, they want to experience, try out. So if a teacher comes and asks, she says yes. Also because they have jobs and might be able to help out.

According to the informants there is not always pressure or force involved in these teacher–schoolgirl relationships. In those cases, the children say that the girl is looking for a profitable sexual relationship and therefore seeking someone with a job. It was said that to some girls, a teacher is not different from a shopkeeper. Informants referred to these girls with: “she has already grown up” (see Chapter Four). In other reports it was made clear to us that teachers do make use of their position to put pressure on girls. They do this by rewarding agreement to have sex with high marks, special attention, less punishment or a guarantee of passing exams while refusal is punished with the opposite. The general opinion of those who discussed the involvement of teachers with schoolgirls was that those teachers were ‘bad’ and should be punished. These boys and girls complained that teachers can get away with such behavior, because “it is hard for a pupil to take action on a teacher”. I asked if they could not tell the guardian teacher or other female teachers. They said that the female teachers already knew but did not do anything about it: “They know, but it’s a secret”. This too, turned out to be true.

When we returned to our research locations a year after the main research period, there was a new guardian teacher assigned in one of the schools. When I introduced myself to this new guardian teacher and explained about our research she was very interested. At one point she spontaneously mentioned that the headmaster of the school was having sex with his pupils. Shocked by this sudden openness I invited her for dinner later that week, away from the
school and the village. During the dinner we spoke more about the sexual relationships of the headmaster:

**Interview guardian teacher**
Last week you mentioned that the headmaster is involved in sexual relationships with some of his pupils…
I am a guardian teacher. Many girls approached me to report that the headmaster was approaching them.

*What did you do?*
Because it is the headmaster, I cannot warn him, I am afraid to warn him. I tell the pupils to talk about this issue at home with the parents. Then the mother could come to school and warn the headmaster. Most teachers are afraid of the headmaster because he can fire you.

*Did any of the parents ever come to school to warn the headmaster?*
The mother of this girl told the girl that she should tell the headmaster to stop or otherwise she would come to school herself. So this is what the girl told the headmaster. But he punished her for refusing and reporting.

*You mentioned the headmaster has two girls…?*
One is in Standard 6 and one is in Standard 7. When the one from Standard 7 passes examinations he has left the other one and then he chooses a new one in Standard 6.

*What kind of girls does the headmaster choose?*
He chooses big girls [mature], who are from a poor family background and are not very smart, who don’t have a lot of confidence [so those who have less power to refuse].

*And there is nothing you can do?*
It’s not only losing your job, you sacrifice your whole life – everything you have depends on that job. If you report this to court they might only warn him and nothing else happens.

*Are you the only one who knows about the sexual relationships the headmaster has with school pupils, or are there other teachers who know?*
All the teachers know! He even approaches female teachers! But he has a wife!

*What do the female teachers do?*
Some of them agree, some refuse, it depends.

*On what?*
He gives you an office; he gives you the best things if you agree. They agree because of what he has to offer. Some are afraid that they get transferred to a far away village. Or that he will send a bad report to the ministry of education about you.

*You said all the teachers know. Do you think that students know who is having a relationship with the headmaster?*
The students know who the headmaster is involved with. Some boys challenge the girl: “why do you take this teacher?!”
They bully her?
No, the girl will be popular in class, everybody wants to be her friend because than they can profit also – get less punishment, more freedom.

When I asked her why she decided to mention the headmaster’s involvement with girls to me, she said: “I am a good Christian. What this man is doing, is wrong. There is nothing I can do about it, but maybe if you write it down, people may become aware of what is happening in schools and then something can be done about it.” She herself suggested that the best solution might be to make sure all headmasters in Tanzania are female so that abuse and harassment of male teachers can be reported to someone who has more power than these men. I asked her permission to pass on her information to the NGO responsible for the Guardian programme her school and she agreed (see Chapter 2). The NGO is currently addressing the issue and contemplating how to lower the threshold that obviously exists for guardian teachers to directly inform the NGO.

Concluding remarks

The taboo in Tanzania that exists among teachers and adults in general, about the discussion of sexual issues with children limits the information and affects the quality of the information that is given to school children. As the examples in this chapter have demonstrated, unanswered questions, confusion or plain misinformation lead to speculations and misconceptions. This has serious consequences for risk perception and contraceptive use of primary school children and their current and future sexual behavior and health. The majority of guardian teachers in the schools where we did research had conservative views about children and sexual activity, which caused the children to refrain from approaching the teachers with questions or problems. Interventions like sexual education programs in primary schools are an important way of reaching large numbers of children. However, conservative views and teaching methods pose serious challenges and limitations on the implementation and effect of such interventions and unless closely monitored, may add to the conception of misconceptions and negative attitudes towards condoms. Furthermore, sexual education programs do not address the gender and power issues that seriously limit children’s ability to apply their knowledge and use condoms.
Although the Guardian programme has proven to be of some success in regard to targeting the sexual abuse and harassment of schoolgirls by teachers (Mgalla et al. 1998), the story of the guardian teacher sheds light on the difficulty and personal risk that is involved in reporting a headmaster or other teacher with authority. Feedback on such issues to the Ministry of Education, the sponsoring NGO, or perhaps an independent ombudsman, without the risk of losing a job or other repercussions is of utmost importance. Unfortunately sexual abuse by teachers will continue to be difficult to prove if children fear to report it, are not taken seriously or if the chance of conviction is small. Teachers have the ability to offer girls they want to have sex with favors, which may cause some schoolgirls to actively seek a relationship with a teacher, or the teacher may offer bribes to their parents. All of these actions complicate reporting. The findings from this research support findings from other research (Mgalla et al. 1998; Plummer et al. 2007) and perceptions of parents and caretakers that a sexual relationship between teachers and schoolgirls is indeed a major problem in schools in northwest Tanzania.
PART 3

AGENCY & VULNERABILITY: THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN SELF AND SOCIETY IN THE FORMATION OF SEXUAL MEANINGS AND BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN
X WHAT SEX MEANS FOR CHILDREN

My friends have girlfriends. They take it as a normal situation. But they are not thinking ahead.
[Shilling, 13, Magu town]

Introduction: The interplay between self and society

The focus of this study is to gain a thorough understanding of children’s sexual behavior in Tanzania. I believe such understanding forms the basis for analyzing children’s vulnerability to HIV and poor sexual and reproductive health in general and for analyzing the limited success of many SRHR and HIV/AIDS intervention efforts. In Part 2 ethnographic data was presented that described the experiences of Tanzanian children and their perceptions of sex, social norms and regulation of childhood sexuality. Children described various social influences, situational aspects and reasoning that inform their decisions regarding sexual activity. To understand children’s sexual behavior we need to appreciate how socializing influences act together with individual goals, feelings and circumstances, shape sexual meaning and lead to decisions that are expressed in behavior. In short, we have to examine the process of decision-making. Decision-making is complex and involves a multitude of elements that influence the process. There is a risk of drawing a static picture in which a rational actor makes cognitive decisions. I believe it is critical to examine how individual psychological processes, both cognitive and emotional, as reported by the children interact with social and situational influences. I want to make an analysis of the interplay between self and society. Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and capital are useful tools for such an analysis. However, I choose a different approach although it bears some similarity to Bourdieu’s concepts. I intend to provide greater opportunity to focus on conflicting influences including bodily experiences and to allow for a more dynamic understanding of risks, benefits and vulnerability. My approach will explain why a person with their own habitus and capital makes different sexual choices in virtually similar situations and contexts or fields, for example depending on mood. I have chosen this approach after contemplating the term ‘temptations’, which was used so often by children to describe the reasons for boys and girls to engage in sexual activity. Temptations imply choice and conflicting interests. Temptations
are attractive alternative choices that compete with intentions. There is a connotation of morality: intentions are often ‘good’, rational and responsible, while temptations are judged as distracting from a higher goal and often related to physical or emotional short term gratification. Giving in to temptations insinuates a lack of self control and is sometimes labeled as sinning. For a person to be tempted, he or she must have a consciousness of good and bad and a degree of freedom to choose between those. If this consciousness and freedom are present, we can say a person has ‘free will’, or agency.

I use the theoretical model of ‘individual temporal orientations’ in the conceptualization of agency for my analysis (Hitlin & Elder 2007; Emirbayer & Mische 1998). This model provides an analysis of behavior by examining how goals, whether socially, biologically or personally defined, inform individual decision-making. This requires considering the temporal horizon of these goals and how external circumstances direct the actor’s attentional focus. Temptations could be seen as an example of causing a shift in an actor’s attentional focus. I apply this model to analyze particular behavior, namely the sexual behavior of the children in this research. But before I start I first give a short overview of how I understand the model.

The theoretical model of individual temporal orientations is based on the assumption that people do not make completely random choices. Rather people are guided by aspects of their personality, ‘the self’, which includes the conscience. Feedback from the social environment and processes of reflection establish a sense of right and wrong, a sense of self-esteem and a conception of the self (Stets & Burke 2000, Longmore 1998). The internalization of gender roles is an example of such a process. Gender roles may be defined as the activities that society determines to be appropriate for individuals based on their biological phenotype (male or female). From birth, biological gender determines whether an individual is raised and socialized as a boy or as a girl and each gender has unique social expectations. Gender roles are internalized by socialization and children learn to identify with a specific gender, i.e. reflect upon themselves as a girl or a boy, and thus to express their gender identity in corresponding ways. This reflection and expression becomes automatic or habitual over time depending on the frequency of recursivity (repetition) of the thought and action patterns (like Bourdieu’s habitus) and are integrated as a person’s sense of self and identity. Identity refers to who one is, to the various meanings attached to oneself by self and others (Stryker 1980). Social norms and expectations such as gender roles and ideas about good and bad can be internalized and influence an individual’s sense of self. Living up to social expectations can
become a significant personal goal and motivation for behavior although this goal is culturally informed. However, as we saw in the discussion at the beginning of this book, social norms, expectations and personal goals can conflict. The roles and expectations adults place on children such as ‘sex is not for children’, ‘the age does not allow’, ‘you are still a student’, can conflict with norms and expectations regarding gender and sexuality and the norms and expectations placed upon children by their peers. Later in this chapter I will analyze how children exercise agency in order to manage these conflicts. Actors exercise agency in order to perform in congruence with their sense of self, although the amount of agentic effort or the level of conscious reflection might differ depending on the situational demands and the frequency of recursivity of the thought and action patterns. Emirbayer and Mische refer to this with the idea of “iterational dimension” of agency (1998:971) and Hitlin and Elder refer to the concept of “identity agency” (2007:179). I find these concepts useful, for they illuminate the role of internalization, conflicts of norms and the importance of parental and gender expectations, peer pressures and self-esteem in regard to the sexual behavior of children.

The model makes an analytical distinction between situational aspects that orient the actor to the here and now and the ‘projective element’ of agency that allows an actor to imagine possible trajectories of action further away in the future. Choices are made in relation to the actor’s hopes, fears and desires for the future (Emirbayer & Mische 1998:). Such choices exert influence on one’s life trajectory and Hitlin and Elder call this “life course agency” (2007:182). For example, we found that many Tanzanian boys and girls made sexual decisions in consideration of larger ‘life’ projects, or at least rationalized their decisions in this regard, for example postponement of sexual activity for reasons of schooling. However, actors also have to deal with the here and now of situations that emerge and pose particular demands. The goal of the actor’s behavior in the context of such novel situations is to successfully manage the present situation and decisions are based on quick assessments. The capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgments in response to emerging demands is referred to by Emirbayer and Mische as the “practical-evaluative dimension” of agency (1998:971) or with the term “pragmatic agency” by Hitlin and Elder (2007:178). Behavior in such situations can be impulsive and unpredictable even to the actor him/herself (Longmore 1998). In this chapter I will consider the role of physical impulses, emotions, feelings and situational demands -often referred to with the term temptations- that might orient an actor towards the present situation and overrule other temporal orientations.
By applying a model of temporal orientations to the ethnographic data I intend to illustrate how sexual meaning systems are formed through social interaction and shape both individual and social patterns of sexuality for children in Tanzania. I will separate the main elements that influence decision-making in the analysis. I will begin with important socializing influences as identified by the children and the particularities of social situations in which children must adjust their behavior and which enable or limit their possibilities for action. Although I take as a starting point the children’s experiences and perceptions, this chapters should be seen as my interpretation, an ‘etic’ account, and a generalized reflection from an ‘outsiders’ point of view. This is in contrast to the ‘emic’ perspective that I presented in the previous chapters. My aim is to show how social norms and expectations not only inform but also conflict and compete with individual goals and feelings and with situational demands and how children manage these. It is within this ‘management’ that I believe the concept of agency becomes most concrete. I will analyze the various social manifestations of children’s agency and relate it to experiences of vulnerability and appreciations of risks and benefits of sex. I will also consider how these manifestations of agency (informed and directed by social structures) shape the characteristics of courtship and sexual relationships. In the chapter that follows I will apply the insights gained through the research and analysis in a reflection on children’s vulnerability to poor sexual and reproductive health and why sexual health interventions are of limited success (Chapter 11). I will formulate some points of attention that might be useful for future research and sexual health promotion.

What is at stake: A good future and being regarded grown up

Throughout childhood and adolescence children are socialized, learn how to attach meaning to situations and actions, and gradually internalize norms, values and expectations of the people the child is interacting with. This process includes the internalization of gender roles, which become part of the child’s identity. Tanzanian children learn norms about appropriate behavior and that sex is a taboo subject. Yet boys and girls view feelings of desire and curiosity about sex as part of their normal development. This attitude reflects a broader societal view of sex and sexuality as something natural. In general, growing up is regarded of central importance to both children and parents. In Tanzania childhood is concerned with the development of mature and responsible behavior. In Tanzania children are also valuable because of their economic contribution to the household and their future role in the survival of
their parents in old age. In many of the domains that encompass children’s social lives, including economic and household responsibilities, maturity and development towards adulthood are encouraged and rewarded with respect, increased self-governance and ultimately independence and autonomy. Thus, when children learn in school that sexuality is related to the development of the body they are keen to experience this ‘physical change’ themselves. Reaching puberty is a clear sign of development towards adulthood. It gives them an excuse to be curious about sex. Boys and girls compare their development with peers and develop an idea about normality. They want to belong, are driven to be ‘normal’ and therefore to show their maturity and compete with peers in this domain of growing up. Successful competition leads to respect, status and self-esteem, while unsuccessful competition can produce feelings of inferiority, weakness and vulnerability (Maslow 1943, Stets & Burke 2000). The peer, parental and caretaker expectation that developing children will show mature behavior contributes to the personal goal of boys and girls to be regarded grown up. Tanzanian children accomplish this status among peers by demonstrating increased independence from parents and by expressing their femininity, masculinity and sexuality (i.e., by showing interest in the opposite sex). Engaging in sexual relationships has the symbolic meaning of growing up, being sophisticated and becoming independent. ‘Independence’ for both genders means making choices without parental or caretaker consent or knowledge and for girls by having an independent source of money. In this way, sexual behavior can be seen as a normal expression of physical, mental and personal development especially during puberty. It serves the sense of self and is a form of identity agency. For the informants of this research, sex appeared to be of ritual importance for the transition from childhood to becoming a man or woman. Yet adults in Tanzania regard this particular domain of maturity as inappropriate for children. Despite the emphasis on mature behavior children have to make sure adults do not see them entering the domain of sexuality.

Another important personal goal of Tanzanian children is ‘escaping poverty’ and achieving ‘a good future’. This is related to the parental expectation of future reliance on children and to the poor circumstances in which many children grow up. The almost universal wishes for (further) education and employment illustrates this goal for both boys and girls. The ultimate hope is to ‘become somebody’, to move out of the village and into the city to live a life in modernity and with financial security. The children are in agreement on how this can be accomplished. The best way is to work hard in school, to pass Standard 7 examinations with good marks and be selected for secondary education. The chances of getting official
employment are best when a secondary school diploma is achieved. Yet only 8% of the primary school pupils continue with secondary education and children are aware of their slim chances. Compared to boys, it is much harder for girls to find a job without school diplomas. Therefore the next best option for girls to become independent and find a ‘good future’ is to be married, preferably to a prosperous man. We found that many boys and girls made sexual decisions in consideration of larger ‘life’ projects, or at least rationalized their decisions in this context. As explained in the introduction of this chapter, an attempt to exert influence to shape one’s life trajectory can be called “life course agency”. School in particular was mentioned as a reason to postpone sexual activity. Boys and girls who were performing well in class and with a realistic chance of entering further education were resolute in their decision not to engage in sex. They reasoned that a relationship would distract them and if they get caught or pregnant they ran the risk of being expelled. Neema and Juma attached a priority to education that was so strong it outweighed encouraging influences and benefits of sexual relationships (see Chapter 5). In general, school seemed to be the only peer accepted excuse to postpone sexual activity. Children who said they wanted to wait with having sex generally argued that they wanted ‘to finish school first’ and in the courtship dialogues we found many girls responding to a boy’s suggestions with: “I am still a student” (see Chapter 6).

The personal goals of being regarded as grown up, escaping poverty and achieving a good future reflect wider societal expectations and a context of poverty in Tanzania. These goals and the belief or strong hope to be able to reach these goals are significant because they direct the actor’s temporal orientations and influence decisions regarding sexual behavior and activity. But these goals often conflict or compete with other goals and shift within social contexts. The most important social contexts that were mentioned by the children in which different meanings of sex were constructed were family context, peer context and partner context. In the next section I will analyze how children’s temporal orientations shifted within these various social interactions.

Family context: Interaction with parents and caretakers

As described in Chapters 3 and 4, parents and caretakers in Tanzania attempt to regulate children’s sexuality by limiting boys’ and girls’ interactions with each other, punish ‘bad’
behavior and by maintaining a taboo on sexual topics. Control particularly focuses on girls. But despite all the restrictive norms, parents and caretakers sometimes turn a blind eye or encourage boys and girls either directly or indirectly to engage in sex. And if parents or caretakers do this, children say it is difficult not to comply.

In the context of extreme poverty, parents or caretakers might encourage or ‘allow’ their daughters to engage in sexual relationships as a strategy for subsistence. Girls engage in sexual relationships because it is expected from them or in order to ‘find money’. The meaning of sex is instrumental and relationships will most likely discontinue after the exchange. One could argue that in such a situation, the girl is responding to an emerging demand and her temporal orientation is focused on the present. Sex can then be seen as a form of pragmatic agency. But girls might also try to engage in longer-term relationships with continuous support and hope for marriage. Strategies include multiple partners to increase benefits and to increase the chance of finding a marriageable partner. In order to attract men, girls develop seduction skills, described by children as ways of dressing, moving and speaking. Some more experienced girls apply beauty products like body creams or lotions to increase their attractiveness. They may also utilize strategies to maintain a good reputation and therefore bargaining power by hiding sexual relationships or lying to partners about previous relationships. According to boys, another strategy that girls may use is to become pregnant in the hope that the partner will take responsibility and marry her.

If boys are encouraged by their parents or caretakers to engage in sex, it most likely is a result of ideas about natural or healthy masculine behavior and a perception that the boy is old enough to start developing his sexual prowess (see Kosmos’ experience in Chapter 4). The meaning of sex then shifts towards building self-esteem and proving manhood. In such cases a boy’s sexual relationships are generally multiple and short-lived.

Even if parents or caretakers do not encourage sexual activity or actively discourage this, their children may still be sexually active. But they will be more secretive about it. The children told us that parental or caretaker indifference was an indirect encouragement because they believed that without parental or caretaker guidance children would naturally become sexually active. In their reasoning they referred both to the logic of nature as to the benefits of sex when there is less risk for punishment. During group discussions the consensus was that poor parents or caretakers in particular were more likely to be indifferent. Poor parents and
caretakers were perceived by the children and teachers as uneducated and would therefore be less likely to consider the consequences of their children’s sexual behavior and more likely to be preoccupied with financial struggles than the upbringing of their children.

Apart from socio-economic circumstances and parental norms and values a significant aspect of the family context for children’s decisions regarding sex was the personal relationship between the child and their parent(s) or caretaker(s). From the dramas that the children performed we learned that bad treatment by parents could lead a child to engage in sexual relationships as a form of defiance. If children perceive parents or teachers ‘not to respect themselves’, children lose respect for them and resist control and show disrespect through recalcitrant behavior. This was the case with parents or teachers who preached respectable behavior for children but displayed indecent behavior themselves, such as alcohol abuse or showing inappropriate sexual behavior like flirting or engaging in affairs with non-marital partners or pupils. In these contexts the sexual activity of children could be considered a form of resistance.

**Peer context: Pressure and competition**

A compelling benefit of giving expression to sexuality is that it makes boys and girls feel mature because of the symbolic meaning of sex. Sex makes boys feel masculine and girls feel feminine. Behaving sexually does not necessarily automatically lead to sexual activity. But the peer norm for Tanzanian boys is to show curiosity about sex, to approach girls and for sexual intercourse to be the goal of such behavior. This peer norm reflects a wider societal norm of male sexual prowess in Tanzania. Boys of all ages clearly state they expect physical pleasure from sex. Satisfaction of desire is therefore formulated as an important reason to engage in sex, even for pre-pubertal boys. Boys frequently encourage each other ‘to try out’ sex and many informants reported being pressured by peers. Sometimes a boy who is sexually experienced arranges for a girl to have sex with his inexperienced friend. In such a situation it is difficult for the inexperienced boy to refuse to have sex with the girl (see Charlie in Chapter 5). Occasionally, pressure and curiosity are so strong that it can lead pre-pubertal children to try to become sexually active, as in the case of Tumaini and Daniel (Introduction of Part 2 and Chapter 5). When a boy’s friends or brothers are sexually active and encourage him to participate in sexual activity, boys find it difficult to refrain from pursuing a sexual
relationship with girls. Behaving in a masculine manner, e.g., chasing girls, bragging about sexual accomplishments or sexual needs and showing persuasive skills with a girl is expected and rewarded with positive feedback and self-esteem. Furthermore, having a girlfriend is a way to gain status with peers because it shows not only sexual skills and accomplishments but also independent behavior (going against the wishes of parents or caretakers) and access to money, which in itself is a great status symbol. The meaning that is attached to sex through social interaction between male peers is one of natural curiosity, pleasure, achievement, pride, masculinity and maturity. The meaning that parents and caretakers attach to sex, namely that sex is the domain of adults and the conflicting norms in regard to sexual-, mature- and gender behavior actually help to shape the meaning of sex between male peers.

Many boys practice a form of identity agency with their sexual activity as it serves them to live up to peer and gender expectations and positively contributes to their self-esteem. If boys decide not to engage in sex they need strategies to deal with peer pressure and the negative effects on their self-esteem. The decision not to engage in sex appears to depend on a strong personal conviction that the risks of such behavior outweigh the benefits, or rather, if the benefits of not engaging in sex outweigh the risks. The principal risk of not engaging in sex is negative feedback from peers, feeling abnormal or insecure and social exclusion. Losing friends might mean losing social position and self-worth. To address this increased social vulnerability, boys who decide not to engage in sex might sever ties with friends who put pressure on them to become sexually active. They look for the support of other peers who share their decision and are able to openly admit to this, as in the case of Shilling and Zazi (Chapter 5). This strategy is illustrated by our finding that some informants pointed out that their class was separated into two groups, those who made a decision to be or become sexually active and those who decided to postpone this activity. It is doubtful whether this separation was clear-cut since most of the boys and girls were unsure of the sexual ‘status’ of their classmates. That children give such information indicates that children may actively strategize in regard to their social lives. Another strategy to deal with the risk of increased social vulnerability is to engage in a one-time sexual encounter to satisfy curiosity and manage peer pressure but then decide to postpone any further sexual activity until after finishing school. Other boys address the risk of increased vulnerability by lying about sexual achievements. Pretending to have had sex may have the same social rewards as actually having sex but without the risks or the expense. Such impression management is also practiced towards parents, caretakers and teachers. It allows children to live up to the specific
expectations of significant others despite the fact that these expectations are contradictory or conflict with other goals. Using impression management children can assume offered social and role identities while creating space to commit to more personal goals and identities\textsuperscript{64}. Children’s skills with impression management pose challenges for researchers and make it hard to assess the reliability of their stories or data from surveys for that matter. It is therefore useful to collect data from the same informants in different settings with different group compositions, personal interviews and child-to-child interviews. And if available, quantitative data.

The norms and expectations for girls are even more conflicting. On the one hand feelings of sexual desire and curiosity are seen as natural and indicative of normal development since growing up is important for girls as well as boys. When children are maturing there is competition and pressure to demonstrate this by giving expression to sexuality. If boys and men show interest in a girl this confirms to the girl that she is attractive and feminine. Girls boast to each other about being approached and how much money or material goods were offered. But the societal norms for women’s sexual behavior are constricting. Girls are supposed to show restraint and should be reticent about their sexual feelings. Expressions of curiosity or desire can be interpreted as ‘bad behavior’ and can damage a girl’s reputation. Overt attention and approaches by boys are therefore seen as an annoyance. Yet, there are also permissive societal norms for women’s sexuality in Tanzania that allow them to use sex as a resource to exploit (Wight et al. 2006). Girls see examples of peers and women in their community who benefit socially and economically by the ‘support’ of a single or multiple sexual partners. Some peers are successful in maintaining a relationship from which they gain continuous support, such as Deusi as described in Chapter 4. Deusi might very well marry her current boyfriend if she cannot continue with secondary education and she would therefore safeguard her future and independence from her family. Girls become jealous when they see peers who have achieved desired goals by means of a boyfriend’s support. Girls encourage each other ‘to find a boy to solve your problems’, referring particularly to the money that can be gained through a relationship. Money is a strong status symbol among girls as it is for boys. It enables girls to have greater control over their lives. With money a girl can get what she wants such as beauty products that might be relevant for her self-esteem, reduced insecurity about access to food or tuition for school. Girls with money are able to take control

\textsuperscript{64} Social identity; role identity and personal identity are the meanings one has as a group member, as a role-holder, or as a person and form the bases of self. See Stets and Burke (2002).
over their own lives and no longer have to depend on the finances or wishes of parents or caretakers. Therefore, girls identified money as a primary short-term goal for sexual relationships. Girls are severely limited in their ability to secure money in Tanzania and so they turn to boys if they are in need. Girls frequently try to obtain money by skinning boys without returning sex. But this involves the risk of conflict and force from the boy. A girl might decide to have sex with a boy she was skinning to prevent force. Sex then becomes a strategy for harm reduction. However, for most girls who engage in sex, sex appears to be a strategy for control in their lives and possibly to safeguard a good future. Within the context of female peers, the meaning of sex is related to self-esteem, sophistication, independence and control. Girls who are involved in sexual relationships risk being expelled from school. They also risk ruining their reputation and the chance for marriage as well as conflict with parents or caretakers. The principal perceived risk of sexual activity for girls is to become pregnant. This perception actually inhibited many girls from engaging in sexual relationships. It is clear that Tanzania girls who engage in sexual activity can achieve multiple goals yet also jeopardize other goals. If a girl decides to engage in sexual relationships she will attempt to cope with the risks by keeping her relationships hidden making it difficult for others, including researchers, to assess her sexual history.

**Partner context: Feelings and expectations**

For boys and girls in Tanzania, the decision to engage in sex involves a complex interplay of personal goals, feelings and social contexts. Parents, caretakers and peers influence this decision in the form of expectations, feedback, norms and pressures. Decisions are made in light of hopes and fears for the future, ideas about the self, and about normality. Situational aspects like conflicts, threat of force, ‘arrangements’ by friends and poverty can further influence this decision. But of course, the decision is not detached from emotional feelings towards a partner. In most cases sexual partners are not randomly selected. This is despite the fact that identity related and pragmatic goals such as self-esteem and money would appear to decrease the importance of the selection process. Girls indicated that the most critical reason to say no to sex was failing to be attracted to the boy who initiated courtship. Boys mentioned the importance of physical appearance and good manners of girls. An intention to engage in or to refrain from sex is often established in advance. The real decision, however, must be made when sexual activity becomes a real possibility. Long term planning can give way to
more immediate concerns. The most common examples of these concerns may be falling in love, sexual arousal and pleasure. Boys, in particular, mentioned that infatuation could make them ‘lose control’ or ‘drive them crazy’, describing a state in which those powerful feelings resulted in some degree of narrowed consciousness. Mathias told his friend Iddy how he forgot to use a condom because of sexual arousal. Some boys mentioned a need to act upon their feelings of wanting to experience pleasure. Emotions, therefore, play a significant role in the temporal orientation of an actor. Within the social context of physical interaction between partners meanings of sex are reconstructed and strongly influenced by bodily experiences. Unfortunately during this research I did not manage to persuade girls to talk about more intimate feelings and experiences in detail. As discussed in the methodological chapter, it was difficult to find girls in the age group under sixteen who dared to admit they are sexually active which I believe reflected a norm of Tanzanian female sexual inhibition. Yet in general girls talk about feelings of love, attraction, desire and expectations of pleasure. It is likely that for girls those feelings, as for boys, play a role in temporally orienting girls to the here and now.

Emotions are influenced by social learning, personal characteristics (mental, cognitive and genetic qualities), personal history, physiological processes and stage of mental and physical development. Puberty is perhaps one of the most glaring examples of strong physical and mental impulses influencing emotions, bodily experiences and behavior. Boys and girls have an idea about how strong feelings can become in a relationship. Imani told us, “[…] You don’t know what kind of temptations will face you when you grow up. Personally I’d like to hang in there [stay a virgin] until marriage, but I can’t promise”. Boys and girls consider the consequences of such strong emotions when they make decisions about sexual activity. Those who have decided to postpone sexual activity try to avoid situations where these feelings might develop. Neema, for example, remarked, “If I would have a boyfriend now, my mind would go out to him and I would be thinking about him too much. Then I could not concentrate on my studies or what the teacher is saying”.

Meanings of sex are reconstructed with a potential partner within the social context of interaction. It is within this context that a fear of getting hurt is experienced as vulnerability. Hurt feelings can result if meanings are not synchronized, expectations differ and if feelings are not reciprocated. Boys and girls employ complex negotiation strategies during courtship to assess each other’s intentions and to negotiate the meaning of sex in terms of feelings and
commitment. They do this because of the significant ‘risk’ to their emotional well-being and self worth. The negotiation process or courtship is further complicated by the general normative expectation that sex should involve affectionate feelings and commitment and that boys and girls should behave according to gender norms. Even if the boy and girl are both interested in a one-time sexual encounter, they are not supposed to show this to each other. Therefore central to the courtship ritual are the boy’s initiative and attempts to convince the girl how much he loves her, that he is willing to ‘invest’ in her and wants to marry her, balanced by the girl’s reticent responses, postponement and false promises. On the other hand, even if the boy and girl have strong emotional feelings and hope for a long-term relationship this should not be acknowledged because it increases vulnerability and reduces negotiation power. Courtship strategies include strategies of self-presentation and testing of each other’s intentions and commitment. Girls assess the intention of boys by testing their willingness to invest with money and patience and hence the ambivalent but fundamental role of money in sexual relationships. Boys’ strategies to assess the meaning of girls’ reticence, postponement and false promises, is to be persistent and put pressure on the girl. All these tactics, including skinning and deception have ambivalent meanings and can indicate instrumental goals but also feelings of love and affection. This ambivalence sometimes results in misinterpretations and false expectations that add to the grey areas of sexual violence (see the example of Nuru in Chapter 6). Both boys and girls assess each other’s intentions by ‘investigating’ the character of the potential partner and his or her sexual history, family background and good manners. However, the Tanzanian social context limits boys’ and girls’ possibilities for assessment. For other youth in other contexts, a ‘dating’ period is normally used for the assessment of compatibility, feelings and intentions and to develop intimacy. Boys and girls in Tanzania however have to rely on information from others, on observations and on the short interactions during courtship negotiations.

The temporal orientation of risk perception

Constructing meanings for sex during courtship includes negotiations about prevention of unwanted consequences like pregnancy and diseases. Abstract risks such as pregnancy and disease are personalized within the context of social interaction between partners. School attending informants of this research generally had a high level of knowledge and reported to us awareness of their risk for HIV infection. Yet risk perceptions change within social
interaction, as do sexual meanings. Emotions can override even a high level of risk awareness and boys and girls might prioritize more immediate concerns. If the meaning that is attached to the courtship includes love and commitment then feelings of trust become important in the consideration of risk and prevention. A girl might be more willing to have unprotected sex if she believes that the boy will support her if she becomes pregnant. Partners may decide not to use a condom if they trust each other not to have or to have had other partners. Strategies for risk management include assessment of the sexual history of the partner and application of the ‘cycle method’ by having sex on days that the chance of conception is low, calculated on basis of a girl’s menstrual cycle.

Appraisal of risk depends on the assessment of a potential partner and strategies for risk reduction as well as ideas about the ability to recover from or resist unwanted outcomes. Boys appraise the risk of pregnancy differently from girls because they believe they will be able to avoid responsibility. Girls who believe that they will be supported in case of pregnancy will be more willing to take this risk than girls who believe they will be ostracized by their family or community. Hypothetically, because I did not investigate this, ideas about and access to antiretroviral therapy and perceptions about the possibility of abortion might also influence risk perception. These options may affect the decision whether or not to engage in safe or unsafe sex.

I argue that risk perceptions should be understood as a temporal orientation and therefore dynamic as they are influenced by social context, personal goals and feelings. An important element influencing the temporal orientation of children in their prioritization of the risks and benefits of a sexual relationship are their experiences and perceptions of vulnerability. The social aspects of risk predominated the children’s narratives. Negative feedback from peers, parents, caretakers and partners had consequences that affected their feelings about the self, social support and relationships and were considered a greater risk than more abstract health risks or even pregnancy. In general the risk of pregnancy is prioritized over the risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted infections. Although children are aware that condoms reduce the risk for pregnancy and STI not many of the informants seem to use them. The children believed that condoms could harm a relationship between partners if using one communicated distrust or a lack of commitment. Being caught in possession of a condom by parents or caretakers could signal bad behavior and damage the child’s relationship with the adults. Most noteworthy is that Tanzanian boys do not personalize the risk for pregnancy as
much as Tanzanian girls do. The children have many misconceptions about condoms that make their use unpopular. Condoms are difficult for children and youth to obtain, especially because they cost money. In order to increase condom use among children and young adolescents in Tanzania it is clear that these barriers towards condom use should be targeted. It is salient that if boys are not interested in using a condom, it is difficult for girls to negotiate their use.

Understanding social and individual patterns of sexual behavior

The analytical model of ‘individual temporal orientations’ is useful to understand how children construct a system of sexual meanings through social interaction and how this influences and makes dynamic their perceptions of benefits and risk. The model demonstrates how social norms and expectations are internalized and guide behavior. It illustrates how these social norms and expectations inform personal goals that drive children to make sexual decisions in accordance with their sense of self and their hopes, fears and desires for the present and future (near or far). However, the original model does not include an analysis of the roles of strong physical impulses, emotions and feelings that can arise suddenly and which are acutely experienced by children during puberty. The children reported experiencing desire, attraction, infatuation as well as feelings of rebellion and strong curiosity all of which influenced their sexual behavior. Perhaps we could understand sudden powerful feelings as demanding an actor to make practical and normative judgments in response to an emerging demand. Children’s impulses or feelings can result from evolving situations and lead to more impulsive, unpredictable and spontaneous behavior (Longmore 1998). This model of decision making is not dominated by cognition and rationality but allows for biomedical and psychological contributions to explain sexual behavior (e.g. the influence of hormones on moods). Or perhaps we could understand action informed by feelings and emotions as identity agency, if such feelings and related thought and action patterns are recursive and lead to more habitual patterning (e.g. “sexual scripts”65) or ideas about the self. In any case, I argue that feelings such as desire, attraction, infatuation as well as curiosity and rebellion can be conceived as temporal orientation. This would mean that the feelings direct the actor’s

attentional focus to the here and now, competing and sometimes conflicting with more distant goals, life projects or ideas about the self.

I prefer to consider the temporal orientation of an actor as dynamic, simultaneously incorporating the presence of multiple goals and demands, and continuously refocusing through changing contexts. The social manifestations of impression management, resistance, negotiation strategies and risk management are examples of social strategies used by the children to manage the demands, conflicting norms and expectations so that they might optimize their personal benefits. Concrete examples of children’s agency are seeking beneficial social relationships such as friendships and partner selection as well as secrecy, lying, silence, exaggerations, deceptions, skinning, seducing, flirting, assessment of a person’s background, character and intentions, and many more. Children experience vulnerability in the moments when they lack agency, or lack a feeling of control over the outcome of a social interaction. Girls feel vulnerable if social and internalized norms do not allow them to be assertive with an older boy or man or when they are approached in isolated areas. Boys feel vulnerable when they are poor and cannot compete with peers or men who are better off. Boys and girls both feel vulnerable when they are perceived to deviate from the norm or cannot live up to expectations. Boys and girls also feel vulnerable when they are confronted with strong emotions towards a potential partner and the chance that these will not be reciprocated.

Considering the interaction of physical, mental and social structures allows us to determine individual differences as well as broad patterns of sexual behavior. To investigate how structures are being reproduced and transformed including how new meanings are created, social rules are bent and how change might occur requires consideration of the flow of continuous interaction between physical, mental and social processes. To explore the change and reproduction of structural aspects of Tanzanian sexual culture, I first analyze broad patterns of sexual behavior of children in northwest Tanzania. I will consider how the social manifestations of agency, informed and directed by social structures, shape the characteristics of courtship and sexual relationships. My intention is not to generalize, but to discuss which structural aspects and agentic actions shape these social patterns of sexual behavior and to draw attention to their role in influencing children’s future vulnerability to HIV infection and poor sexual and reproductive health.
Contradiction, ambiguity and secrecy: Sex as a deal

Whether through modernity, economic hardship, media influences, globalization, sexual taboo, threat of and attention to AIDS or, as parents indicated, ‘mixing of cultural rules’, the norms, messages, and expectations for sexual behavior that children in Tanzania receive are contradictory and conflicting. Children’s main strategy to manage these contradictions is to keep their interactions with the opposite sex hidden (Wight et al. 2006). Because interaction between boys and girls are limited there is not much space to develop friendships or to get to know each other better through ‘dating’. When there is direct interaction outside school, it appears to be automatically charged with an underlying sexual meaning and tension. Perhaps because of the interpretation that parents, caretakers and teachers give to interaction between boys and girls, children ‘learn’ that such interactions cannot be ‘neutral’ and learn to interpret it as something sexual. Because courtship has to take place in secret, boys approach girls when they are alone and dialogue is kept short and to the point. Courtship dialogues seem to have a ritualistic and ‘deal-like’ character and are generally variations on the same script. The boy communicates his interest in the girl and asks her for an answer. If the girl ‘agrees’, negotiations follow regarding the transaction or promises of transaction and a time and place are set when the boy and girl will meet for sex. This setting of time and place is important because of the limited options for privacy for boys and girls. Therefore sex takes place in ‘hidden places’ such as unfinished buildings, the bushes or at home when the house is empty. As argued earlier, I suspect the importance of agreeing on a place and time for sex is related to girls’ assumed knowledge of their chances for conception. Contrary to Fuglesang’s conclusion that “… adolescent sexuality is often irregular and spontaneous and seldom planned” (1997:1252), I believe that most boys’ and girls’ have highly planned sexual encounters. Exceptions are perhaps younger boys and girls who are still allowed to play with each other. We heard stories how play and imitation could ‘accidentally’ or spontaneously lead to sexual games and activities. But for most boys and girls the shape and structure of courtship cause them to consciously make a decision to engage in sexual activity. This actually offers potential entry points for intervention efforts, which will be discussed later.

The context of secrecy can facilitate coercion and force. Because courtship takes place in secret and girls are approached in places where they are alone, boys are less likely to be punished if they use pressure. As the example of Nuru showed, girls find it hard to report such

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66 See also Wight et al. 2006; Dilger 2003; Kayaa et al. 1998; Nyanzi et al 2001
experiences or to ask for help. Wight et al. argue that lack of social feedback due to secrecy prevents the adult social environment to judge or reinforce relationships, which might create more opportunities for children to engage in short and multiple relationships unsanctioned (2006). From the children who participated in this research we learned that long-term sexual relationships between boys and girls of primary school age are uncommon. Relationships usually end after the boy and girl have had sex. Boys explained that they were primarily interested in what they called ‘temporary’ girlfriends because of the boy’s dependency on their own parents or caretakers. Boys’ access to money is irregular and it is therefore hard for boys to maintain a relationship. Boys indicated that chances are high that a girl would move on if a boy is broke or has trouble supporting her or if she is offered a better deal. Furthermore, boys saw marriage as something for the distant future and therefore not the purpose of their courtships or sexual relationships while young. They justified their deceptive words and outright lies during courtship by rationalizing that girls were expected to know this. The fact that the children’s relationships lack non-sexual aspects due to structural constraints contributes to the short duration of the sexual relationships between boys and girls. However, the children maintained the option that a temporary relationship could develop into a permanent one. Despite this claim, the boy’s general perception was that temporary girlfriends were for sex, while a permanent girlfriend was invested in and sex was not the main goal. Partners were selected on this dual basis. Temporary girlfriends were chosen based on physical attraction. Permanent partners were chosen based on a history of good manners and character (for more selection nuances see Chapter 7). Although girls complained about the boys’ deception and lack of commitment, the children acknowledged that boys have difficulty maintaining a relationship due to their lack of money and this gives girls an incentive to move on.

The exchange element and limited space to develop relationships and non-sexual intimacy are consequences of larger socio-economic structures. These structures shape the characteristics of courtship and relationships as well as ambiguous meanings for sex. Children described a reality of relationships that were characterized by short duration, deceit, skimming, transaction and sometimes multiple partners. These relationships are discrepant from the children’s described ideal of long-term relationships that would be based on commitment, trust, faithfulness and love. Children appeared to negotiate these ambiguities by constructing both temporary and permanent sexual relationships. Since every new sexual encounter needs to be
negotiated, temporal relationships can follow each other quickly, sometimes with the same partner(s), or exist simultaneously with a permanent relationship.

Thus, social structures like poverty, conflicting norms and expectations, gender inequality and sexual taboo guide the agentic choices children make regarding sex. Despite the individual differences in sexual decision making and the dynamics of sexual meanings and perceptions of risks and benefits, the social manifestations of children’s agency - secrecy, impression management, negotiation strategies and risk management- shape social patterns of courtship and sexual relationships. Sexual taboo, poverty and gender norms support the continuation of gender inequality and frame how courtship and relationships develop and intimacy and sex are experienced, leaving little room for social change. Torren’s argument that data from children provide anthropologists with an analytical tool to study the micro-history of the constitution of ideas; a basis for explaining adult decision-making and behavior is relevant in this context (1999). Yet the sexual meaning system of children is no passive copy of that of adults. Secrecy creates space for children, away from the control of adults, to develop their own rules for interaction and communication. Within this space cultural norms are sometimes reinvented, but also bent and restructured, incorporating ‘new’ realities of changing economics, gender roles, life course possibilities and perhaps modern images of love and sex. But these processes of change take time and will not immediately impact on children’s sexual decision making and behavior. Unless structural barriers like poverty, sexual taboo and gender norms are addressed, children and young people’s ability to change their sexual behavior will be limited, even if they have sufficient access to information and condoms – explaining the lack of effectiveness of prevention efforts in changing young people’s sexual behavior. In the next chapter I will further investigate key reasons why I think interventions that aim to promote the sexual health of children and youth in northwest Tanzania are of limited success.
Childhood sex: Vulnerability to poor sexual health and HIV

From the view of public health, the early onset of sexual activity, the short duration of relationships (and associated likeliness of multiple partners) and low use of condoms that characterize the sexual behavior of primary school children in Tanzania is concerning. Especially regarding their future vulnerability to STI and HIV infection. We found that the sexual debut of boys and girls generally occurs with a partner of approximately the same age. Because HIV and STI rates are low among children up to the age of 15 in Tanzania, the most pressing public health concern is unsafe abortion following unwanted pregnancies which result in high maternal mortality rates. Since sex costs boys money and access to money is limited for most boys, I suspect sexual activity for most boys and girls is infrequent. Lack of funds also limits schoolboys’ access to older, more experienced girls or women. However, it is imaginable that as girls grow older, have sexual experiences and hopes for marriage they would establish sexual relationships with more interesting partners. Such partners might be young men who have finished school, are earning some money and are potentially marriageable. This is the category of men that Nnko and Pool are referring to in their article about sexual discourse among primary school pupils in Mwanza: not the stereotypical middle-aged sugar daddy, but out-of-school youth in the 18-25 age group (1995).

In the previous chapters the relative ‘protective’ value of school was described. Children’s decisions to wait with sex are often related to ideas and perceptions of schooling. Informants of this research used school as the most frequently used reason or excuse to say no to sex. Perhaps the steep rise in HIV prevalence in girls between 15 and 20 (Obasi et al. 2001) can be explained by girls’ increasing interest in young men with jobs, an increasing frequency of sexual intercourse and multiple partners, but also because the protective value of school falls away when girls finish Standard 7 around age 16. Unfortunately the group of informants who did not go to school was too small to make a good comparison or strengthen the argument of the relative protective value of schooling. However, my impression was that schooling also positively contributed to girls’ assertiveness and ability to openly reject boys and men when
approached. One must bear in mind that this assertiveness could also be related to the girls’ home location, family background or personal characteristics. Yet we felt that girls, who were not going to school, were younger or who were from rural areas were more submissive and passive. These girls might have been prone to stay silent when approached by an older boy or men or to avoid negation. Thereby weakening their negotiation power and making them more vulnerable to experience continuous pressure or situations of harassment and force.

As the children indicated, poverty appears to directly increase a girl’s vulnerability to ‘give in to temptations’ in particular to the monetary incentive that comes with sexual activity. More generally, gender inequality and the power differences between adult man and girls decrease girls’ negotiation power and increase their vulnerability to poor sexual and reproductive health (SRH) as well as unwanted sex. The power differentials and the sexual taboo in Tanzania make it difficult for girls to ask for help or report harassment as illustrated by the stories about abuse by teachers. The indication that sexual relationships between teachers and schoolgirls are common signals the extent of power differences. The ‘commonness’ of this situation and remarks such as from the guardian teacher “He chooses big girls, who are from a poor family background and are not very smart, who don’t have a lot of confidence” indicate that pedophilia is an insufficient explanation for this phenomenon. This remark highlights the increased vulnerability to harassment of girls who are poor and less assertive. I expect we might learn more about perceptions of childhood and sex and about gender and power inequalities if we had been able to hear how teachers and ‘older men from the village’ who approach girls justify their behavior.

Despite a reasonable knowledge of HIV/AIDS, individual risk reduction strategies and societal attempts to regulate and control children’s sexuality, children of primary school age in northwest Tanzania are at considerable risk to become infected with HIV or other STIs, to have unwanted pregnancies and to experience unwanted sex. This is true for girls more so than for boys. In general, the unsafe temporary relationships that characterize children’s sexual behavior result from social-economic structures that cause children to value sex as important and beneficial and the mixed messages and social expectations that lead to ambiguity and secrecy. Sexual taboo resulting in incorrect and incomplete information, temporal orientations of risk perceptions, ideas about responsibility and gender inequality are a few of the reasons why condoms are hardly used by children in Tanzania. Boys are placed at risk by prevailing Tanzanian norms for masculinity. Contrary to girls there is an expectation
that boys will become knowledgeable and experienced about sex. The children indicated that their relationships with their parents or caretakers as well as their economic and educational backgrounds were prominent influences on the onset of their sexual activity. Poverty interacts with many of these structures and increases the children’s vulnerability to HIV by many different routes.

**Sexual health interventions: Understanding meanings and realities**

There is increasing evidence that sexual health interventions that aim to prevent poor sexual and reproductive health, including HIV, in young people through sexuality education, increased access to SRH services or life skills building, are of limited success. Large scale randomized controlled trials in Africa, like the MEMA Kwa Vijana trial among primary school students in Mwanza region, and other evaluated interventions showed an increase in knowledge, but very little impact on biological outcomes such as HIV, pregnancy and STD rates (MKV policy brief 2008, Yankah and Aggleton 2008). Explanations that are given include that there is insufficient addressing of wider societal norms, that life skills programs are too simplistic to offer any valuable solution to the complex needs of African young people and that a comprehensive approach to HIV prevention is needed, including a variety of measures (Yankah and Aggleton 2008). These explanations are supported by the outcomes of this research. However, I want to try to give more concrete explanations for the lack of behavior change of primary school children in northwest Tanzania and reflect on points that I believe are critical for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SRHR interventions.

*a) Many interventions insufficiently fit with children’s realities and do not take into consideration what is at stake for children.*

I argue that one of the reasons why interventions that aim to promote the sexual health of youth are of limited success is that they focus exclusively on the dangers of sex and do not take into account the children’s perceived and experienced benefits of sex, how vulnerability is experienced and how risks are managed and become personalized. The narratives of Tanzanian children not only demonstrate that children benefit from sexual relationships, but

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67 [www.memakwavijana.org](http://www.memakwavijana.org)
also what they have to lose if they do not engage in sex. Social aspects of risk predominated the children’s narratives. What is at stake for them is negative feedback from peers, parents, caretakers and partners with consequences that impact their feelings about the self, social support and relationships. The children considered these a greater risk than the more abstract health risks such as HIV. This perception is rarely considered by intervention efforts, especially those that promote abstinence and faithfulness. Unless there is a strong religious conviction, which I found in only a few boys and girls, abstinence and faithfulness are not relevant options for the majority of the boys and girls. Furthermore, interventions that exclusively focus on the dangers of sex and try to increase knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention do not take into account the fact that HIV is not perceived by the children as a significant risk because of their individual risk management strategies. If we want boys and girls to use condoms, we need to realize that pregnancy is perceived as a much higher risk of sexual activity than HIV and the emphasis should be placed there. I think it is crucial to change boys’ existing ideas about responsibility for pregnancy and provide children with clear information about the ‘cycle method’ and condoms by targeting misconceptions. The script-like courtship dialogue and the setting of place and time for sexual activity actually provide entry points to introduce condom negotiations that fit with children’s realities. It should be considered that in Tanzania girls are not supposed to provide the condom. Yet the debate between boys and girls in Nyahali showed that boys might be willing to consider agreeing upon the use of condoms and of female controlled prevention methods like the female condom and possibly microbicide gels. Because sexual encounters are highly planned, gels could be an acceptable and relevant option. The acceptability of using these preventive methods among children and young adolescents should be explored. Negotiating prevention methods need to be practiced, perhaps through debate and role-play, so that condom use will become part of the sexual scripts of children and youth. Group debates seem to offer an acceptable and encouraging setting for girls to voice their concerns and opinions to boys and for boys and girls to seek solutions together. This seems to be a good starting point for empowerment trainings in which negotiation skills can be build. Asking boys and girls to switch gender perspectives during such debates could teach them to consider wishes and boundaries of future sexual partners. Through role-play practice, children could learn to accept that girls can initiate talks about prevention and bring condoms. It is important to include a focus on contraceptive negotiation at an early stage of developing sexual scripts rather than trying to change or insert it in already existing scripts. In general sexual health interventions should target children in Tanzania at least from the age of 10 and onwards. Young children
are confronted with situations in which they have to make sexual decisions. There is a need to teach them how to deal with these situations. At the same time interventions should make condoms available and affordable for children and youth and continue to increase knowledge on sexual and reproductive health.

If we want to encourage children and youth to communicate about safer sex options, we need to include a focus on the positive sides of sex. Including space to talk about desire and pleasure, which are highly valued by the children involved in this research, and empower them to make positive decisions. If boys and girls learn to communicate about their sexual wishes and boundaries this can enhance mutual respect, strengthen relationships and decrease experiences of unwanted sex. A positive approach in sexuality education could include efforts to change collective meanings of for instance condom use. If boys learn that being a good lover means to ensure a girl is relaxed and not worrying about negative consequences like pregnancy and therefore better able to enjoy the sex, they might be more willing to use condoms. An approach to sexual education that includes a focus on non-sexual aspects of relationships and intimacy might contribute to changing gender inequality and make children aware of their rights and responsibilities as well as those of others.

b) Insufficient training and monitoring of people responsible for ‘educating’ children and youth

Intervention efforts should carefully design, monitor, evaluate and follow up on the training of teachers, volunteers, health educators, peer educators etc. The teachers and educators we encountered during this research were not fully supportive of the contents of the programs they were part of, despite being trained by reputable NGO’s. Many of them felt their task was to prevent children from having sex, not to teach them how to have safe sex. This meant they offered the children incomplete information and an emphasis on the dangers and reproductive aspects of sex. The incomplete information led to misconceptions and reinforced contradictory messages that children already receive. Ideas and perceptions about sex and children and social norms regarding respectful inter-gender and inter-generational interactions are deeply rooted in Tanzania. It is unfair and unfeasible to expect people to ‘accept’ children’s sexuality over night and to provide ‘correct and positive’ information on sex in an interactive, open and honest way after only a few days or weeks of training. I therefore think attempts to improve teacher, parental or caretaker communications about sex might be problematic, consuming and inefficient in Tanzania. This does not mean teachers, parents and
caretakers should not be involved in interventions. On the contrary, their support for early and comprehensive sexuality education is essential. I believe that the effort should go into diminishing adults’ principal reason for resistance, the fear that information about sex and access to condoms encourages their children to engage in sex. A way to decrease fear is to ensure parents receive regular feedback about the monitoring and evaluation of SRHR projects and can provide input on project adaptations that is taken seriously by the implementers. Many of the parents and caretakers interviewed were aware and concerned about their children’s sexual lives. They recognized the high prevalence of teenage pregnancies and frequent sexual abuse of children by teachers. They acknowledged that not talking about sex led to secrecy rather than to abstinence and that their children hid their sexual relationships. These parents and caretakers actually wished for their children to receive sexual education but by someone other than themselves. Providing such programs in schools appears to be the most efficient and sustainable option. But the educational system in Tanzania is overburdened and teachers are accustomed to a one-way didactic teaching approach. Their own norms and perceptions do not fit with contents of the sexuality education they have to teach. Unless the quality and intensity of teacher trainings improve it would be more appropriate to have an independent professional ‘guardian’ teacher selected on his/her ability to communicate about sex who visits schools or groups of youth and who is independent from the schools. It would be easier for such an outsider to establish trust and confidentiality with the children and teaching staff and make it less challenging to report on sexual abuse by teachers. There is a compelling need for structural intervention of sexual harassment and abuse by teachers in Tanzanian schools.

For interventions to have a chance to address structural and individual determinants of sexual behavior in children and young people they first have to reach this target group. This means that the messages and information that are given to this group should be complete, fit with the perceptions and experiences of children and youth and is communicated by persons who are accepted by the target group and listened to. Children in our research said they preferred to get information from older brother/sister figures rather than from peer educators or teachers. Teachers were not trusted and sometimes not respected. The problem with peer educators is that they were frequently considered arrogant, judgmental or as catering only to pupils who did not want to get involved in sex. Like teachers, peer educators’ ways of communicating the

68 See Plumber et al. (2007) for a discussion on the suitability of Tanzanian schools as a setting for adolescent sexual health promotion and the requirements schools need to fulfill to become adequate settings.
messages and information were found pedantic. We heard complaints that peer educators often did not have the answer to questions that were raised by boys and girls and that peer educators could not look for answers because they shared the same limitations to sexual information as the other children. Just as some adult educators, many peer educators seemed to fear losing face if they admitted that they lacked knowledge and therefore provided incorrect information instead. I found that the young women and men in their 20’s that I worked with during this research, like my interpreters and persons like Hope, had the ability to relate to and talk with children about sex on fairly equal terms and in an open and honest way. Children seemed to be better able to identify with these persons and interested to hear their personal experiences, opinions and advice. Trust and confidence are quicker established if information is personalized. Boys in this research were actively inquiring the advice of my interpreter Godfrey, who could be considered a role model to the boys, about how they should treat a girlfriend. Godfrey’s personal stories about respect and condom use seemed to be listened to intently.

The potential of child participation in interventions

For SRHR interventions to be able to reach children and youth and fit with their realities there is a role for child and youth participation on different levels and in different stages of such interventions. The first step is to base such interventions on in-depth research of determinants of sexual behavior and meanings of sex and relationships whereby children are actively involved both as informants as well as advisors and co-researchers. Data provided and collected in cooperation with children will provide necessary insights into children’s preferred ways of communicating and will lead to a better representation of children’s experiences, needs and interests. Insight into how children understand, define and label key concepts should inform quantitative research. Furthermore, children can be consulted during the design of projects, participate in the implementation of interventions, assist in the production of materials and instruments and be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of projects. Children can advise us how to best reach other children and what methods are most favorable for optimal expression for children. In the context of northwest Tanzania it is important for children not to expose themselves as being sexually interested or active. However, using role-
play, songs\textsuperscript{69} and debates children have group protection and can express their sexual concerns, needs and questions. Children’s advice on methods is important in the design of assertiveness or communication trainings that I have mentioned above. Their advice can ensure that condom promotion and negotiation skills training can be fitted within their courtship structures. Children can actively collaborate in the design, production and evaluation of intervention materials and in awareness raising or educational activities. Such materials could for instance be games or films. These materials would help facilitate discussions among children particularly about sensitive or difficult topics. Materials could be shown to parents and caretakers to inform them of proposed actions. In this manner, the researchers could determine if there is adult resistance and if so, why. There is a possibility to have a dialogue with parents and caretakers in an attempt to diminish their resistance towards SRHR promotion, if parent and caretakers see there is a demand coming from the children themselves. The video camera is a useful tool for ‘child friendly reporting’ as a device to monitor and evaluate projects. The camera also provides the researcher with the ability to include illiterate children in the data collection. If children are asked to do the filming and interviewing there is a potential advantage of more honest opinions. Furthermore, meaningful participation by children in research has empowering qualities (Laws & Mann 2004). Children develop useful skills, are educated in the process, improve self-confidence and help to create an environment where more children can exert their rights. Empowerment through meaningful participation can induce ideas of citizenship, lead to active citizenship and contribute to processes of social change and transformation (IAWGCP 2008).

But child participation in research and interventions is not without challenges. One of the main challenges of child participation in both research and interventions is to convince gatekeepers, communities, intervention staff and policy makers of the usefulness and validity of children’s opinions, experiences and needs and their participatory and sexual rights (see Chapter 2). Other challenges in regard to child participation are related to methodology, demands of donors (time, efficiency and resources), training of child participants (e.g. to equip them with research skills) and the necessity to adjust work methods and procedures in order to give children and youth the power to truly influence decisions. But if active

\textsuperscript{69} See, for example, the R.A.P.-song project of Youth Incentives, international programme on youth and sexuality of the Rutgers Nisso Groep. R.A.P. stands for Rights, Acceptance and Participation, Youth Incentives principle approach in its’ SRHR interventions. \url{http://www.youthincentives.org}
participation of children in research and interventions can be achieved, children can become important agents for change (Van Reeuwijk 2008).
CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to understand Tanzanian children’s sexual behavior, to assess their vulnerability to poor sexual health and to reflect on how this understanding might help to improve the success of sexual health interventions.

The central question of this study was why do children of primary school age (10-16 years) in the Mwanza and Magu districts in northwest Tanzania engage in sex and what do sex and sexual relationships mean to them? The narratives presented in this book indicate that children are confronted with situations in which they have to make sexual decisions beginning at a young age, often before the onset of puberty. The data produced and collected in cooperation with children show how meanings of sex are produced within these situations and how a wide range of socializing influences, personal goals and feelings, future projects and situational aspects influence decisions and experiences regarding sex. I theorize that these influences direct the actor’s ‘attentional focus’ and that children’s ‘temporal orientations’ are highly dynamic, incorporating the presence of multiple goals and demands and continuously refocusing in ever changing contexts. Using the ‘temporal orientations’ model for analyzing the empirical data provides a focus on the interplay of society and self, allowing for the analysis of individual patterns of sexual behavior and to explain differences in behavior between individuals who are under similar social influences. It also enables an analysis of structural elements and agentic reaction that shape broader patterns of sexual behavior. The model leaves room to explore sexual behavior that does not conform to the norm, investigate how new meanings are created and to determine how social structures are being reproduced and transformed.

The most important social contexts that are mentioned by children in which different meanings of sex are constructed are the family-, peer- and partner contexts. Children experience different situational demands, norms and expectations regarding their sexual behavior within these contexts. Throughout their narratives children show how they make sense of these demands and expectations, renegotiate meanings and make reflective decisions about sex in relation to what is at stake for them in an effort to construct a life of their own. Although some children experience unwanted forms of sex (e.g. in relation to power abuse by
schoolteachers) or engage in sex because of an immediate need caused by poverty, the majority of the children who say they engage in sex or want to engage in sex, say they do so because they feel it benefits them socially and personally. Sex is important for children because of their ideas and feelings about the self. These ideas and feelings include the wish to be (regarded) grown up, making decisions independent from parents or caretakers, feeling masculine or feminine or a wish or need to be accepted by others. Living up to expectations of specific sexual behavior generated in a particular social context can lead to self-esteem, peer status and the strengthening of social relationships. Not living up to those expectations can lead to the opposite and produce feelings of vulnerability. Boys and girls sometimes use sex as a form of resistance against parental or caretaker control or behavior. It provides girls with a means to take control of their own lives and become more independent from their parents or caretakers. But sex is also related to experienced physical impulses and powerful emotions and feelings that can emerge within specific social situations. The children experienced feelings of desire, attraction, infatuation, the temptation of money as well as feelings of rebellion or strong curiosity and a wish to test their bodies all of which influenced their sexual behavior. Such ‘temptations’, as they called it, competed with their intention not to engage in sex due to future goals such as the wish to escape poverty, to secure a good future and to be able to support parents in old age. The children believed that to achieve these future goals it was critical to finish their education and to obtain official employment. Sex and relationships had specific meaning in relation to these future goals. The strength of the intention to postpone sex until after finishing school was related to the hope or belief that the child held about their ability to pass Standard Seven and enter secondary education. If this hope or belief was high, the children said they made a conscious effort to avoid situations in which sexual feelings might emerge.

Other inhibitions to engage in sex were related to the fear of pregnancy or bringing shame upon the family. The strength of these inhibitions was associated with the children’s perceived benefits of engaging in sex or refraining from sex and to their beliefs about their ability to manage risks or to recover from negative consequences. I theorize that risk perception, just as meanings of sex, change with the shifting of an actor’s ‘temporal orientation’ and that abstract risks like pregnancy and diseases are personalized within the context of interaction between partners or potential partners. Emotions and feelings have a significant role in sexual activity and can ‘overrule’ concerns about risk. Furthermore, children actively assess the sexual history of their potential partner in order to reduce their
risk for STI. A critical element influencing the temporal orientation of children in their prioritization of risks and benefits of a sexual relationship are their experiences with and perceptions of vulnerability. Predominant in the children’s narratives were the social aspects of risk. Negative feedback from peers, parents, caretakers and partners and subsequent consequences on their feelings about the self, social support and relationships were considered a greater risk than more abstract health risks, or even pregnancy. Although children are aware that condoms reduce the risk for pregnancy and STI, their use is low. Condoms are difficult for Tanzanian children to obtain, they are negatively perceived and there are many misconceptions that make them unpopular. Most importantly, boys do not personalize the risk for pregnancy because they place responsibility of pregnancy entirely on girls. Although girls have a more positive attitude towards condoms, boys’ lack of incentives to use condoms makes it difficult for girls to negotiate usage. Gender norms and lack of money prevent girls from purchasing or providing a condom themselves.

The analytical model of ‘individual temporal orientations’ is useful to understand how social norms and expectations are internalized, guide behavior and inform personal goals that drive children to make sexual decisions in accordance with their sense of self and their hopes, fears and desires for the present and future. The conflicting sexual norms and expectations set by parents, caretakers, peers, partners and potential partners not only inform but also compete with individual goals and situational demands. Children use social strategies including impression management, resistance, negotiation strategies and risk management to manage these conflicts and to optimize their personal benefits. Concrete examples of children’s agency are secrecy, lying, silence, exaggerations, deceptions, skinning, seducing, flirting, and assessment of the potential partner. In addition, children demonstrate agency by seeking beneficial social relationships, such as friendships, and in partner selection. Children are skilled in adapting their self-presentation to the demands of the specific context, keeping their exact sexual experiences uncertain. This poses a challenge for research that investigates children’s sexual behavior and a reason to be cautious when relying on only one method or setting for data collection. Increasing triangulation of data by using various methods and settings and comparing data collected by adults with data collected by children allows for mapping and explaining contradictions, which increases reliability.

Social structures, such as sexual norms and expectations, and agentic reactions including impression management and secrecy help to shape the social patterns of sexual behavior
among primary school aged children in northwest Tanzania. Restrictive norms and adult control and regulation do not allow adequate space for boys and girls to interact outside the school or family context. This limits the children’s options to develop intimacy through ‘dating’. The idea that love is ‘like an accident’ or ‘a bonus’ indicates that children attribute experiences of love to fate or luck and is not seen as something one can or should pursue or aim for in a sexual relationship. This belief likely contributes to limiting development of non-sexual intimacy in children’s sexual relationships.

Children have to keep their sexual interactions short and hidden. The children have to rely on information from others, observations and short interactions during courtship to assess the compatibility and intentions of a potential partner. Boys generally initiate courtship, which is characterized by a short script-like dialogue followed by an offer of money, gifts, or promises of support. Thereafter the offer is followed by a question to the girl to determine if she ‘agrees’ and then a time and place for sex is arranged. Boys use money and gifts to convince girls of their love and commitment and as an incentive to have sex. Boys and girls both employ complex negotiation strategies to assess each other’s intentions, including strategies of self-presentation, deception and ‘skinning’ (accepting money but not giving anything in return). Money plays an ambivalent but fundamental role in the negotiation of sexual relationships. If a certain amount of money is accepted, there is a shared expectation among Tanzanian children that the girl has to reciprocate with sex otherwise the boy is entitled to put pressure on her which can range from persistence and threats to physical force.

Children describe relationships that are characterized by a short duration, deceit, skinning, transaction and sometimes multiple partners. This is discrepant from the children’s described ideal of long-term relationships based on commitment, trust, faithfulness and, if lucky, love. Children come to terms with this ambiguity by the construction of temporary and permanent sexual relationships. Because every new sexual encounter needs to be negotiated, temporal relationships can follow each other quickly, sometimes with the same partner or partners or exist simultaneously with a permanent relationship.

Conflicting norms, expectations and changing realities necessitate that children construct meanings of sex that are relevant to them and that fit with their own experiences, needs and realities. These meanings and related sexual behavior are not a passive copy of adult sexual culture. The meanings that children attach to sex and relationships shift along with their own
development and changing circumstances. However, sexual taboo, poverty and gender norms in the context of children in northwest Tanzania support the continuation of gender inequality and frame how courtship and relationships develop and intimacy and sex are experienced, leaving little room for social change. Unless these structural factors that condition children and youth’s sexual choices are addressed, children and young people’s ability to change their sexual behavior will be limited, even if they have sufficient access to information and condoms.

Tanzanian children of primary school age are at considerable risk for unwanted pregnancies and exposure to sexually transmitted infections including HIV due to the early onset of sexual activity, the short duration and multiplicity of relationships and low use of condoms that characterizes their sexual behavior. Girls’ vulnerability for unwanted sex and harassment, which are difficult for girls to report, are increased in a context of poverty, secrecy and expectations of reciprocity. It is hypothesized that school attendance provides children with relative protection from damage to their sexual health (although it increases the risk of abuse by teachers) as it appears to be a reason for many children to postpone sexual activity. Once primary school is finished and/ or it is known that secondary education cannot be obtained this protection disappears and sex becomes the next best strategy for girls to achieve a ‘good future’, and for boys to increase their self-esteem.

Children should be included as a target group in sexual health interventions because they face situations in which they have to make sexual decisions and because they form a considerable risk group for poor sexual and reproductive health. Furthermore considerable gains could be made in the promotion of sexual health of youth if children were reached before the onset of sexual activity when sexual meanings and practices are still being developed, rather than at a later stage when these are more fixed. The results of this research provide insight into why prevention programs and health interventions in Tanzania are of limited success. Many interventions are insufficiently adjusted to children’s realities and do not take into consideration what is at stake for them. Interventions focus almost exclusively on the dangers of sex and do not take into account the experienced benefits and risks of sexual relationships, adding to the range of conflicting messages. Furthermore, adults responsible for the sexual education of children and youth are often inadequately trained and do not sufficiently support the contents of the program. This is due to local ideas about respectful adult-child interaction and beliefs that introducing topics related to sexuality can create adverse effects. The
provision of incomplete or incorrect information to children contributes to the production or reinforcement of misconceptions. If sexual and reproductive health interventions want to have a chance to address determinants of sexual behavior in children, they have to ensure they reach the children with their information and messages. This means that the messages and information should be complete, fit with the perceptions and experiences of children and is communicated by persons who are accepted and listen to by the target group. Lastly, interventions do not sufficiently address structural barriers that condition children’s sexual choices, such as poverty, gender inequality, limited prospects for further education or official employment, secrecy and sexual taboo.

I suggest that a participatory rights-based approach in interventions, based on research that actively involves children, could be a first step to increase the quality and success of sexual health promotion projects. I argue that such interventions should include a positive approach towards sexuality and relationships. Such an approach could address structural barriers on a micro-level, promoting mutual respect for rights and responsibilities and communication about wishes and boundaries among children in Tanzania. If active participation of children in research and interventions can be achieved, children can become important agents for change.
APPENDIX 1 LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

Overview of names and ages of key informants, categorized by location

Nyahali primary school
Tumaini – 15
Yussuf - 14
Kosmos – 16
Juma – 16
Neema – 14
Nuru – 15
Shani – 15
Deusi – 17
Salim – 15
Omari – 15
Issa – 14
Iddy – 16
Mathias – 16

Magu town primary school
Shilling – 13
Zazi – 13
Blessed – 13
Seba – 14
Ayubu – 14
Simeo – 15

Kijiji school in rural Magu
Zawadi – 14
Imani – 15
Charlie – 15
Daniel – 13
Mayega – 12
Thereza – 14

Jabali out-of-school
Sammy – 13
Abdalla – 15
Bo – 15
Siti – 14

Others:
Hope – 21
Grace – 22
Vincent – 30
Dear teachers of xxx Primary School,

I have come to understand that you are concerned about my research activities with the primary school students of your school. I write you this letter in an attempt to explain to you clearly about the intentions, reasons and working methods of my research. I hope this will convince you that I am a legal researcher and have no intentions of harming anyone.

My background
I am a doctorate (PhD) student from the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. I have degrees in Medicine and Medical Anthropology. Medical Anthropology is the study of diseases and behavior related to health and illness in different cultures and ethnic groups.

My research
I am focusing on the problems of HIV/AIDS and how these problems affect the lives of children. Previous research indicated that children in Tanzania are confronted with temptations of getting involved in sexual relationships. This of course means that they might get exposed to HIV and thus forms a threat to their lives. With my research I want to find out how realistic this threat is. To be able to do that, I need to understand the motivations and reasons for children in the age of 8-16 to agree or refuse to get involved in sexual relationships.

My methods
Next to your school, I interview students at a primary school in xxxx (near Mwanza) and in xxxx (near Magu) as well as a group of children who are not going to school, in a village called xxxx at the lake shore (near Nyanguge). I have also interviewed a lot of street children in Mwanza town.
In September I started with group discussions, where I would ask the children questions regarding:

- Why boys and girl want to get involved / do not want to get involved
- Family background (religion, occupation of parents, strictness of upbringing, economics, constitution of household etc)
- How they reach agreements (what they say, what they give, dress codes etc)
- Where they learn these things
- What they expect from a partner
- etc

I use the video camera to record the discussions, so Godfrey and I can listen to it again and type it out word for word. I have now in total conducted more than 70 group or personal interviews and transcribed over 400 pages of interviews.

Next to group interviews, we ask children to write essays for us about above topics, make drawings, perform a play/drama, interview each other and at the moment I have reached the stage where I am interested in children’s personal stories and opinions. Let me assure you that the children I personally interview, are not selected because we think they have sexual relationships. Often it is even the opposite! We just want to find out about their norms and
values with regard to e.g. condom use, faithfulness, tasks and duties of wives and husbands etc.

Confidentiality
It is of the utmost importance that the children tell us the truth and do not lie when they answer our questions. To assure this,
- we only interview children who volunteer to participate in our research
- we do not pay money or bribe them with gifts (otherwise they will say anything just to get the money/gift. We do offer lunch if we use the person’s lunch time)
- we guarantee confidentiality, meaning that we will not reveal any sensitive information about them or the people they talk about
- we want to guarantee anonymity. So in the book that I am going to write, there will be no use of real names and nobody will ever know who said what.

It is therefore very important for us to have the support and trust of the teachers of the schools that we work with.

Supervision and Research Approval
My research has been officially approved by COSTECH, the Tanzanian government’s commission for science and technology (see attachment I) as well as by the District Educational Officers of Mwanza and Magu Districts (see attachments II & III). I am officially supervised by NIMR, the National Institute for Medical Research, under which TANESA (Tanzania Netherlands project to Support HIV/AIDS Control in Mwanza region) falls. Within TANESA, I work with the guardian program.

Goal of the research
To write a book that increases people’s understanding about the lives of children and the difficulties they have to deal with on a day-to-day basis, in particular with regard to making decisions concerning sexual issues. I hope by publishing this book and articles, policy makers (people working for n.g.o.’s) will make use of the knowledge I gained with your help and apply their programs in a way it will help to decrease the chances of the future generation to get infected with HIV.

Please, if you have any questions, never hesitate to ask me. I would like to invite you all to a group discussion where I can ask you about your opinion and you can ask me about anything that I did not make clear.

Thank you very much,
Kind regards,

Miranda van Reeuwijk and Godfrey Francis
### ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMREF</td>
<td>African Medical and Research Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSTECH</td>
<td>Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD</td>
<td>Focus Group Discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIMR</td>
<td>National Institute for Medical Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>OVC</td>
<td>Orphans and Vulnerable Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAP</td>
<td>Rights, Acceptance, Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>RNG</td>
<td>Rutgers Nisso Groep</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRH</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>SRHR</td>
<td>Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>STD</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Diseases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Infections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANESA</td>
<td>Tanzanian Essential Strategies against AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOTRO</td>
<td>Stichting voor <em>Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek</em> van de Tropen en Ontwikkelingslanden (onderdeel van de Nederlandse organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek - NWO)</td>
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SUMMARY

This book details the results of an ethnographic research project, conducted between 2004 and 2008 with children (from 10 to 16 years of age) in Northwest Tanzania. The aim of the research was to investigate the children’s experiences with sex, the reasons children indicate they engage in sex, and what sex and relationships mean to them. In the literature, there are indications of early sexual debut of primary school students in the area and of sexual and reproductive health problems in this group including unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions and HIV infection suspected to be related to ‘sugar daddy’ relationships. Despite these indications, sexual and reproductive health interventions rarely target children under the age of 14 and in-depth studies of childhood sexuality are rare. To date, sexual health promotion efforts that target adolescents have had limited success in increasing safer sexual behavior among youth. The insights gained through this research help to explain why success has been limited, why children should be included as a target group and what issues need to be considered in order to improve the quality and success of SRHR interventions.

In order to collect data that represented the children’s ideas, experiences and (reported) actions, the children were the central informants of the study. With the help of an interpreter, I interviewed three groups of students attending: Nyahali School on the shore of Lake Victoria just outside Mwanza City; Magu Town School, a big market town 80 kilometres to the east of Mwanza; Kijiji Rural School, 20 kilometres inland from Magu Town. In addition, we interviewed children who were not attending school who came from a fishing village and nearby farmland area called Jabali. These children walked over an hour to meet us and were interviewed in an empty classroom in a school located between Mwanza City and Magu Town. The methodology that was used included active child participation as informants and as co-researchers. Children were not considered as passive recipients of adult culture who simply assimilate and reproduce it, but as active social agents in their own right, with their own experiences, perceptions and actions in the social and cultural world. A focus on agency allows for an analysis of the interplay between self and society; how socializing influences interact with individual goals and feelings as well as situational demands or circumstances. This theoretical approach helps to frame how children manage conflicting norms and

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70 Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
expectations and how the manifestations of their agency (informed and directed by social structures) shape the characteristics of courtship and sexual relationships.

With the help of children I spoke to, it became clear how meanings of sex varied depending on the context and how a wide range of socializing influences, personal goals and feelings, future projects and situational aspects influenced their decisions and experiences regarding sex. Although some children experienced unwanted forms of sex (particularly in cases of power abuse by schoolteachers) or engaged in sex because of an immediate need caused by poverty, the majority of the sexually active children engaged in sex because they felt it benefited them socially and personally. Sex was important for children; for self esteem, peer status, to feel sophisticated and a wish to be (regarded as) ‘grown up’. Sometimes sex was used by boys and girls as a form of resistance against parental control or behavior. It provided girls with a means to take control over their own lives and become more independent from their parents. Since girls have few alternatives to obtain money, boyfriends provided girls with the needs that their parents cannot or would not provide. Boys mentioned a strong physical desire to make love when they reached puberty. Curiosity and wanting to test their bodies also played a significant motivational role, even for pre-pubertal boys. Love, infatuation and attraction interacted with other motivations and inhibitions. It appeared that some girls engaged in sexual relationships in the hope that the boy or (young) man would marry her and provide her with a good future. The strongest motivation for boys and girls not to engage in sex was related to the perception of the importance of education and the risk of being expelled if caught or pregnant. In general both boys and girls took active roles in courtship, in negotiating the meanings of sex, in optimizing the benefits, in reducing risks and in managing social and sexual relationships.

In the Tanzanian context there are many contradictory norms and expectations from peers and parents in regard to children and sex that are further conflicted by messages from NGO’s and the children’s own experienced emotional, bodily and financial needs. Children manage these conflicts through impression management and by hiding their sexual relationships. Due to parental control and regulation, there is limited space for boys and girls to get to know each other or develop intimacy through ‘dating’. Relationships are short and sometimes multiple. Courtship is described as taking place in secret and in a ‘deal’-like manner: boys approach girls when they are alone and dialogue is kept short and to the point. Money and gifts are used by boys to convince girls about their love and commitment and as an incentive to have sex.
Complex negotiation strategies are used by boys and girls to assess each other’s intentions and commitment, including strategies of self presentation, deception and ‘skinning’ (a girl accepting a boy’s money but not returning sexual favors). Money plays an ambivalent, but fundamental role in the negotiation of sexual relationships. From stories about harassment and unwanted sexual experiences it appears that expected reciprocity and secrecy facilitates boys’ persistence and sometimes leads to situations in which girls experience unwanted sex. Girls stated that they found it difficult to seek help or to report harassment and force due to secrecy and taboo. On the other hand, girls are skilful negotiators and many young boys say they are frustrated with girls who are ‘skinning’ them without receiving anything in return.

Consequences of larger socio-economic structures within the Tanzanian culture help shape ambiguous meanings of sex and characteristics of courtship and relationships. Examples of these cultural aspects are the practice of exchange for sex, limited space to develop intimacy, and relational aspects that are non-sexual (like friendship, love, commitment etc.). Children come to terms with these ambiguities by constructing temporary and permanent sexual relationships. Because every new sexual encounter must be negotiated, temporal relationships can be rapidly sequential, sometimes with the same partner(s), or exist simultaneously alongside a permanent relationship.

The narratives of the children help to understand how vulnerability is experienced and how risks are managed or become personalized. Debates between boys and girls illustrate how misconceptions and negative ideas about condoms come into existence or are reinforced. Their stories demonstrate how emotions can draw attention away from risks to more immediate concerns and how perceptions of responsibility influence risk taking. The social aspects of risk predominate in the children’s narratives. At stake is negative feedback from peers, parents and partners. The consequences impact the children’s feelings about themselves, their social support and their other relationships. These consequences are considered a higher risk than more abstract health risks such as HIV.

The insights gained from the ethnographic data collected throughout this qualitative participatory research with children begin to explain why prevention programs and health interventions often have limited success. Most interventions focus almost exclusively on the dangers of sex and therefore, inadequately address the children’s daily realities ignoring the experienced risks and benefits of their sexual relationships. Furthermore, professionals responsible for the sexual education of children and youth (i.e., teachers and local trainers) are
often insufficiently trained to work with children and adolescents. They do not sufficiently present the entire contents of the educational programs, due to their personal ideas about how respectful adult-child interactions should occur. In addition, some health education professionals believe that introducing topics related to sexuality can create adverse effects in children and adolescents. Incomplete or incorrect information given to children contributes to the creation or reinforcement of misconceptions. Lastly, current interventions do not sufficiently address the structural barriers that condition children’s sexual choices, such as poverty, a limited prospect of further education or official employment, secrecy and sexual taboos. A participatory and rights-based approach for health education interventions, based on research that actively involves children, could be a first step to improve the quality and success of sexual health promotion projects. In addition, these interventions should target children as well as youth as sexual decision making starts at younger ages and more gains will be made if children and youth receive information before becoming sexually active.
SAMENVATTING

Dit boek geeft de resultaten weer van een etnografisch onderzoek naar het seksuele gedrag van kinderen in de leeftijd van 10 tot en met 16 jaar, woonachtig in het noordwesten van Tanzania. De studie onderzoekt de redenen waarom deze kinderen beginnen aan seks en wat seks en relaties voor hen betekenen. Het onderzoek is uitgevoerd tussen 2004 en 2008. Uit gepubliceerde studies is bekend dat basisschool leerlingen in dit gebied op jonge leeftijd aan seks beginnen en te maken hebben met seksuele en reproductieve gezondheidsproblemen zoals ongewenste zwangerschap, onveilige abortus en HIV infectie. Van HIV infectie binnen deze groep wordt gedacht dat dit verband houdt met zogenaamde ‘sugar daddy’ relaties, seksuele relaties tussen jonge meisjes en oudere mannen. Ondanks de bekendheid van deze seksuele en reproductieve problemen onder jongens en meisjes in deze groep vinden er nauwelijks interventies plaats die zich richten op kinderen onder de 14 jaar om deze problemen te voorkomen. In het algemeen kan gezegd worden dat initiatieven om de seksuele gezondheid van jongeren te verbeterenweinig succes hebben geboekt met het bevorderen van veilig seksueel gedrag onder jongeren. De inzichten die voortkomen uit het in dit boek gepresenteerde etnografische onderzoek helpen een verklaring te geven voor het gebrek aan succes van interventies. Er wordt beargumenteerd waarom interventies zich ook op jongere kinderen moeten richten en welke kwesties beschouwd moeten worden om de kwaliteit en effectiviteit te vergroten van interventies die zich richten op het bevorderen van seksuele en reproductieve gezondheid en rechten van jongeren.

Om data te verzamelen dat de ideeën, ervaringen en het gedrag van kinderen representeert, waren kinderen de centrale informanten in deze studie. Met behulp van een tolk heb ik drie groepen basisschool leerlingen geïnterviewd. De leerlingen kwamen van Nyahali School aan de oever van het Victoriameer even buiten Mwanza stad, van Magu Town School, een marktplaats 80 kilometer ten oosten van Mwanza en van Kijiji rural School, een plattelandsgemeenschap op 20 kilometer van Magu gelegen. Een vierde groep kinderen die gevolgd en geïnterviewd zijn ging niet naar school en was woonachtig in het vissersdorpje Jabali, aan de kust tussen Mwanza en Magu. De kinderen in deze groepen participeerde actief in het onderzoek, zowel als informanten als mede onderzoekers. Uitgangspunt was om kinderen te zien als actieve sociale agenten in hun eigen recht, met hun eigen ervaringen, percepties en acties in hun sociale en culturele wereld en niet als passieve ontvangers van
volwassen cultuur dat alleen maar door kinderen geleerd en gekopieerd wordt. Deze focus op
deren hun ‘agency’ staat een analyse toe van de wisselwerking tussen de ‘zelf’ en de
samenleving; hoe socialiserende invloeden interacteren met individuele doelen en gevoelens,
asmede situationele eisen en omstandigheden. Deze theoretische benadering helpt in kaart te
brengen hoe kinderen omgaan met conflictiserende normen en verwachtingen en hoe
manifestaties van hun agency (geïnformeerd en gestuurd door sociale structuren)
karakteristieken van hofmakerij (courtship, flirten) en seksuele relaties vorm geeft.

Met behulp van de bestudeerde kinderen is het duidelijk geworden hoe betekenissen van seks
variëren, afhankelijk van de context en hoe uiteenlopende sociale invloeden, persoonlijke
doelen en gevoelens, toekomst ideeën en situationele aspecten hun beslissingen en ervaringen
met betrekking tot seks beïnvloeden. Hoewel er kinderen waren die ongewenste vormen van
seks hebben ervaren (in het bijzonder door machtsmisbruik van docenten) of aan seks
begonnen uit noodzaak wegens armoede, hadden of wilden veel van de kinderen in deze
studie seks omdat ze vonden dat ze er persoonlijk en sociaal profijt van hadden. Seks was
belangrijk voor de kinderen in deze studie voor redenen die te maken hebben met gevoelens
van eigenwaarde, onderlinge status, wereldwijs zijn en met de wens als ‘groot’ te worden
beschouwd. Soms werd seks gebruikt als een vorm van weerstand tegen ouderlijke controle of
gedrag waar het kind het niet mee eens was. Seks is een manier voor meisjes om controle over
hun leven uit te oefenen en meer onafhankelijk te worden van de ouders of voogden. Meisjes
hebben niet veel alternatieven om aan geld te komen en een vriendje of vriend (boyfriend,
partner) kan een meisje in die behoeften voorzien, waarvan haar ouders dat niet willen of
kunnen. Jongens noemden een sterk fysiek verlangen om seks te hebben, zodra ze de puberteit
bereikten. Nieuwsgierigheid en het willen uittesten van hun lijven speelde ook een belangrijke
motiverende rol voor jongens om aan seks te beginnen, zelfs voor het bereiken van de
puberteit. Liefde, verliefdheid en aantrekkingskracht hadden een wisselwerking met andere
motivaties en inhibities met betrekking tot flirten en seks. Ook bleken sommige meisjes
seksuele relaties aan te gaan in de hoop dat de jongen of (jonge)man met haar zou trouwen en
haar een goede toekomst zou bieden. De sterkste motivatie voor jongens en meisjes om zich
van seks te onthouden was gerelateerd aan de perceptie van het belang van onderwijs en het
risico van school te worden gestuurd in het geval van zwangerschap of betrapt worden. Over
het algemeen namen jongens en meisjes een actieve rol aan in hofmakerij, in het
onderhandelen en afstemmen van betekenissen van seks, in het optimaliseren van baten van
seks, in het reduceren van risico’s en in het onderhouden van sociale en seksuele relaties.
In de context van noordwest Tanzania zijn er veel tegenstrijdige normen en verwachtingen van leeftijdgenoten, ouders en volwassenen met betrekking tot kinderen en seks. Deze zijn op hun beurt weer in conflict met boodschappen van NGO’s en de door kinderen ervaren emotionele, lichamelijke en financiële behoeften. Kinderen gaan met deze conflicten om middels ‘impression management’ (het creëren van een bepaalde indruk, afhankelijk van de situatie en verwachtingen) en door het verbergen van hun seksuele relaties. Vanwege strenge ouderlijke controle over het seksuele gedrag van hun kinderen krijgen jongens en meisjes niet veel ruimte om, buiten school, met elkaar om te gaan. Daarom krijgen veel jongens en meisjes niet de kans om afspraakjes te maken en elkaar zo beter te leren kennen en intimiteit op te bouwen. Seksuele relaties zijn meestal van korte duur en soms met meerdere partners. Hofmakerij gebeurt in het geheim en gebeurt op een manier die lijkt op het sluiten van een deal: de jongen benadert het meisje als ze alleen is, de dialoog is kort en bondig en de jongen komt snel ter zake. Geld en cadeautjes worden gebruikt om het meisje te overtuigen van de liefde en toewijding van de jongen en als stimulans om seks te hebben. Complexe onderhandelingsstrategieën worden door zowel de jongens als de meisjes gebruikt om achter elkaars bedoelingen te komen, om te bepalen of de ander serieus en eerlijk is, of dat het meisje alleen de bedoeling heeft om de jongen ‘uit te kleden’ (‘skinning’: erg geld aan over te houden zonder te recipreeren) en dat de jongen alleen de bedoeling heeft om middels mooi praat het meisje te verleiden tot seks maar niets van zijn liefdesverklaringen meent. Geld speelt een ambivalente maar fundamentele rol in deze onderhandelingen. Uit verhalen over jongens die meisjes lastig vallen en verhalen over ongewenste seks wordt duidelijk dat de verwachte reciprociteit na ontvangst van geld of giften en de heimelijkheid waarin hofmakerij en seksuele relaties plaatsvindt, bijdraagt aan jongens’ vasthoudendheid in het ‘volgen’ van een meisje dat ze op het oog hebben en soms zelfs kan leiden tot situaties van seksuele dwang. Meisjes gaven aan dat ze het moeilijk vinden om hulp te zoeken of aan iemand te melden als ze worden gevolgd of lastig gevallen, uit schaamte of angst iets fout te hebben gedaan en gestraft te worden. Aan de andere kant zijn meisjes ook bedreven onderhandelaars en menig jonge jongen klaagde over meisjes die wel hun zuurverdiend geld en cadeautjes aannemen en van alles beloven, maar uiteindelijk niets met de jongen doen. Consequenties van grotere sociaal-economische structuren in de Tanzaniaanse samenleving dragen bij aan de ambigue betekenis van seks en de karakteristieken van hofmakerij en seksuele relaties. Voorbeelden van hiervan zijn bijvoorbeeld het uitwisselen van geld voor seks, beperkte ruimte voor het ontwikkelen van intimiteit, en relationele aspecten die niet seksueel zijn
(zoals vriendschap, zorg, liefde, toewijding). Kinderen gaan met de tegenstrijdige normen en verwachtingen om middels het construeren van tijdelijke en meer langdurige seksuele relaties. Omdat elke nieuwe seksuele ontmoeting onderhandeld moet worden, kunnen tijdelijke relaties elkaar snel opvolgen, soms met dezelfde partner(s), of tegelijk bestaan naast een meer langdurige relatie.

De verhalen van de kinderen in deze studie helpen te begrijpen hoe kwetsbaarheid wordt ervaren, hoe risico’s persoonlijk worden en hoe hiermee wordt omgegaan. Debatten tussen jongens en meisjes illustreren hoe misvattingen en negatieve ideeën over condoom gebruik de wereld in komen of worden versterkt. Hun verhalen laten zien hoe emoties de aandacht weg kunnen lokken van risico’s naar meer prangende behoeften of verlangens en hoe percepties met betrekking tot verantwoordelijkheid het nemen van risico’s beïnvloedt. De sociale aspecten van risico zijn dominant in de verhalen van kinderen. Van belang is de mogelijkheid van negatieve feedback van leeftijdgenoten, vrienden, ouders en (potentiële) partners of geliefden. De sociale consequenties hebben een impact op de kinderen hun gevoel van eigenwaarde, de sociale steun die ze kunnen verwachten en de waarde en betekenis van hun sociale relaties. Dit wordt als een groter risico gezien dan de meer abstracte gezondheidsrisico’s als HIV, waar docenten en NGO’s het veelal over hebben.

De inzichten verworven door dit kwalitatieve participerende onderzoek met kinderen beginnen te verklaren waarom veel preventie programma’s en gezondheidsinterventies vaak maar beperkte successen boeken. De meeste interventies richten zich bijna alleen op gevaren van seks en nemen de dagelijkse realiteit van kinderen onvoldoende in ogenschouw. Ze negeren daarmee de risico’s en baten die kinderen ervaren van seksuele relaties. Verder zijn de professionals die verantwoordelijk zijn voor de seksuele voorlichting van kinderen en jongeren (zoals docenten en lokale trainers) veelal onvoldoende getraind. Ze ondersteunen vaak onvoldoende de inhoud van de seksuele voorlichtingsprogramma’s, door hun persoonlijke ideeën over respectvolle communicatie tussen volwassenen en kinderen. Bovendien geloven sommigen van hen dat bepaalde onderwerpen gerelateerd aan seksualiteit tegenovergestelde effecten kunnen hebben en kinderen en jongeren juist kunnen aansteken tot seks. Maar uit dit onderzoek blijkt hoe incomplete en incorrecte informatie bijdraagt aan de vorming misconcepties of deze versterkt. Verder adresseren huidige interventies onvoldoende de structurele barrières die de seksuele beslissingen van kinderen conditioneren, zoals armoede, een beperkt toekomst perspectief, gender- en machtsverhoudingen, het
verborgen moeten houden van relaties, en seksuele taboe. Een participatief en op rechten gebaseerde benadering in interventies gericht op het verbeteren van seksuele gezondheid, voortbouwend op onderzoek waarin kinderen actief betrokken zijn, kan een eerste stap zijn in het verbeteren van de kwaliteit en effectiviteit van zulke interventies. Interventies zouden in hun doelgroep niet alleen adolescenten moeten opnemen, maar ook kinderen aangezien het maken van seksuele beslissingen en het vormen van intenties al op jonge leeftijd begint en er meer winst kan worden gemaakt als kinderen en jongeren informatie ontvangen voordat ze seksueel actief worden.