Because of temptations: children, sex and HIV/AIDS in Tanzania
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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.
\textsuperscript{15} WHO, Gender and Reproductive Rights: \url{http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexualhealth.html} and IPPF Charter on Sexual and Reproductive Rights: \url{http://www.ippf.org/en/Resources/Statements/IPPF+Charter+on+Sexual+and+Reproductive+Rights.htm}
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 Netherlands16. 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

“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 ‘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. ‘.. Uh…Good morning’, Godfrey and I responded back shyly. Then the teacher

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. 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.

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 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.

**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

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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

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 participation. 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 rewards.

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

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). 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:

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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 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.

Selection and research locations

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 Nyahali (see map below) It is located some kilometers from the outskirts of 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. The government or the fishing industry employed some of them. Since Nyahali is close to Mwanza City, many people have migrated from other regions of Tanzania to live near the city and in Nyahali. Yet the majority of the participants in this research belonged to the Sukuma tribe, which has traditionally lived in the district. The participating group in the Nyahali School was a Standard 7 class of 80 children.

34 The interview with this guardian teacher is presented in Chapter 9
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.