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

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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”.

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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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shilling</th>
<th>Do you have a female friend?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zazi</td>
<td>Here in the class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shilling</td>
<td>Yes, like here at school, do you have female friends? Friends, not your lover, a friend only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zazi</td>
<td>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…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 condition⁵². [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:

⁵² What ‘condition’ entails precisely and what ‘falling in love’ means to the boys will be discussed later in this chapter.
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.\[53\]
[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

\[53\] 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.
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 \textit{money} and \textit{assets} would be in the first and second position. But when we asked three different groups of girls (\textit{Magu} town, \textit{Kijiji} in rural \textit{Magu} and \textit{Nyahali}) to order the cards, money and assets were completely left out or had a low ranking. Top positions were given to cards with \textit{Good manners} and \textit{Character}. When the boys from rural \textit{Magu} saw that the girls left the card with \textit{Money} off their list they fiercely disagreed saying, \textit{“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 & Clean \\
Love & Faithful & Bright \\
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: \textit{Love} – \textit{Money} – \textit{Character} – \textit{Good manners} – \textit{Bright/Intelligent} – \textit{Falling in love} – \textit{Good looking/beauty} – \textit{Being cool} – \textit{Family background} – \textit{Assets} – \textit{Lifestyle} – \textit{Reputation}. Added by the children: \textit{Faithful} (to be with one lover only) – \textit{Happy/cheerful} – \textit{Never fed up (still in love after long time)} – \textit{Way of walking (Conduct)} – \textit{Clean} – \textit{Big chest} – \textit{Sexy eyes} – \textit{Normal length} – \textit{Tall} – \textit{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.

\textbf{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\textsuperscript{56}. 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?

\textsuperscript{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 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. 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 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: Who ends it normally?
The boy.
Me: Why is that?
Because the boy’s interest is to have sex with you, once he has achieved that, he’s gone.
[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: And 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 kabisal (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\(^59\). 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.

\(^{59}\) 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.