

***The social construction of young women's  
identity and sexual decisions***

*by*

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## Declaration

I, Neo Tshireletso Pule, hereby declare that the work contained in this document is my own work unless acknowledgement otherwise indicates. I furthermore declare that the whole document, or any part thereof, will not be, has not been, nor is being, submitted for any purpose other than as part of the requirements to complete an M.Sc (Counselling Psychology) degree at the University of the Free State only.

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## Abstract

The identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions of young women have been explored from a social constructionist perspective in this text. Social constructionism acknowledges multiple realities by recognising that one's understanding of a concept is constructed in terms of where and how one lives. The three concepts are therefore explored in terms of the reality of each of the participants.

The writer has focused on the work of Gilligan in describing the possible psychological processes that might be involved in the development of the identity of a young woman. The work of Bowen has also been acknowledged in terms of identity development in family systems. Other research has been explored regarding the social construction of young women's identity, sexual identity and their sexual decisions. Certain research in which information on the experiences of women has been shared in terms of sexuality has also been explored. Previous studies regarding the sexuality and sexual behaviour of young people (male and female) have been consulted in order to gain a better understanding of the sexual lives of young people.

The participants, who were all students at a South African higher education institution, were gathered by means of a volunteering system to participate in two focus groups. The focus group discussions included creative or artistic expressions as well as an application of the nominal group technique. The stories of the young women were recorded. The researcher obtained some understanding of these by means of the feminist poststructural discourse analysis.

The participants reported that a relationship context is essential for the social construction of the identity of young women. It appeared, from their reports, that connectedness is important in defining identity as a young woman. Furthermore, the participants indicated that a communal artifact, or processes whereby knowledge is interchanged and concepts are negotiated and debated, facilitates the social construction of female sexual identity. They finally reported that one's intrapersonal script appears to inform the sexual decisions of young women. They seemed to hold the view that the intrapersonal script is informed by socialisation, context (family, friends, religion, beliefs etcetera), as well as past experience, among other factors. A concept which may be related or identical to the ethic of care as

discussed in Gilligan's work seems to play an important role in facilitating and informing the sexual decisions of a young woman.

## **Main characters**

The **researcher** refers to the individual who facilitated the research process. She took part in this process as part of the requirements of the completion of an M.Sc (Counselling Psychology) degree. The researcher originated the topic, facilitated the process of gathering the participants and undertook the gathering and writing of the information in this text.

**Supervisor** refers to the lecturer who provided the researcher with guidance with regards to her successfully meeting the requirements of completing the research component of the M.Sc (Counselling Psychology) degree.

**The participants** refer to the groups of individuals who have participated in the research process. The individuals were actively involved in gathering information pertaining to the topic of interest by sharing their stories regarding the topic.

**Social constructionism** is regarded as constituting a theoretical approach of accounting for a phenomenon by constructing its nature and existence as a product of social relationships, practices and discourses (Friedman, 2006).

## **Our counterparts**

- Female identity
- Sexual identity
- Sexuality
- Female sexuality
- Sex
- Sexual decision
- Dominant narrative
- Scripts
- Sexual scripts

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## **CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE SCENE**

### **1.1 The ushering**

The social construction of young women's identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions are at the focus of this research process. The researcher explores these issues by referring to previous literature as well as by gathering descriptions of young women's stories regarding the three points of interest. In this chapter, the researcher furnishes a brief overview of the purpose and necessity of the study, the theoretical framework which informs it, as well as the aims of the research. Furthermore, the researcher also furnishes a brief overview of the guidelines of facilitating the research inquiry together with guidelines for studying the information obtained from the inquiry. In addition, the researcher whets the appetite of the reader by providing a brief outline of the chapters to follow so as to make her or him aware of what to expect in the rest of the document.

### **1.2 Purpose and necessity of research**

The purpose of this research is three pronged. Firstly, the researcher is interested in exploring the social construction of young women's identity. Secondly, to explore the social construction of young women's sexual identity and in turn how the social construction of identity and sexual identity informs the sexual decisions of young women. This triple aim proves to be of importance in the context of South Africa as previous studies have implied that young women will be more at risk in facing challenges associated with sexual activity such as sexually transmitted diseases and infections, unwanted pregnancies and HIV/AIDS (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya, 2005; London, 2005; Maxwell, 2006).

The researcher advances the suggestion that the exploration and insights that may be obtained from this research process may inform relevant fields in

terms of a deeper understanding of young women's identity and young women's sexuality as well as of factors that contribute to their sexual decisions. If these fields are informed by this research, this could facilitate the creation of effective mechanisms to assist young women with the possible challenges they may confront in terms of the social construction of their identity, sexual identity and the making of sexual decisions. The success of the latter facilitation to create effective mechanisms to assist young women may therefore also indirectly have value in managing and / or reducing the risks and challenges associated with engagement in sexual activity by young women (London, 2005). These effective mechanisms may moreover indirectly have value in assisting young women in terms of challenges involved in the developmental tasks of identity (Maxwell, 2006).

As found in previous research, the normal development of the young women of interest to this research process includes their decisions to engage in sexual activity, as well as exploring their definition of identity (Maxwell, 2006; Gilligan, 1982). This decision brings about numerous questions involving morality, the meaning of being a woman and various expectations of society, including the family and the social context in which one finds oneself (Gilligan, 1982; Kigozi, 2006; Maxwell, 2006). These questions are explored in a later chapter discussing young women and sexuality, so as to inform this study about the various possible processes occurring in the decision of a young woman to engage in sexual activity. Issues such as society and the family are also discussed on the bases of family system theory and systems theory as well as community psychology. The researcher regards these discussions as important because they inform the research in as holistic a sense as possible regarding the different factors that contribute to the topic under discussion.

The decision to engage in sexual activity appears more challenging for young women as the overall gender norm results in young women experiencing sexual pressure (Maxwell, 2006). The pressure seems to be made evident by the feelings of obligation the young women experience when having to make the romantic relationship work. Young women also take emotional

responsibility for the relationship, which may result in guilt feelings when not satisfying the male (Maxwell, 2006). The female is taught by socialisation to postpone sex until marriage (Berns, 2001). In contrast to this, she is also taught to be submissive and care for the male (Kigozi, 2006). This contradictory information might perpetuate the obligation and guilt feelings of the young woman in satisfying the male while also intensifying the struggle, as addressed by Gilligan. The issues of identity and intimacy pose an additional challenge. These issues seem to interact in this decision making process, since, as Gilligan suggests, a woman finds her identity in relation to the intimacy in her life (Gilligan, 1982).

While exploring previous research in terms of the aims of the current study, the researcher only discovered limited resources regarding the said topic. She found that previous researchers had discussed her three main interest areas separately. Some researchers have also discussed topics relating to this research study in relation to the local context of South Africa (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya, 2005; Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Nicholas, 2008 & Pattman, 2005). The researcher is of the opinion that more research in the area of young women's identity, their sexuality and the sexual decision making of young women is worth undertaking. She therefore takes interest in the social construction of young women's identity and their sexual decision making in the context of their specific community, in an attempt to thicken existing knowledge regarding the issues in the current research.

### **1.3 Theoretical framework**

Social constructionism, which will be used as the theoretical framework guiding the research process, can be defined as the shared meaning of a concept in the midst of multiple realities (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007). This meaning arises from a group of people putting words together to refer to a specific action or means of doing something. The way a group of people

experience something and how it is communicated gives rise to the meaning. The researcher is thus interested in the meaning that young women share in terms of how they understand themselves and their sexuality (sexual identity).

Social constructionism provides the reader with theoretical lenses for reading the text and the writer, lenses through which to view to write. The theoretical framework gives direction to explain concepts that appear to be important to this research process, for example, language, communal artifact, social constructs, etcetera. Furthermore, social constructionism assists the writer and the reader to tap into certain processes which may be important to the research process including socialisation, connected knowing and the importance of relationships. The ideas of social constructionism also seem to be related to processes that are important in the research process, such as the narrative approach and discourse, communal artefact and language. The framework may also be instrumental in providing a link between systems functioning and community interaction which both appear to be important concepts in the current research. By nature, social constructionism may assist the researcher in gaining understanding of the processes involved in the construction of young women's identity, sexual identity and their sexual decisions as informed by their social contexts.

#### **1.4 Research aims**

The researcher aims to firstly understand the social construction of the identity of young women. She furthermore seeks to explore their sexual identity. In achieving the former, she aims to gain an understanding of what young women understand sex to be and what processes are elicited in making sexual decisions. To achieve these, the researcher poses the following questions:

- What is the social construction of young women's identity?
- What is the social construction of young women's sexual identity?
- How do young women make sexual decisions?

## **1.5 Research method and participants**

The meta-paradigm guiding this research process is the narrative approach because it will best facilitate the capturing of the sexual experience stories of the participants (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). The approach allows for the attainment of rich, thick and deep descriptions of such stories (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). Two groups of ten to fifteen undergraduate university students were gathered by means of calling for volunteers.

### **1.5.1 Research inquiry**

The inquiry was planned to take place in two phases. The first phase included introducing the participants to each other, building group rapport and introducing the research question. The second phase included a creative or artistic representation of the participants' sexual stories, which included a written narrative of the creative or artistic representation of the young women in the second group. Furthermore, the second phase included the nominal group technique (Sample, 1984; Dunham, 1998) which was used to pick up themes stimulated by the creative or artistic representation activity. The group thereafter engaged in a discussion concerning the themes obtained.

### **1.5.2 Data analysis**

Discourse analysis was used as a method to study how the use of language was utilised to create reality (Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2001). It offers a method with which to study meaning (guiding metaphors) and to investigate how meaning informs everyday life (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). For the purpose of this research process, Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis has been employed (Baxter, 2003).

## **1.6 Outline of chapters**

In this chapter, the reader was furnished with an overview of the document, giving a brief discussion of its contents. Chapter 2 provides a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework used to guide the research process.

Chapter 3 furnishes the reader with accounts of previous research which may be relevant to answering the questions that have been asked in the research process. These accounts include information about identity, sexual identity and sexual decision making. The social constructionist view of identity, sexual identity and sexual decision making is also discussed in this chapter. The guidelines used to facilitate the inquiry are discussed in chapter 4. The same chapter also includes details about how the young women's stories were obtained and how they would be analysed. Chapter 5 provides the reader with a report of the research inquiry, including comments of the different activities, as well as the researcher's understanding of and suggestions regarding the young women's stories. The final chapter, chapter 6, closes the curtain. Chapter 6 includes the researcher's reflections and final thoughts concerning the research process.

### **1.7 In a nutshell**

In the quest to obtain understanding of the social construction of young women's identity and sexual decisions, the researcher hopes to enthuse the reader from the outset, when the theoretical spectacles are donned in chapter 2, until the curtain closes in chapter 6. The researcher also hopes that each chapter will equip the reader to peruse the subsequent chapters. Furthermore, the writer aims to build the chapters on each other as well as inform each chapter along the journey until the final chapter (6). The following chapter, chapter 2, is intended to orientate the reader to the genre of the text as it sets the tone for the rest of the document. The writer therefore invites the reader to journey with the main characters and their counterparts in exploring the social construction of young women's identity and their sexual decisions.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL GLASSES

### 2.1 The ushering

The writer acknowledges that every piece of writing is performed from a certain standpoint (Creswell, 2007). By this she refers to the theoretical framework informing the piece of writing, one's own views regarding the topic, experiences regarding the topic and so on (Creswell, 2007; Freeman & Combs, 1997). The brand name of the spectacles that the writer / researcher wears guides the writing style and becomes the genre with which the text is written. Hence, this text is informed by social constructionism. Communal artifacts and language are significant concepts in social constructionist theory. These two concepts play an important role in this text. The researcher thus esteems and is interested in reflecting on the process through which young women construct their identity and sexual decisions.

### 2.2 The genre

The word 'theory' suggests an explanation based on thought, observation and reasoning, especially one that has been tested and confirmed as containing general principles explaining a large number of facts (Kotze & Kotze, 1997). In view of the stance of this text, the use of 'theory' would seem contradictory as the researcher seeks to facilitate the writing of this text in a space receptive of unfixed and open ideas (Gergen, 1991). In search of options to satisfy the desired stance, an awareness of epistemology appears attractive. Epistemology refers to a particular way of thinking, which drives the process of how we know and understand the world (Dalton, Elias & Wandermans, 2001). Following the considerations of the different paradigms, the researcher introduces social constructionism as being the most suitable genre with which to pursue the desired plot for this text.

### **2.3 The backdrop**

The backdrop of social constructionism is postmodernism. Postmodernism presents a challenge to the ideas that are conventionally accepted in psychology and in the rest of the world; together with the schools of thought that result in those ideas (Burr, 2003). It further questions the schools of thought that have paved the way for its existence as well as those that exist alongside it (Burr, 2003). Postmodernism also raises debate and argument about existing knowledge by questioning existing knowledge, therefore encouraging conversation about existing concepts (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007). Further conversation about existing concepts may drive language to evolve alternative views.

Somewhat more traditional ideas are termed modernism (Kotze & Kotze, 1997). According to modernism there is a clear distinction between the objective world which represents the 'real' world and the mental world which is viewed as being subjective (Burr, 2003). Modernism furthermore detects a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the researched (Lowe, 1991). The researched thus practices passive involvement, responding to experimental conditions while possessing no knowledge pertaining to the topic of interest (Burr, 2003).

Postmodernism, on the other hand, deconstructs the power relations where the researcher becomes part of the research process (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). The participants play active roles in the process and their experiences seem to be of value to it (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007). The world is viewed from different perspectives and sharing seems important to postmodernism (Gergen, 1991). It thus becomes clear that postmodernism (in particular, social constructionism) offers a radical move to research and social enquiry (Burr, 2003)

### **2.4 Social constructionism on stage**

As the reader of any story at any given time, one is inclined to want to

become acquainted with the style in which the story is written in order to experience the story being conveyed. Having announced its differences to other theoretical frameworks, there appears to be no absolute description or explanation of social constructionism although there are characteristics that can imply one's affiliation to the approach. Social constructionism seems to invite the person to question the traditional prescriptions of the world and psychology along with a critical evaluation of ideas that are widely accepted (Burr, 2003). It meets normality head-on as it is experienced by those living it (Freedman & Combs, 1996). This is pursued by welcoming greyness and granting an opportunity to the possibility of the non-existence of absolutes (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007).

The perspective also recognises that one's understanding of a particular concept occurs in terms of when and where in the world one lives (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). In essence, one's understanding is therefore culturally and historically relative (Dalton, Elias & Wandermans, 2001). Although social constructionism presents a critical stance towards the existing schools of thought, it is important to note that it does not operate on a clean slate but rather offers a broader piece of paper on which to function (Burr, 2003).

Thinking wider than traditional ideas, the stance of social constructionism expands dualism (Burr, 2003). The position that it adopts here includes the idea that the development of knowledge emerges from social interaction (Burr, 2003). Traditional researchers' stances, such as positivism, hold the belief that knowledge is a representation of facts and events in the 'real' world (Hoffman, 1990). In its aim to be critical and in the questioning of norms, social constructionism is moved by meanings that emerge in constant exchange of narratives which create new knowledge each time (Lowe, 1991). Hence, from a social constructionist perspective, the descriptive concepts referred to as dualities such as subject / object, masculine / feminine, mind / body, self / other, etcetera, are socially constructed rather than real (Kotze & Kotze, 1997).

Hence, it can be said that social constructionism considers how phenomena develop in a particular social context (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Social constructionism is therefore advanced as a theoretical approach of accounting for something by constructing its nature and existence as a product of social relationships, practices and discourses (Friedman, 2006). The approach recognises that most, if not all, aspects of human behaviour and experiences are constructed by the culture in which these exist (Giles, 2006). Therefore, social constructionism can be assigned a suggested definition such as the shared meaning of a concept in the midst of multiple realities (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007). A definition of social constructionism is offered, while acknowledging multiple realities, to create common ground or shared meaning when reading this text.

Pertaining to this research process, social constructionism is acknowledged for the dialogue it will allow and the process in which the meanings of interest are constructed. It is the desire of the researcher, therefore, to participate in a social context in order to experience the social construction of young women's identity and sexual decisions so as to reflect on the reality existing in the said context. Although the reflection(s) will not account for the absolute truth, they represent some knowledge of the social context of concern and may inform other contexts. The latter is acknowledged since conversations seem to be continuous and realities also possess the ability to co-exist (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007).

In the following sections, various aspects of social constructionism will be explored. These aspects may provide greater detail concerning social constructionism and how the aspects may be related to the research process.

#### **2.4.1 Multiple realities**

According to social constructionist viewpoints, there are limits to the ability of people to measure, describe or explain the world in a precise, absolute and measurable manner (Freedman & Combs, 1996), which implies the existence of multiple ways of viewing the world. Social constructionism therefore refers

to multiple realities where each individual, culture or society gives rise to meanings of the world where their experiences differ because of the different tools with which they measure, describe and explain these (Hoffman, 1990). These tools appear to be socially agreed upon by means of mechanisms constructed by the particular social context (Burr, 2003). The idea of multiple realities therefore alludes to the concept of 'no essential truth', which suggests that reality cannot be objectively known because it is relevant to a particular context (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). While seeking to create meaning, we can only interpret experience while considering many possibilities of interpretation as viable with none of them being 'really' true (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism hence offers a *no truth method* where there are no foundational rules, thus making truth relativistic (Burr, 2003). 'Truth' in this sense is relative to the context in which it is experienced (Hoffman, 1990).

Recognising 'truth' as being relative, does not mean that anything goes (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Relativism, however, offers the context in which to accept what is real to it (the context) (Burr, 2003). In the same breath, social constructionism also affords an opportunity to the researcher, the individual, society or culture to be critical and view norms as being subject to transformation (Gergen, 1985). Here is an opportunity for the radical questioning of foundationalism and absolutism (Gergen, 1991). According to available research, any attempt to gain knowledge involves a continual reflexivity (Lowe, 1991).

This research text therefore acknowledges that the participants may possess different realities in terms of the construction of young women's identity and sexual identity. The researcher expects that the realities with which they come into the research discussion are informed by their upbringing, their experience in university, their experience of the construction of their own individual identity, their own experience of sexuality and sexual decisions as well as their previous experiences of being in discussions regarding the said topic. Therefore, it is desired to identify the shared meaning in the midst of the multiple realities that are expected to be introduced in the research discussion.

#### **2.4.2 The script: The language of interaction**

Mechanisms constructed by a particular social context to socially agree on acceptable behaviour, rules, etcetera, with regards to the particular context or to create contextual reality may be called scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). The researcher has adopted the word scripts from the scripting theory of Simon and Gagnon (1986). Their work has been heavily informed by a writer who has been widely acknowledged for his extensive work in social constructionism: Michel Foucault. He is said to believe that language is an instrument of power (Freedman & Combs, 1996). According to Foucault (1978), people easily tend to internalise socially acceptable behaviour, rules, etcetera, specific to a particular context since they take that as the truth of their contextual identity. These socially acceptable behaviours, rules, and so forth, seem to be formed by those who have the ability to participate in an interaction through language; hence this gives these persons power to persuade one of the truth of a belief in a particular context.

The researcher therefore interprets these beliefs as scripts in line with the definition of Simon & Gagnon. Therefore, according to the scripting theory, scripts may be viewed as metaphors for conceptualising the production of behaviour within a social context (Giles, 2006). The writer is of the opinion that script writing or the construction of the scripts is mediated and / or dependent on language (Lowe, 1991), also in accordance with assumptions made with reference to Michel Foucault's work. Language, furthermore, appears to be essential to the process of negotiation in order to create a 'code of interaction' (Gergen, 1985). The following processes, including typification, institutionalisation, legitimation and reification, which will be discussed later, appear to be important in the negotiation process mediated by language to create scripts (Freedman & Combs, 1996). This section therefore discusses language as used by people and as a medium for interaction including its products, such as discourses and social constructs. The discussion is later taken further so as to inform the manner in which language centres the social interaction.

### **a) Language as a communication tool**

The heart of social constructionism is characterised by language (Burr, 2003). Language is a communication tool exclusive to human beings which is therefore worth appreciating. Language as a communication tool tends to be used by people as a measuring, describing and explaining instrument to facilitate processes that reflect meanings and give rise to the according of meanings to experiences (Hoffman, 1990). It therefore provides parameters for our understanding and experience (Kotze & Kotze, 1997). Language thus mediates and constitutes reality rather than reflecting or representing reality (Lowe, 1991). Language as a communication tool is intended to be employed in this research process as a means to identify the experiences of young women as they communicate these. As a communication tool, the researcher hopes to use language to obtain a glimpse of the young women's reality pertaining to their meaning regarding the topic of interest.

### **b) Language: A social process**

Social constructionism consequently perceives people existing in language more than it merely being a form of human connection (Kotze & Kotze, 1997). In addition, to be in language describes a dynamic, social operation rather than a simple linguistic activity (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Language is therefore a means to verbalise social processes so as to render human interaction a reality. According to Foucault (1990), therefore, the meaning of sexuality, which is the interest of this research process, is derived from language. Foucault (1990) furthermore contends that language facilitates the process of defining sexuality by means of interaction between people. Our experience of the world as well as our internal states therefore appears to be enmeshed with the parameters of language in order to give the experience meaning (Burr, 2003). The social process experienced during the research process is hence expected to propose a reality to be reflected upon as shared meaning for the individuals participating in this research process. 'Truth' as it exists for the participants of this research process is therefore expected to be brought to the fore by means of language in the social context.

### **c) Social constructs**

A social construct is a concept or practice which may appear to be natural and obvious to those who accept it (Burr, 2003). In effect, it appears to be an invention of a particular culture since, as people talk with each other, a view is constructed (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). The construction of a view demands thought processing that occurs while or after the process of language does (Hoffman, 1991). This implies that one cannot think about something which, people have not yet heard being spoken about (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007). As human beings use language, they create categories and concepts that provide a framework for meaning (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Certain social constructs relating to the participants' experiences, as well as other social constructs being created, as facilitated by the social conversation, are thus expected to be utilised. As participants use language, the shared meaning will prevail and be carried in the social constructs used in the discourse among them. As participants engage in the conversation about the topic of interest they may develop their own language unique to the respective groups in order to describe their reality as regards the topic. Furthermore, this language might be reflected in the participants' use of the same words to describe different experiences. The experiences might also be described by employing common themes. The use of the same words, as well as the themes derived from the conversation, might be taken as the social constructs in the participants' conversation that relate to the said topic. Moreover the use of the same words to describe different experiences as well as the themes might also form a common reality amongst the respective conversations. These conversations might be unique to the participants, relating to the social construction of young women's identity and sexual decisions as well as their sexual identity.

### **d) Discourse**

The use of language or the product of language is termed discourse. This includes sets of meanings, metaphors, images, stories, statements, etcetera

(Burr, 2003). The term discourse can be explored in a twofold manner (Freedman & Combs, 1996). In the one sense it refers to a process of conversation through which meanings are progressively and dynamically achieved (Lowe, 1991). These conversations would imply public interactions such as the everyday conversations of laypeople (Kotze & Kotze, 1997). On the other hand, discourse can also refer to systematic and institutionalised ways of speaking and writing or even meaning / sense-making by means of the use of language (Burr, 2003). However, the focus of this study falls on the everyday conversation of the layperson while noting that the latter might be of great effect in this conversation.

As people live together or interact in the same context they use language as a communication tool to build a discourse. The discourse presented within a context facilitates the construction of scripts so as to produce behaviour. Discourses that are real to the participants in the current research process may therefore be referred to in the inquiry to be held, in which discourses embedded in the scripts guiding the behaviour that the participants will speak of could also be highlighted.

#### **e) Narrative**

Various discourses might occur in a context, each with a different story to tell or a different way of understanding, of knowledge and of meaning (Burr, 2003). The various stories imply multiple narratives which constitute the stories that we tell. Brooks and Edwards (1997) have been able to identify four classes of narratives.

The dominant narrative is used to refer to the most commonly accepted narrative in a system (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007). It also includes the ideas and points of view that are usually called the norm (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). The norm is achieved by the construction of a shared meaning (Visser & Moleko, 2003). This construction seems to be substantially influenced by the guiding metaphor (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007). A

includes the dominant symbols of society used to guide an understanding of a concept amongst a group of people. A description of these symbols suggests the creation of a vocabulary to refer to the actions, objects and means of carrying out activities as described above (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004).

While the dominant narrative receives an opportunity to be storied, there appears to be many other events that are not storied as loudly as the dominant narrative (Gergen, 1991). These narratives which might not be storied seem to include the silent narrative, counter and shadow narratives. A silent narrative is experienced as an unstoried expression (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007). It is a private narrative that consists of the condensed versions of a system's experience, so much that it remains formless (Brooks & Edwards, 1997). Secondly, in opposition to the dominant narrative lies a counter narrative (Brooks & Edwards, 1997). Unlike the silent narrative, the counter narrative is well-storied, enabling those identifying with it to detail the narrative concerned with it. On the dark side of the dominant narrative is the shadow narrative. Instead of it being located on the opposite end, it is a well-storied private narrative of the dominant narrative (Brooks & Edwards, 1997). The shadow narrative is usually whispered, if it is at all spoken (Brooks & Edwards, 1997).

Discourses or narratives in the context of this text appear to concern that which can be said and thought, as well as who can speak and with what authority (Lowe, 1991). This might imply that language could pose as an instrument of power (Freedman & Combs, 1996). In a system of language, the dominant narrative is expected to constitute that which centres the system conversation to such an extent that the dominant narrative is internalised (Burr, 2003). As such it becomes easy to believe that the dominant narrative speaks truth about our identities. The dominant narrative then forms the 'take for granted ideas' (Gergen, 1985), hence forming the *king* pin of socialisation. In this way the societal expectations are formed and certain roles are internalised.

The aim of this research process is thus to hear the stories of the young

women and to identify the narratives pertaining to their realities regarding the social construction of their identity and sexual decisions. It can be expected that the dominant narrative might be louder. This is not to say that the dominant narrative represents truth, but as described above, the dominant narrative tends to speak with more power where other narratives remain unstoried. The sharing of stories of the young women could help the researcher to uncover the unstoried so as to understand their realities as young women pertaining to the topic under discussion.

### **2.4.3 Social interaction**

In this section of the text, the writer seeks to highlight how the language centres social interaction. First, systems theory will be discussed. This is anticipated to help to conceptualise the functioning of a group of people and the aspects that facilitate effective functioning. Since the participants are viewed as a community by the researcher, the researcher discusses systems theory in order to highlight ways in which the group may function. The following discussion also highlights how the group might operate in terms of being in constant communication and interaction. Lastly, the writer discusses the topic of a communal artifact. This section attempts to demonstrate how language and communities function together and how communal artifact may be applied to the research process.

#### **a) Systems theory**

According to the systems theory, a system is an organised whole comprising various interlinked subsystems that are related and are in interaction with one another (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). Systems appear to be organised according to function, in such a manner that the relationships between the subsystems create boundaries around the system as well as around the subsystems themselves (Visser & Moleko, 2003). Boundaries denote what appears to be acceptable with regards to entering and exiting the system and travelling between subsystems (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007).

In an extreme view, a system may either be closed or open (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). A closed system is characterised by an impermeable boundary because no exchange of information occurs between the system and the environment (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). This sort of functioning may seemingly prevent interaction between individuals in the system and / or subsystems (Visser & Moleko, 2003). An open system, however, is identified by continuous interaction with the environment by way of permeable boundaries (Visser & Moleko, 2003). These boundaries open the door to growth and change and facilitate the view of multiple realities (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007).

Systems function optimally when in homeostasis. Homeostasis suggests a system that is in balance and is stable (Visser & Moleko, 2003). A system in homeostasis is able to engage in functional conversation that will facilitate the constructive local knowledge process of a system (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007). As a system, it may be beneficial for the groups in conversation to be in homeostasis. If a system is in homeostasis, this implies that the participants are likely to function effectively under the following two circumstances. Firstly, effective functioning may be encouraged by the participants' acceptance of new forms of interaction brought by other participants within the group. These new forms of interaction may be different from the forms with which the participants are familiar. Secondly, the participants could function effectively by retaining their individual forms of interaction with which they are familiar.

#### **b) Community**

The writer considers the participants of this research process to be a community, as viewed through the lenses of social construction. Borrowing from the systems theory, this community could be called a system (Visser & Moleko, 2003). The participants therefore come together with a common goal in mind to participate in the conversation of interest, and therefore could be considered to be a system or community (Dalton, Elias & Wandermans,

2001). They carry with them thoughts, feelings and conversations of previous engagements in other contexts outside the context of concern (Dalton, Elias & Wandermans, 2001).

The participants could therefore derive guidelines of interaction which might be informed by other systems so that as a community they might be able to function as a focus group. The boundaries they establish could imply that, as participants negotiate guidelines of interaction with one another, their openness to each other's thoughts, feelings and previous knowledge could create a group discussion that is beneficial to the current study. However, it is wise to be aware that a too permeable boundary suggests instability because it might invite information that is unclear, as well as having the capacity to invite conflict that could be dysfunctional for the system (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). At the same time, too rigid boundaries might limit effective and efficient group interaction which might limit or thin out the information shared by the participants. The community (participants) as a system or group of people in the same context (research context) may therefore negotiate principles which will guide their interaction, which may be called a communal artifact. In the next section the researcher discusses how the community could enter the process of creating a communal artifact and how the process facilitates the functioning of the groups as systems so as to facilitate effective and efficient functioning.

### **c) Communal artifact**

In the view of social constructionism, discourse with regards to the world occurs as an artifact of communal interchange (Gergen, 1985). This interchange presents itself as an active cooperation of people in relationship. The social processes include communication, negotiation, and conflict (Gergen, 1985), which all seem to be centred by language.

'Communal artifact' therefore refers to a social process whereby people engage in a process of knowledge interchange, and negotiation of concepts, to approve them as reality for the concerned community and conflict in order

to reach homeostasis (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1985 & Hoffman, 1990). In the process of constructing the communal artifact; there appears to be processes that occur that maintain the dominant narratives. These processes suggest and guide the norms to be lived by within a context / culture (Lips, 2006). These norms seem to facilitate the balance and stabilisation of systems, namely their homeostasis (Visser & Moleko, 2003). When challenged, these processes may alter, depending on the openness of the system to change, as well as the negotiation processes entered into (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007).

Systems, or rather in this case the research communities, therefore enter into a process of devising a communal artifact in order to describe their experiences (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). The said process includes a procedure to build vocabulary and words pertaining to the system's reality in order to describe their experiences (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). The process entered into appears to include four different stops along the path, namely typification, institutionalization, legitimation and reification. These four stops will be discussed below.

Typification refers to a process through which participants could set their perceptions about the research questions into types or rather categories (Freedman & Combs, 1996). According to some writers, people most likely accept the types that their family, friends, community, and so forth, perceive as being real, which the participants might also do (Gergen, 1985). As perceptions are typified, the sets of typifications bring about institutions in a process of institutionalisation (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Institutionalisation helps systems to maintain and distribute the knowledge of typification (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Institutions can refer to political institutions, cultural frames and family systems (Freedman & Combs, 1996). According to Foucault (1990), each institution employs a discourse about sex, which becomes evident in the way its members think about it, talk about it, etcetera. Therefore, institutionalisation could include the participants' descriptions of their experiences according to that which they had learnt from family, their cultural beliefs, etcetera, prior to the current conversation.

Foucault (1990) also suggests that during the unfolding of history, sexuality became the responsibility of the family.

The family, as a system, therefore defined sexuality and confined it within the boundaries of reproduction. The researcher mentions the latter as an example of how the family as a system may be able to construct a script about a certain social construct by means of institutionalisation. From this example, one would expect the participants to be embarrassed to talk about sex or to define their identity according to the definition given by their family. On the other hand, since this research is aimed at considering multiple realities the reader is encouraged to keep an open mind and consider the reality or different realities held by the participants. While the participant may have a need to maintain homeostasis in terms of the view she inherits from her family system, she may also be involved in a process of securing homeostasis in the system involved in the research process (i.e. focus group and university context).

Legitimation is the next step, the third step in the process of evolving a communal artifact or procedure to build vocabulary so as to describe experiences. Legitimation seems to afford merit to institutionalisation (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Legitimation seems to therefore allow societies or groups of people to take possession of their own reality by creating words to describe their experiences (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). The participants might therefore raise and bring institutional knowledge into the current conversation since the knowledge would have been endorsed by the systems which they regard as being important and significant in their lives (Freedman & Combs, 1996).

A group of people then construct a meaning by defining the words from the aforementioned processes into a specific concept by means of reification (Gergen, 1985). The participants would therefore listen to one another's description of his / her experiences and make sense of the words used in the current conversation in a manner that is specific to the current context (Burr, 2003).

Social constructionism is therefore interested in uncovering ways in which individuals and / or groups participate in creating their perceived social reality (Lowe, 1991). The reality is viewed as an ongoing, dynamic process (Hoffman, 1990). The reproduction of reality is achieved by people acting on their interpretations and their knowledge of reality (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). Therefore, reality or the manner in which people view the world and that which is in it, as well as what happens in it, is constructed by culture and / or society (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007).

## **2.5 In a nutshell**

Social constructionism as a genre assists this research process to acknowledge multiple realities as well as the importance of language in the construction of meaning and reality. This text thus recognises the importance of the communal artifact where discourse is central in the formation of knowledge. Language is appreciated as a tool in a social process. The dominant narrative of social contexts is therefore taken into account by this text. The social construction of young women's identity and sexual decisions is therefore acknowledged to occur in multiple realities in the midst of the discourses that occur in the culture and context in which they live. Sexual decision making may therefore represent a different experience for each young woman, while a dominant narrative could exist for the young women.

## CHAPTER 3: YOUNG WOMEN AND SEXUALITY

### 3.1 The ushering

The three questions of this research include questions regarding the social construction of young women's identity, young women's sexual identity and the sexual decisions young women make. This chapter addresses these three areas of interest while also highlighting the discussions of existing literature relevant to this research.

The literature consulted mostly relates to the field of behavioural studies, mainly psychology. Studies in other fields in the humanities such as social work, sociology, philosophy and political sciences have also been consulted. The writer encourages the reader to read these accounts of previous research contained in this chapter bearing in mind the theoretical lenses guiding the current research process. These social constructionist lenses were discussed in the previous chapter. Congruent with social constructionist ideas, the writer reminds the reader that the accounts contained in this chapter pose as that which the researcher found to be apparently relevant resources that suggest answers to the questions asked.

The theorists' work as well as the concepts of previous studies discussed in this chapter represent different voices existing in the world of research which speak to the research topic. Since social constructionism is open to multiple realities, as noted in the previous chapter, the researcher listens to the different views of other researchers concerning the topic.

The conversation of this text begins by providing a focus on the social construction of young women's identity, where identity refers to the manner in which they understand themselves. The first section of this chapter discusses their socialisation and formation of identity as part of the discussion on social construction of their identity. Socialisation is discussed in terms of primary and secondary socialisation and how this informs the formation of identity. In order

to take hold of the theoretical concepts discussed in the previous chapter, the researcher discusses identity development from the systems theory perspective by exploring such development according to Bowen's family systems theory with a specific focus on self-differentiation. Bowen (1913-1990) is a family therapist who developed a theory by making interventions in his family of origin (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). His study has been recognised as a multi-generational study / theory which highlights the importance of individuals differentiating themselves from their family of origin (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). This theory exhibits a holistic nature because it considers the functioning of the individual in relation to the system, as well as her / his emotional and intellectual functioning (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; Levant, 1984).

The second section of the chapter includes a discussion on gender and gender roles. Gilligan (1982) and Judith Butler (1999) facilitate most of the conversation on gender and gender roles. The researcher acknowledges both Butler (1999) and Gilligan (1982) as they have both succeeded in imparting focus to women's issues in research.

Judith Butler (1999) is a feminist who has written about sexuality and gender from a social constructionist point of view. The researcher wishes to point out to the reader that although Judith Butler seems to be committed to feminism and her views may be labelled as coming from a feminist point of view, the researcher by no means takes the feminist position. The researcher acknowledges the work of Judith Butler (1999) as she seems to be a writer who has somehow been able to explore the interests of this study to a degree that warrants her acknowledgement in it. She assists this research to position itself and its interest in the frame of social constructionism in terms of sexuality and gender. The work of Judith Butler is also worth acknowledgement as it has been informed by Michel Foucault. Other researchers such as Friedman (2006), Lips (2005) and Matlin (2000) who accord a keen focus to sexuality from a social constructionist point of view are also consulted.

Gilligan (1982) on the other hand is a female researcher who further investigated moral development in order to render it relevant to the voice of a female. Her position is considered to be gender-sensitive rather than feminist (Gilligan, 1982) and therefore seems to be a preferred position for the current research. Gilligan's work (1982) appears to constitute a dominant narrative in the research of women concerning the bringing of the voice of a woman into psychological theory (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). Gilligan's contribution to such theory provides a more focused description of the different experiences of females by highlighting and suggesting the unique ways in which females might experience moral development. She offers a description of the possible psychological process which may be involved in the development of identity of young women. The description furnished by Gilligan's work may also inform the current study as to how the possible psychological processes may inform or effect young women in their gender roles within society or a social context.

The conversation is taken a step further by exploring sexual identity where the interest is focused on how young women understand themselves in terms of sexuality. Previous studies carried out on sexuality by various researchers, including both males and females, such as Giles (2006), Simon & Gagnon (2003) as well as Halperin (1999), Lear (1995), Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya (2005), are explored. The views found in the latter mentioned previous studies are those which the researcher has been able to find during the research process and which were able to inform her study. These views are therefore by no means preferred over others except in situations where the researcher felt that they would add the most value to this study. These accounts also therefore do not pose as the absolute truth.

The understanding gained previous research explored during the research process was further used to investigate the sexual decisions young women make. Issues such as the sexual script (Giles, 2006; Simon & Gagnon, 2003), acculturation, socialisation as it informs sexual decisions, sex negotiation and so forth are explored in this final section.

## **3.2 Socialisation and the formation of identity**

Socialisation, according to the literature, is a process by which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and character traits that enable them to participate as effective members of a group (Berns, 2001). Socialisation allows an individual to exist harmoniously within a social group (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007). This is pursued by the acquisition of relevant values, attitudes and habits (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). Processes such as typification, institutionalisation, legitimation and reification, which have been discussed in the previous chapter, serve as red flags for the acceptance or rejection of ways in which to behave in a particular context (Freedman & Combs, 1996). The existence of shared metaphors in a system therefore implies the acceptance of certain ideas among a group of people as well as the rejection of others so as to maintain homeostasis (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004; Visser & Moleko, 2003).

### **3.2.1 Primary and secondary socialisation**

The process of socialisation begins in childhood and is termed primary socialisation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Lips, 2006). During this time, significant others (parents or guardians) impose themselves on the child and appear to be in charge of the child's socialisation (Baron & Byrne, 2003). Significant others furthermore mediate the world and select aspects of it that pertain to their social structure (Berns, 2001). During primary socialisation the child creates an emotional attachment that allows for the internalisation of the roles and attitudes of significant others, such that the 'female role' is acquired for girls and the 'male role' for boys (Lips, 2006). Through the process of internalisation, behaviour that has been controlled externally shifts to become internally or self controlled behaviour (Berns, 2001). The latter implies that the child obeys that which she is told by significant others (people external to herself) repeatedly to the point where the repeated behaviour becomes conduct that the child will exercise of her own free-will. Successful

internalisation of the system's appropriate behaviours contributes to the maintenance of the system's homeostasis and narrative (Matlin, 2000).

Following primary socialisation, secondary socialisation occurs (Sternberg, 1997). Secondary socialisation is expected to occur during the adolescent years (during high school and university) (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). During secondary socialisation, a conversation occurs amongst the peer group of the adolescent (Sternberg, 1997). During this conversation, the adolescent evaluates and explores which of the internalised values and beliefs seem to appeal to the peer system (school or university community). The exploration and evaluation of internalised values and beliefs also facilitates a sense of belonging for the adolescent (Berns, 2001). In this process the adolescent is faced with acquiring his / her own values and beliefs because the process challenges the adolescent to find that which works in the individual system, as well as being able to maintain interactional homeostasis within the peer group (Bartle-Haring, 1997).

### **3.2.2 Bowen's family system theory**

Bowen's (1978) family system theory provides a way of thinking about emotional and social functioning with reference beyond the individual taking a position that is inclusive of the family of origin (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). This model is used to examine ways that individuals might project emotional difficulties onto others (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Charles, 2001). The central premise of the theory is that it is important for individuals to resolve all emotional issues with the family of origin before they can become mature and healthy people (Charles, 2001). Furthermore, according to Bowen's family system theory, resolving all emotional issues with the family of origin is recognised as being important, rather than rejecting the emotional issues or passively accepting them (Charles, 2001).

The researcher prefers to focus on self-differentiation in the discussion of Bowen's work in this text. Exploring the concept could assist in gaining an

understanding of an individual male or female within a system, that is, in the family and in society. The writer takes a keen interest in Bowen's work, working from the assumption that, following socialisation, one might feel a need to self-differentiate. The need to self-differentiate could be motivated by the need to resolve the family of origin's emotional issues so as to reach homeostasis on the individual system level. This need could occur and be catered for during the social construction of identity.

Differentiation, as described by Bowen, refers to the extent to which an individual can distinguish between emotional and intellectual functioning (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Previous research has described emotional functioning as being regulated by the emotional system (Levant, 1984). This system includes emotions, behavioural patterns that are associated with emotions, as well as the automatic functions that are governed by the autonomic nervous system, such as the fight / flight reaction. The intellectual system is described as consisting of cognitive processes that have to do with planning. Intellectual functioning is also associated with actions based on what feels right or comfortable in response to the reactions of others (Carter, 1989). According to other researchers, the feeling system is finally described as the link between the emotional system and the intellectual one (Levant, 1984). The feeling system includes the emotional states that are in conscious awareness (Levant, 1984). Bowen's theory therefore encourages individuals not to be driven by emotions that they do not understand but rather to allow an interaction between their emotional and intellectual functioning as respective systems (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004).

The lesser the degree to which an individual is entangled with the emotional processes of the family of origin, the more successful she or he will be in reaching differentiation (Levant, 1984). Bowen believes that the achievement of balance between connectedness to the family, as well as that of gaining autonomy, is essential for the successful functioning of an individual outside the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). This homeostasis allows one to victoriously voice one's views without causing a dysfunctional conflict in the system in which one is operating. One is therefore able to remain true to one's

own desires, goals and views without putting in effort to avoid disapproval or gain acceptance (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999).

In the same breath, Bowen's description of differentiation alludes to a sense of self-knowledge and self-definition which does not depend on the acceptance or approval of others (Carter, 1989; Charles, 2001). This situation is exhibited by the ability to balance thinking and feeling where one adheres to personal convictions as well as expressing emotions that are initiated by individuals themselves (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). Other research further suggests that the ability of the family to accommodate intimacy and difference is essential in the interpersonal functioning of the family member outside the family (Bartle-Haring, 1997). The level of family differentiation (i.e. tolerance of difference or openness) determines the level of differentiation of self (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Carter, 1989; Charles, 2001). The extent to which this differentiation is being mastered plays a role as a gatekeeper for individuation, as well as the materialisation of identity and intimacy (Bartle-Haring, 1997). This is where one is able to balance the sense of self as a separate entity and also as being connected with the relational context (Carter, 1989). The balance seems to be necessary for change (growth) to occur in the self and in the larger system, that is, the family system and community or context in which one lives (Charles, 2001; Visser & Moleko, 2003);

Having said all this, the researcher notes that Bowen's concept of differentiation does not describe a destination at which the individuals arrive, but rather, a process of growth and maturity that is journeyed through (Carter, 1989). The researcher furthermore notes that Bowen's work could also mean something different for females. This point is congruent with other research that has identified that women could possess a tendency to be more emotional than men because they tend to be guided by factors such as socialisation (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004).

### **3.3 Gender and gender roles**

#### **3.3.1 Exploring the terms**

'Gender' is said to speak to an individual's attributes as normed by the communal artifact (Matlin, 2000). These attributes are regarded as including psychological characteristics which refer to gender roles, gender stereotypes and other social categories constructed by communities (Butler, 1999). The definition of gender according to the interest of this study is opposed to using the term gender to describe factors that explain the physiological make-up of an individual, such as those of reproduction (Matlin, 2000). According to Butler (1999), gender stems from performativity. Butler (1999) suggests, by means of this concept, that attributed or social constructs such as the ability to fall pregnant or child-bearing should not reflect a definition of femininity. She therefore rejects norms of society which distinguish between male and female (Butler, 1999). This text however, adopts a less rigid stance in this respect.

Although the researcher recognises that child bearing is not necessarily the definer of one's gender and that gender is constructed by means of social processes, her perspective also acknowledges possible scripts within society or communities which may seek to define male and female in the particular community, such as gender stereotypes. 'Gender stereotype' therefore refers to traits that are expected to be attributed to a male or female and that would distinguish the one from the other (Matlin, 2000). Lastly, 'gender role' characterises a position that a gender stereotype assigns to the behaviour of a male or female (Baron & Byrne, 2003).

#### **3.3.2 Socialisation in terms of gender roles**

Research has established that men and women are socialised differently (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Carter & McGlodrick, 2005). According to Gilligan (1982), the difference in males and females stems from factors such as social status and power. These factors, in combination with perspectives constructed

on reproductive biology principles, seem to shape the experiences of males and females as well as the relation between the genders (Gilligan, 1982). Males and females seem to be socialised differently by means of gender role and stereotype assignment (Butler, 1999; Lips, 2006). The researcher therefore takes an interest in discussing the development of females according to the theory that has explored development from a gender sensitive perspective. Gilligan's theory is discussed below in order to orientate the reader to the development of females, particularly discussing female identity and how it is conceptualised according to this theory.

### **3.3.3 Gilligan's theory of moral development**

Gilligan (1982) explored identity and moral development in early adulthood years. She studied the latter by relating the view of self and thinking about morality to experiencing moral conflict and making life choices. Some of Gilligan's input into psychology, regarding female identity, is referred to in the text to offer a theoretical perspective on the topic of interest, as well as to provide insight in terms of writing the text and relating to the participants of the research process. Gilligan's (1982) research involved college students and therefore seems relevant to the young women with which this researcher seeks to engage.

In Gilligan's work the dominant narrative is also found to be that men and women employ different approaches to forming a world view (Lacombe & Gay, 1998). While men base their decision making on respecting the rights of others, women seem to prioritise responsibility towards others (Carter, 1989). According to Gilligan (1982), it appears that the principle of an ethic of justice is primarily preferred by men while women prefer the principle of an ethic of care. The former ethic is concerned with the moral choice derived from weighing the rights of the people involved (Kroeger-Mappes, 1994). The decision that results in the least damage, to the least number of people, will be preferred. The ethic of justice appreciates that relationships stem from one's being a separate entity; therefore individuals are viewed as being

separate from each other and individualised (Kroeger-Mappes, 1994).

The principle of the ethic of care, on the other hand, is concerned with deciding on right and / or wrong actions based on a responsibility and loyalty towards individuals with whom close, solid and meaningful relationships exist (Gilligan, 1982). This principle is rooted in sustaining relationships where the individual acquires identity in being connected (Kroeger-Mappes, 1994). Gilligan suggests that young women have a tendency to think of their identity in terms of relationships (Gilligan, 1982). Therefore, the ethic of care is primarily concerned with responsibility within relationships, as well as the nurturing of relationships (Bukler, 2005).

Gilligan's (1982) work derived from the work of Erikson (1956). Erikson explores the developmental tasks of individuals and categorised the tasks according to ranges in age or life stages (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). For the adolescent and the early adult, in whom this research is interested, Erikson identified identity formation vs confusion, and intimacy resolution vs isolation, as being primary tasks respectively (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). According to Erikson (1956), an individual facing the identity formation vs confusion task explores who they are (or their identity) with the opportunity of either concluding or mastering the task or of conforming to the environment and being confused about their own identity. Furthermore, Erikson suggests that during the intimacy resolution vs isolation phase the individual's task is to define relationships, including romantic or intimate relationships, family and work relationships (Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

Previous research accounts likelihood of girl children to identify with the mother during socialisation the mother as the mother is the primary care giver and represents the preferred gender role to be internalised by the female child (Bartle-Haring, 1997, Matlin, 2000). The likelihood of the identification of females with the mother might therefore cause girls to experience intimacy as a task fused with the process of identity formation, while men are prone to adopt the tasks of identity formation and intimacy resolution as separate (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Lacombe & Gay, 1998; Matlin, 2000). The process of

self-differentiation could therefore be more complex for young women than young men (Prochaska & Norcross, 2007). According to previous research, intimacy accompanies identity for the female (Bukler, 2005; Carter, 1989; Lacombe & Gay, 1998). Gilligan further describes a female as knowing herself as she is known through her relationships with others (Gilligan, 1982). In other words, the identity of a female is conceived in relationship and intimacy (Buckler, 2005).

Gilligan inspires to unshadow the voice of the female, as she has noted the different voices with which men and women speak in their development (Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan has hence established three stages of moral development, namely, the pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional stages, in her discussion of the development of the female (Gilligan, 1982). According to Gilligan, the female child starts out by solely taking care of her own needs (Gilligan, 1982). This stage is termed the pre-conventional stage (Gilligan, 1982). The female thereafter progresses to the conventional stage (Gilligan, 1982). The transitions, according to literature, are fuelled by the changes in her sense of self (Kroeger-Mappes, 1994). In the conventional stage, the female child learns to act according to the needs of others, so much so that she is capable of disregarding her own interests in order to satisfy others (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). The goal of the conventional stage is to reach a point where self-sacrifice is perceived as goodness (Gilligan, 1982).

Later, in the post-conventional stage, the female learns about the dysfunctional outcomes of disregarding her own needs (Gilligan, 1982). As she experiences differentiation (Charles, 2001), she acquires the understanding that connection in relationships is distorted when she disregards her own needs (Lacombe & Gay, 1998). During the third stage, this awareness is brought into existence stemming from the desire to be intimate with or close to another person (Bukler, 2005). The latter occurs while the female experiences a transition from the idea of goodness to the idea that is the truth is that she too is a person.

A female in the post-conventional stage of moral development seems to be aware that one is still left with conflict regardless of the choice one makes (Gilligan, 1982). During the last phase of Gilligan's moral development theory; the post conventional stage, the individual is encouraged to accept responsibility for her own decisions (Gilligan, 1982). In this stage, the young woman realises that she does not necessarily have to be the one who is hurt after making the decision to be moral (Charles, 2001). The essence of moral decision making, according to Gilligan, is to exercise choice and willingness to accept responsibility for that choice (Gilligan, 1982).

Gilligan (1982) identifies the conflict that a female experiences as the challenge to disentangle her voice from others and to find language that represents her experiences of relationships and her sense of herself. Gilligan terms this challenge as the crisis of identity vs. the crisis of moral belief (Gilligan, 1982). This crisis is characterised by the struggle to decide what is right for her (women making choices) and what is right for the other person (Gilligan, 1982). According to Gilligan, the concept of 'care' for females tends to be a concept that suggests self-criticism rather than self protection.

The crisis of identity vs. moral belief may be experienced as being tricky for the young woman because she tends to judge herself in terms of being able to care. She may therefore perceive herself as not having a choice, therefore excusing herself from the responsibility that choice entails (Gilligan, 1982). The female's predicament appears to be a paradox. On the one hand she is socialised in the ethic of care where resolution of conflict is communication aimed at sustaining the relationship (Charles, 2001; Kroeger-Mappes, 1994; Matlin, 2000). On the other hand she is taught to be submissive and care for the male (Kigozi, 2006; Maxwell, 2006).

### **3.4 Young women's identity**

#### **3.4.1 Identity through social constructionist lenses**

According to social constructionism, identity seems to be acquired through the

exploration of inherited quality such as genetic and physiological attributes, the influence of family and community, as well as the embracing of the individual quality of the person (Halperin, 1989). The individual possesses the freedom to conduct a dialogue about the prescriptions of the traditional norm (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998). Social constructionism therefore opens a door to multiple realities and allows the individual to explore outside that which appears to be essentially natural in terms of the traditional norm (Butler, 1999; Halperin, 1989; Matlin, 2000). Social constructionist ideas therefore allow the individual to debate and question the teachings of her socialisation. The multiple realities, moreover, allow the individual room to explore the gender role further than that given by socialisation, within the limits of maintaining homeostasis in the system in which the individual lives. The work of Gilligan also indicates the expected processes of development which, according to social constructionism, could occur as facilitated by the discourse and social interaction within which the female lives.

Social constructionism, therefore, opens a door to diversity by recognising that, although women are similar, they are different (Matlin, 2000). The latter point thus represents the value of exploring the similarities and differences in women's experiences in the endeavour to understand the social construction of women's identity and sexual decisions.

According to various resources the dominant narrative recites that women appear to be different from one another (Lips, 2005). This diversity stems from life choices, personalities, their upbringing and their response to biological events (Baron & Byrne, 2003). The differences women experience in response to biological events appear to be particularly interesting since expectations of women as 'women' have been placed on them according to their biological constitution (Matlin, 2000). The latter continues to affirm the challenge women face in being linked to the confinement constructed by the traditional norm. Furthermore, the expected behaviour placed on women could be informed by processes discussed above, such as socialisation and gender role assignment.

### **3.4.2 Young women's identity and socialisation**

Since the primary caregiver in the early years of development is predominantly a female, girls tend to identify with the mother and expectations placed on her development appear to be narrowed into the norm of female behaviour (Butler, 1999; Carter & McGoldrick, 2005; Gilligan, 1982). Although autonomy and attachment are functional goals in adulthood, each gender seems to be taught to pursue a specific goal according to its gender, such as men who pursue identity in self-expression where women seem to be socialised to pursue self-sacrifice in resolving identity issues (Bartle-Haring, 1997, Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Gilligan (1982) thus emphasises that there is not necessarily a single mould of social experience and interpretation that follows. Social experience and interpretation of social experience might rather involve a more complex endeavour of ongoing separation and attachment in the lives of men and women since they pursue different social goals in their achievement of developmental tasks (Gilligan, 1982).

Furthermore, it seems that society views females as being selfish when defining their own values or viewpoints that differ from their association with the community within which they live (Carter & McGoldrick, 1999). It appears that it is anticipated that females endure their needs at the expense of the needs of other (Lacombe & Gay, 1998). It seems that females are thus predominantly socialised to emphasise solidarity, community and caring about relationships which are experienced as being solid and distinct (Gilligan, 1982).

## **3.5 Young women's sexual identity (sexuality)**

### **3.5.1 Sexuality through lenses of social constructionism**

Social constructionism perceives a multiplicity in the so called definition of sexuality. Because the present text is written with a view through social constructionism lenses, one should imagine the indefiniteness of the word

sexuality. As social constructionism embraces multiple realities, the differences found in the meanings of the word sexuality are dependent on the degree to which culture is perceived to produce sexuality (Blackwood, 2000; Breakwell & Millward, 1997). The meaning of this word is reliant on the context in which it is used and experienced (Simon & Gagnon, 2003) since it takes its shape from its social character (Butler, 1999; Giles, 2006).

Michel Foucault (1990) has suggested in his famous work *History of Sexuality* that sexuality seems to be a means of producing power relations between people such as men and women, young people and old and so on. He further views sexuality as a historical construct rather than a natural one. According to Foucault (1990), sexuality would hence be constructed in the context of the history and society within which one exists. The construction may be characterised by the relations of power produced by sexuality. The position that one adopts in terms of the relations of power produced by sexuality may therefore facilitate a construction of identity and especially of sexual identity (Foucault, 1990).

According to Butler (1999), sexuality concerns power in a society. She therefore rejects all sexual norms of any society and proposes that one's sexuality cannot be taken for granted according to what seems to be natural. She feels strongly that one is not born a woman or man but grows into being one, because the behaviour that defines their maleness or femaleness is produced by their social context. Simon & Gagnon (1986) fundamentally concur with Butler (1999) and use the concept of a sexual script stemming from scripting theory which has been discussed in the previous chapter to offer their perspective on sexuality.

Sexual scripts elaborate on how sexuality is directed by the social context and indicate how that direction therefore produces sexual behaviour (Giles 2006). The latter is discussed at a later stage in this text when the researcher seeks to thicken the story of sexuality. Simon & Gagnon (1986) make use of the scripting theory to explain that a social context utilises institutionalisation, legitimation and reification to compose metaphors that would hold as

representations of acceptable perceptions to define sexuality. These perceptions will in turn give direction in terms of permitted or forbidden sexual acts, which will thereby speak of one's understanding of self as a sexual being or of one's sexual identity (Giles, 2006).

The central concept of social constructionism regarding sexual identity and behaviour, therefore, is that these are culturally produced phenomena or socially constructed constructs (Butler, 1999; Giles, 2006; Simon & Gagnon, 2003). This suggestion seeks to regard sexuality as being more than a biological construct which focuses only on the physical development of young women (Butler, 1999; Giles, 2006). Social constructionism therefore acknowledges sexuality to be a product of social interaction with particular desires, meanings and behaviour constructed by culture (Blackwood, 2006). It is furthermore acknowledged that a culturally produced / socially constructed meaning of sexuality could prescribe how people ought to feel and behave (Halperin, 1989; Sternberg, 1997). The latter therefore endorses power relations and inequalities (Halperin, 1989), which the researcher is interested in investigating. On the other hand, social constructionism also acknowledges that, while culture tends to shape sexuality, it considers the 'natural' desire for sex as the baseline of the cultural shaping process (Blackwood, 2006; Giles, 2006). It is therefore safe to say that, since meaning is fluid and continually open to change through the medium of language, different manifestations of sexuality are evident in the different eras of culture as well as in different contexts (Giles, 2006, Halperin, 1989).

Previous research also concurs that sexual identity refers to an individual's view of themselves in terms of their sexuality, or rather, as a sexual being (Breakwell & Millward, 1997). This view takes its shape in accordance with the socially shared construction of reality (Friedman, 2006). The experience of females found in previous research accounts suggests that the sexual identity of women seems to go hand in hand with traditional ideas of femininity (Lips, 2006). These traditional ideas represent relationship-centredness and ideas of romance and passion as being important aspects of sexuality (Hoggard, 2006; Maxwell, 2006). These ideas further include the responsibility for, initiative

regarding and control of preventative and protective measures involved in sexual engagement as being the duty of the woman (Leigh, 1989).

The socialisation of the female in terms of sexuality is thought not to necessarily be about sexuality but, rather, focused on the boundaries of femininity (Breakwell & Millward, 1997), suggesting the interrelatedness of femininity, sexuality and sexual orientation (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). The female thus incorporates female identity into sexual identity, which could limit the exploration of her sexual identity (Lear, 1995). According to that which the writer has been able to identify in the literature, the dominant discourse in literature concerning perceptions of sexuality includes the idea that to be feminine and sexual is a contradiction in many cultures (Breakwell & Millward, 1997).

### **3.5.2 Accounts of previous research on the meaning of sexuality to young women**

The female sexual identity appears to be informed by the meaning of sex and sexuality that the woman possesses (Blackwood, 2000; Halperin, 1989). Researchers have documented that the meaning of sex may be closely linked to the young women's first experience of sexual intercourse (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). Furthermore, the narrative composed at this first encounter seems to carry significance for the meaning given to sex by young women. The experience may be a planned event, an out of the blue encounter, anticipated but not wanted, amongst others (Mitchell & Wellings, 1998). Depending on the meaning acquired at the initial sexual experience together with the scripts with which one is in contact, the young woman creates her meaning of sex (Halperin, 1989; Lacasse & Mendelson, 2007).

Previous research indicates that sexuality is closely linked with identity resolution (Bancroft, 2008). Since females may associate sexuality or the expression of themselves as sexual beings with the act of sex, which they may further associate with giving care or intimacy, sexual exploration or

sexual identity may be fused with intimacy (Blackwood, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). As suggested by Gilligan, the possibility of the fused relationship between identity and intimacy for females could cause the development of identity and intimacy to occur simultaneously (Gilligan, 1982). The latter could cause conflict within the young woman when faced with a sexual decision.

### **3.6 Sexual decisions**

#### **3.6.1 Sex in the context of this text**

Sex is described as a physical act that has symbolic meaning manifesting through verbal and non-verbal communication (Lear, 1995). Sex could also describe factors that refer to the physiological make up of an individual, such as those which are involved in reproduction (DeLamter & Hyde, 1998). Sex is furthermore also used as a term to refer to sexual intercourse (Lear, 1995), which is mostly how it is used in this text, while considering that previous research might also refer to affectionate acts such as hugging, kissing, holding hands etcetera as sex (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000).

#### **3.6.2 Sexual script**

As indicated above, sexual scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1986), stemming from scripting theory, seem to inform sexual decisions. Sexual scripts appear to elaborate on how culture (social context) informs sexual behaviour (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). As indicated earlier, as people commune together, they use language to provide an understanding and creation of reality (Van Vlaenderen, 2004). Therefore, according to social constructionism, sexual decision making might involve communal interaction and conversation. Language functions as a means to communicate the reality experienced and to sift out behaviour that is acceptable in the specific context and that which is not (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007).

According to Simon and Gagnon (1986), sexual scripts are said to be a repertoire of acts and statutes that are recognised by the social group (Laws & Schwartz, 1977). These also include rules, expectations and sanctions according to the boundaries of social roles (Irvine, 2003; Laws & Schwartz, 1977). Sexual scripts therefore offer vocabulary and language to refer to terms related to sexuality and provide a means to communicate about sexuality (Giles, 2006; Laws & Schwartz, 1977). Script writing occurs in the integration and interplay of cultural scenarios, interpersonal and intrapersonal scripts (Irvine, 2003) which a young woman might use to construct a sexual decision. Cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts and intrapersonal scripts will be discussed below to communicate some ways in which a sexual script might inform sexual decisions.

#### **a) Cultural scenarios**

According to scripting theory, cultural scenarios are collective patterns that specify appropriate sexual goals, objects and relationships (Giles, 2006). These sexual goals, objects and relationships are culturally specific guidelines regarding how, when, where, why and with whom to be sexual (Irvine, 2003). Cultural scenarios are thus institutional guides that exist at the level of collective life (Giles, 2006) which could include the micro and mesosystems of community systems.

Cultural scenarios in the microsystem, for example, could correspond with the suggestions of certain research studies. These suggestions include that the family dynamics, family structure, levels of education and income, family values, amongst others, seem prone to influence the young person in terms of the symbolic context (Kirby, 2001). 'Symbolic context' partially refers to young people's understanding of age and gender appropriate sexual behavior (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiyi, 2005). With regards to symbolic context, previous research suggests that single-parent families seem to experience difficulty in providing parental guidance where sexuality is

concerned (Meekers & Ahmed, 2002). Furthermore, the researcher infers that the young person's emotional stability, characteristics of the relationship with the boyfriend, their hormone levels, perceptions of sexual behaviour, skills, motivation to have or not have sex appear to play a role in the sexual script pertaining to the symbolic context (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000).

Furthermore, cultural scenarios can exist as organisational networks (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya, 2005; Giles, 2006). These networks include non-governmental organisations, health, welfare and education representatives as well as local and community leaders and groups (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Organisational networks, as part of the macro, meso and exosystems, are able to debate issues while making an impression on the individual (Proschaska & Norcross, 2007). These debates, depending on the system of influence, are able to shape the realities experienced by individuals to varying degrees (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007). At community level, research has suggested that levels of income, employment rate, crime levels, the organisation or disorganisation of the community, etcetera, seem to be key persuasions as regards sexual behaviour (Kirby, 2001). According to previous research, conversations concerning women's sexual desire, engagement, pleasure, and so forth, are excluded from the sex education curricula while, on the other hand, this conversation is included in the reality of the women's life (Lear, 1995). Furthermore, according to research, the missing discourse from the health, welfare and education networks, as well as the experience of sexual conversations with parents, seem to encourage the fear and shame approach to sexuality for the female (Boyd, 1989; Lear, 1995; Richer, Norris, Ginsburg, 2006).

#### **b) Interpersonal scripts**

Since cultural scenarios provide guidelines, the individual might find it necessary to compose decision making guidelines which would seem individually specific at any given time. Such guidelines are termed interpersonal scripts by scripting theory (Simon & Gagnon, 2003).

Interpersonal scripts pertaining to sexual activity characterise patterns of integration that allow people to function in sexual situations (Irvine, 2003). Individual scripts of sexual situations are constructed from the compositions people create as they apply their knowledge to the different situations presented to them (Giles, 2006). These compositions are created as individuals incorporate the guidelines of cultural scenarios to their specific situations (Giles, 2006).

### **c) Intrapersonal scripts**

It however remains possible that interpersonal scripts might not be sufficient to resolve a certain sexual situation; in this instance, an individual turns to intrapersonal scripts (Giles, 2006). Such a script includes the internal conversation that gives rise to the clearly differentiated personal description of the self, as well as one's own private world of wishes, fantasies and desires (Giles, 2006). These are experienced as originating in the deepest self which is bound to social life (Simon & Gargon, 2003). In terms of the text concerned, the intrapersonal script might serve as a script of interest since the writer is interested in the individual experience and private conversations which individual females have with themselves that shape their sexual decisions.

The intrapersonal script manifests itself in a variety of ways. Young women, at times, might depend on sexual partners for gifts, money or clothing (Richter, Norris & Ginsburg, 2006). This might occur in the case of someone experiencing poverty or also as a means to gain approval or worth from peers and sexual partners (Meekers & Ahmed, 2002). The latter is taken into consideration because it is acknowledged that the young women being considered in this research experience peer approval, as well as intimacy as an important task in development (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). Therefore, the young women might be drawn to sexual engagement as a means to maintain homeostasis in the individual system as well as in the peer group (Maxwell, 2006).

Previous research acknowledges that the sexual exploration which takes place in the developmental period of the young women in which the researcher is interested, can be considered beneficial for growth, including the resolution of identity formation and intimacy (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000). These researchers continue to describe the idea that the integration of intimacy and sexual expression has been noted as a central developmental task in an adolescent and young adult's life (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000). Other researchers have further noted that sexual exploration by girls is essential for the formation and / or the exploration of identity (Bartle-Haring, 1997; Lacombe & Gay, 1998; Matlin, 2000).

In addition, the scripted refusal represents the narrative that expects the female to initially turn sex down yet agree at a later stage (Lear, 1995). Hence, the man takes the refusal of sex as a scripted formality and is prone to not taking her seriously (Eaton, Flisher, Aaro, 2003). The woman is hence confronted with pressure to make the sexual decision until she agrees to the expectation to please the man (Maxwell, 2006).

### **3.6.3 Socialisation and sexual decision making**

While sexual exploration taking place in the context of a romantic relationship is regarded as being normative, young women seem to experience double-bound scripts or conflicting information from systems around them regarding sex. It has been noted earlier in the text that the social construction of sex is theorized as beginning in primary socialisation (Maxwell, 2006). Young women in most cultures during childhood in the process of primary socialisation are taught that what the man says is definite (Breakwell & Millward, 1997). Young men are socialised to prioritise sexual engagement and hence tend to require sex in romantic relationships with young women (Breakwell & Millward, 1997). The traditional sexual script assigns men the role of initiating sex, while women are given the role to be gatekeepers of sexual intimacy (Krahè, Bieneck & Scheinberger-Olwig, 2007). Some authors

refer to this role of women as virgin protectors (Lear, 1995). The discourse of 'virgin protector' encourages young women to be decision makers regarding whether sex will occur or not (Lear, 1995). Sexual exploration, or rather the experience of young women as sexual beings, is thus limited since they are socialised to be gatekeepers and virgin protectors (Lear, 1995).

Young girls are furthermore taught, particularly by their mothers, that sex is an act of shame and danger (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane, & Sibiya, 2005). The focus of this narrative is mostly placed on avoiding pregnancy in adolescence and early adulthood (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000; Leigh, 1989). In addition, young women are socialised to be submissive and caring towards men (Kigozi, 2006). The overall gender norm therefore leaves young women experiencing sexual pressure, as well as feelings of obligation to ensure the success of the romantic relationship (Maxwell, 2006). Furthermore, they take on the emotional responsibility of the relationship, for example, by holding guilt feelings when not having satisfied the man (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya, 2005). Young women may moreover assign greater importance to the partner's needs than their own and are therefore drawn to unwanted sexual activity (Maxwell, 2006). Women are furthermore perceived to have sexual encounters function as a means to establish the relationship as well as a way to retain the relationship with the man (Brooks & Edwards, 1997; Hoggart, 2006). Consequently, the virgin protector narrative could raise conflict within the young woman in a dating context when confronted with issues of being submissive and caring for the male.

Furthermore, included in the double-bound script is the narrative that sexuality promotes love and romance, possibly pleasure and freedom (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). Ambivalently, this narrative also communicates that sexuality is the ticket to unwanted pregnancy, loss of reputation, the bondage of caring for an infant, etcetera (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). The writer therefore deduces that the latter might therefore confuse young women while attempting to establish a relatively stable sexual identity.

With the beliefs that are anchored in socialisation, the young women could

face further struggles in making sexual decisions. The female's sexual decision seems to be linked to her identity, intimacy issues, morality as well as to issues of feeling included and accepted by the peer group (Gilligan, 1982; Kigozi, 2006; Maxwell, 2006).

#### **3.6.4 Acculturation and sexual decisions**

Acculturation is described as a process incorporating the interaction of different cultures as they are in contact with each other (Schwartz & Montgomery, 2002). The cultures experience adaptation to each other while also experiencing change (Rosenberg, 2002). The young people discussed in this study with regards to this topic, experience acculturation since they spend a significant amount of time at university. They are thus exposed to people of different cultures, necessarily holding various ideas and constructions about identity as a young woman and about sexuality. The young person therefore enters a process of adaptation to the new culture of university and might experience some anxiety or ambivalence concerning the current topic (Meekers & Ahmed, 2000). This becomes apparent as the ideas of family, peers, media may conflict with her own perceptions (Meekers & Ahmed, 2000).

Previous research conducted in the Tswana community in Botswana suggests an alteration in female sexual behaviour following contact with the western culture (Meekers & Ahmed, 2000). The same research speaks of an increase of permissiveness as regards sex by females (Meekers & Ahmed, 2000). The alterations spoken of testify to an adapted concept of sexuality. The alterations in the concept of sexuality, theorised as being constructed in the experience of acculturation, define sex in the context of romantic love and regard a sexual decision as an individual challenge. The latter appears to be opposed to waiting for a marriage to be arranged by the family of the female, which would render the sexual decision a community endeavour (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003). Acculturation could also play part in the young person's need to experience open communication with her parents about sexuality

(Richer, Norris & Ginsburg, 2006). Since talking about sexuality is perceived to be a cultural taboo, the young person could be left with difficulties in sexual decision making (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003).

### **3.6.5. Sexual negotiation**

Sexual negotiation as discussed in this text includes communication about the expectations partners have of each other regarding sexuality, the liberty of an individual to experience themselves as sexual beings, as well as communication pertaining to the comfort level of one's experience of one's own sexuality. This communication furthermore includes openness about one's readiness to participate in sexual activity and freedom to make decisions in terms of protection and preventative measures.

As previously mentioned, communication plays an important role in the writing of the sexual script, as well as in the role that the actors and actresses are playing in the production of a desired narrative of the sexual experience (Lear, 1995; Mitchell & Wellings, 1998). The researcher, in agreement with previous publications, acknowledges that silence (a silent narrative) qualifies as communication and that sex can be experienced as a purely non-verbally communicated event (Brooks & Edwards 1997; Lear, 1995).

Sex education at school as well as sexual discussion in the home seems to be discussed at a superficial level (Lear, 1995). In accordance to the gender power discourse, the legitimacy of women negotiating or discussing sexuality in a romantic relationship or any context that involves sexual encounters is trivialised (Lear, 1995). Talking about sexuality in the context in which it is central is scripted to deny its passion and spontaneity (Mitchell & Welling, 1998). The script therefore conflicts with the sexual negotiation and may perpetuate the gender power discourse, the double bound narratives as well as the ambivalence and anxiety experienced by women (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiyi, 2005; Giles, 2006; Maxwell, 2006).

Previous research narrates that women have found it difficult to express their need for sex to their partners (Lear, 1995). The difficulty seems to be associated with the physical and emotional scripts about the appropriate behaviour of young women (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003). It seems desirable for young women to maintain their virginity (Lear, 1995). It is furthermore expected of a young woman not to enter into sexual negotiation as the cultural script considers it unacceptable (Mitchell & Welling, 1998). It is worth adding though, that, according to previous research, sexual negotiation depends on the level of trust established in the relationship and the level of intimacy associated with the sexuality (Lear, 1995).

### **3.6.6 Discourses associated with sexual decisions**

According to previous literature, it appears to be an accepted behavior for young men to explore their sexuality from an early age, while on the other hand it seems to be unacceptable for women to participate in a process of sexual exploration (Mitchell & Wellings, 1998). The dominant narrative pertaining to young women's sexuality seems to include the fact that the females' earliest experiences of sexual encounters are likely to take place in a dating situation (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000).

Furthermore, previous research appears to have reached a consensus that the context (where sexual decision is necessary) in which sex is most likely to occur seems to be in a romantic relationship (Montgomery & Sorell, 1998; Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000). Certain research publications discuss the 'have / hold' discourse where sexuality is only appropriate in a committed romantic relationship (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000). In this case, sexuality serves as a means to hold the partners together, so that engaging in sexual activity might also help to encourage maintaining a relationship that is deteriorating (Leigh, 1989).

In addition, sexual coercion appears to be acceptable in a dating relationship while it is not acceptable in other circumstances (Lacasse & Mendelson,

2007). The narrative of preceding research moreover communicates that coercive sex might be perceived as an indication of passion and thus acceptable (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003). Furthermore, previous research reports that girls tended to testify that it was acceptable for a male to force sex on a female who had played a role in increasing his sexual arousal (Lacasse & Mendelson, 2007; Leigh, 1989). This narrative seems to be encouraged by the discourse of rights where young men claim ownership of their sexual partners (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003). The discourse of rights appears to be supported by the social norm that the man has a right to sexual intercourse within the romantic relationship (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003).

Lastly, it is suggested in literature that there is a lack of language that speaks to women's experience of sexuality (Lear, 1995). Existing language (or the dominant narrative) of women's experience of sexuality appears to be limited to the descriptions of the traditional female role (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003; Hyde & Jaffee, 2000; Lear, 1995). Therefore, women who view themselves as being feminine are more likely to accept and identify with the social representation of sexuality prescribed by the traditional female role since deviation from the norm might not be readily explored (Brooks & Edwards, 1997). This dominant discourse of women's experience of sexuality focuses on women's disinterest in it as well as on women experiencing sexual passivity (Breakwell & Millward, 1997). The latter may imply that the initiation or desire by women to negotiate sexual engagement with their partners, as well as the practice of sexual assertiveness by women, could be limited (Breakwell & Millward, 1997; Hoggart, 2006).

### **3.7 In a nutshell**

According to theorist Michel Foucault (1990), identity and sexuality are produced in terms of power relations in society. Previous research suggests that men and women seem to be differently socialised, which could cause males and females to enter into different processes in their quest to understand themselves. According to Gilligan (1982), females tend to acquire

their identity in terms of the relationships they have with others. Social constructionism seems to nevertheless acknowledge the similarities and differences of females within themselves as women (Lips, 2005, Matlin, 2000). Previous research also recognises that males and females may be socialised differently in terms of sexual identity. As indicated earlier, Butler (1999) believes that one is not born a man or woman but grows into her or his gender, gender role and sexuality. Since sexuality is perceived to be a culturally produced construct, it could hold a different meaning from female to female (Giles, 2006). The sexual script appears to play an important role in the construction of sexual identity and behaviour (Simon & Gagnon, 2003). Previous research suggests that men and women engage in sex for different reasons (Leigh, 1989). The dominant discourse in research reports that men commonly do so for physical gratification while women are said to engage in sexuality for emotional expression (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000). The difference could occur following cultural scripts that describe and prescribe sexual activity for men and for women differently (Maxwell, 2006).

The next chapter discusses how we will hear two particular groups of young women experience the above mentioned detail. It examines the group's reality in terms of the detail discussed in this chapter as well as of the researcher's interpretation of their story. Much has been said about the topic of interest in relation to previous research. However, at this stage, the researcher would like to explore the themes identified in previous literature relating to the particular context of the participants of the current research. Having explored previous research, the researcher found no specific studies of this nature which were facilitated in the specific context of the said participants.

The researcher suggests therefore that research of this nature may firstly increase insight and knowledge of the social construction of young women's identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions within this specific context. The latter therefore could facilitate greater insight in either sexual or sexuality related programmes currently running on the campus so as to render them more context specific. In addition, research of this nature may assist in guiding the process of implementing initiatives to empower young women in

this context with regards to issues of interest to this research process. Furthermore, this research process might stimulate conversation in this research context i.e. the higher institution context, among young people which may promote enhanced informed sexual decision making with regards to the particular context.

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## **CHAPTER 4: GUIDELINES OF INQUIRY**

### **4.1 The ushering**

This chapter provides the reader with a detailed discussion of what was undertaken to obtain, capture, record and understand the stories the young women shared regarding the research topic. The discussion encompasses the aims and purpose of the research, its design, as well as a consideration of processes undertaken to facilitate the research process. These include gathering of the participants, obtaining information through various activities such as artistic expressions and focus group discussions, as well as meanings made, through discourse analysis. Further factors deployed to facilitate the research process include the ethical procedures and guidelines of the higher education institutions, the American Psychological Association and the Professional Board for Psychology (HPCSA).

### **4.2 Research purpose and aims**

The purpose of this study is to explore the social construction of young women's identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions. The research therefore aims to answer the following research questions:

- What is the social construction of young women's identity?
- What is the social construction of young women's sexual identity?
- How do young women make sexual decisions?

The research aims include gaining an understanding of processes that may be involved in the defining / making up of young women's identity and sexual identity. Furthermore, the researcher would like to acquire an understanding of what these women understand sex to be. In addition, she hopes to understand the processes which may be elicited in the making of a sexual

decision by a young woman. Moreover, the goal of the research includes exploring the reality that may be dominant when such women are confronted with sexual decisions.

### **4.3 Research design and method**

#### **4.3.1 Qualitative research approach**

The interest in carrying out this research process is centred on capturing and understanding the stories of young women pertaining to the social construction of their identity and sexual decisions. Taking these factors into consideration, the research approach that offers the best opportunity to optimally achieve the goals seemed to be that of qualitative research. Such research approaches allow for intensive contact with the participants, providing an in-depth account of the experiences of the individuals in the current research process (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). The size of the group used in the application of the qualitative research approach, facilitated the level of detail needed in terms of information gathering (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001) since the group was small (Flick, 2007). As allowed for by qualitative research approach principles, in some instances the researcher relied on her own experience as a source of information as well (Flick, 2007).

Social research can be viewed as either hypothesis-testing or hypothesis-generating research (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2002). For the purpose of this study, hypothesis generating was preferred since such research is valuable when the research is performed in an under - explored area (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya, 2005). In the hypothesis - generating research approach, one does not exactly know what one is looking for or how best to define the variables of interest (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2002). It therefore was difficult and subjective to define the variables referred to in this research process. The variables did, however, include processes involving social construction and social conversations.

In research where the sample of interest is small, it is not feasible to

generalise information obtained from the participants (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). Generalisation was thus regarded as not necessarily the goal of this research process (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). Furthermore, this text or current research did not aim to represent fixed knowledge but rather desired to open a door to further conversation. In addressing issues equivalent to concepts such as reliability and validity in this research, the writer prefers to use the terms trustworthiness and authenticity to speak of its credibility (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001; Creswell, 1994).

'Credibility of research' refers to the extent to which the researcher's interpretations of the narrative obtained are congruent with the realities constructed by the participants (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Some researchers also refer to credibility as the extent to which the research outcome is consistently found to be a relatively true and reasonable observation or interpretation by the researcher, the participants and the reader respectively (Creswell, 1994). The researcher attempted to ascertain the above mentioned by keeping the following in mind: Firstly, during the activities that involved spoken narrative, the researcher actively listened to the participants. She probed, reflected and clarified what the participants said where necessary. The researcher was also transparent about her understanding of the conversations and checked her accuracy in this respect with the participants during and after the discussion. In addition, she also recorded the details of the focus group discussion by using a voice recorder. A transcription of the recorded dialogue was typed out by the researcher. The transcription and the voice recorder audio file are valuable for the verification of information at any stage of the process, as well as at a later stage if necessary.

Although the outcomes of this research would have benefited from the participants' evaluation of the researcher's written interpretation of the conversation, which is presented in the following chapter, there was no opportunity for such an evaluation, which therefore represents a limitation to the credibility of the study. However, in another attempt to ensure credibility, the researcher read previous literature to deepen her knowledge of this topic. The accounts of what the researcher has read and what she found are

reported in the previous chapter. She used previous research to guide her thoughts about the conversations held in respect of this research, in order to be able to select themes from these.

#### ✓ 4.3.2 Narrative approach in research

The meta-paradigm which guided this research process is the narrative approach (Creswell, 2007): a qualitative research method which is rooted in social constructionism (Hiles & Čermák, 2008). In narrative research the primary data source is a narrative or a story (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). The research strategies used to collect the data obtained in narrative research are therefore employed to tell a story or a narrative (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). A narrative may refer to any piece of writing that is used in a qualitative research context (Creswell, 2007). The pieces of writing, employed in this research, included the sharing and / or exploration of the participants about themselves, their lives or experiences / particular experiences regarding the research topic (Hiles & Čermák, 2008).

In research language, narrative is a term given to a discourse in a research inquiry (Creswell, 2007). The narrative approach as a research instrument has been applied as a method of approaching the inquiry (Creswell, 2007). It seemed that the narrative approach as a tool to guide the research process would best facilitate the capturing of the stories of the participants regarding sexual experience, since it allowed for the attainment of rich, thick and deep descriptions of the their stories (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). The narrative research approach facilitated the gathering of information as stories by means of three strategies: a creative / artistic representation; the application of the nominal group technique and lastly the facilitation of the focus groups. All were used to capture parts of the stories of the two participating groups with regards to the research questions. In essence, throughout the facilitation of all three strategies the researcher was interested in the stories being told.

According to other writers, there are various ways in which the narrative

approach can be used as a research tool (Creswell, 2007; Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001; Hiles & Čermák, 2008). The researcher's interest in this particular research process lay in the stories of the personal experiences of the participants with regards to the social construction of their identity and sexual identity as mentioned above. The aim of this method was to understand the phenomenon being investigated from the inside, that is, from the perspective of the individuals participating in the study (Coyle, 2007). This involves grasping the meaning of the processes of interest as the participants experience them.

#### **4.3.3 Language in research**

Having realised that the meaning of a word is rooted in the relationship of the context in which the word exists (Freedman & Combs, 1996), it is important to note the similarity and the differences in the meanings that the young women would apply to the social construct / s in which this research is interested (Friedman, 2006). This was based on the premise that as a group, the young women may have shared similar experiences in terms of these constructs and may have employed similar language concerning them.

On the other hand, since these young women were involved in different conversations in their everyday life, it seemed fair to consider that their involvement in these may have accounted for the creation of different meanings they might have had or applied to the social constructs. As any meaning of a word is based on the context in which it exists, and because no two contexts are the same (Freedman & Combs, 1996), it seemed legitimate to say that the meaning of a word in two contexts was expected to be different. The latter implies that the researcher had an expectation for meanings of words or concepts of interest to this research to not be necessarily the same for the two focus groups which participated in this research process. Furthermore, the meanings of words or the concepts of interest to this research may also be different from the details of previous research.

#### 4.3.4 Roles and relationships

In order to obtain rich, deep and thick description from the participants, the researcher recognised that collaborating with them seemed to be important (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). This included actively involving them in the process of the focus group facilitation (Creswell, 2007). This involvement encompassed negotiation regarding the researcher-participant relationship, and discussing the role of the researcher, as well as the role of the participant (Flick, 2007), which were done at the beginning of the inquiry.

The information pertaining to the aims, goals and content of the study was made available to the participants by means of an information letter (Appendix A). The participants received the letter before participating in the research process so that their ownership could be facilitated (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). The researcher's suggestions concerning how participant ownership was to be achieved included the participants' consideration of the letter's contents and the individual decision to participate in the inquiry. The letter also included information regarding the participants' roles in the research process so that they were aware of the expectations placed on them (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). Together with the said letter, a consent letter (Appendix B) was made available where the participants indicated their voluntary participation (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001) and their understanding of and agreement to the information letter (Creswell, 2007).

The role of the researcher was informed by the researcher's own individual stance about the research topic, the research approach used, as well as the theoretical framework undergirding the research process (Creswell, 2007; Dalton, Elias & Wandermans, 2001). The role of the researcher in this case consists of both a participatory role and acting as primary research instrument (Dalton, Elias & Wandermans, 2001). In terms of having played a participatory role the researcher was part of the research situation as she did not hold an expert role, but participated in the research process equally with the participants (Hiles & Čermák, 2008; Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). Her

role as a primary research instrument included her personal interest in and assumptions made pertaining to the research questions and topic (Coyle, 2007; Creswell, 2007). This role furthermore included her reflections on the research process and its outcomes, and the encouraging of group interaction during the facilitation of the activities as well as of the researcher's self-reflectivity (Barbour, 2007, Creswell, 2007, Elliot, 2005). Self-reflectivity includes the researcher's awareness of self within the process, including the influence she might exert on the process and on the research outcomes (Elliot, 2005; Hiles & Čermák, 2008).

The role of the participants was embedded in their knowledge and understanding of the details contained in the information letter and consent form. Participants could feel free to request further details in cases where the letter did not satisfactorily offer sufficient information.

#### **4.4 Research inquiry**

##### **4.4.1 Participants and sampling**

To facilitate the research inquiry for this research process, two groups of young women were needed. Ten to fifteen undergraduate university students per group were gathered by means of a system of calling for volunteers. A small sample was appropriate as it allowed for the achievement of the greatest potential in this kind of research (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001) which included participating in focus groups. Volunteering participants were thought to accelerate the process by having had a keen interest in the topic (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2002). It also appeared easy for volunteers to gain ownership of the research process (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). Participant ownership was important to capture the gist of the research's aims.

The participants of this research were students at a South African higher education institution. The participants were young women from various

backgrounds of culture, beliefs; community contexts such as some were from urban areas, others from semi urban and others from the townships. The participants age groups range between 18 and 20. The cultural groups represented in this research process were composed of White (5 participants; 3 participants in group 1 and 2 participants in group 2), English (3 participants; 1 in group 1 and 2 in group 2) and Afrikaans speaking (2 participants; both in group 1); Black (15 participants; 11 in group 1 and 4 in group 2), SeTswana (3 participants; 1 in group 1 and 3 in group 2), Zulu (2 participants; both in group 1), Venda (1 participant; in group 1), SePedi (6 participants; all 6 in group 1) and Sotho (2 participants; 1 in group 1 and 1 in group 2) speaking groups.

The table below shows Group 1 and Group 2 participants' cultural and language groups.

	Group 1	Group2
<b><u>White</u></b>	3	2
• English	1	2
• Afrikaans	2	0
<b><u>Black</u></b>	11	4
• SeTswana	1	3
• Zulu	2	0
• Venda	1	0
• SePedi	6	0
• Sotho	1	1

The young women followed various study directions as well. Some of the participants were in the law field, while some were in accounting and finance, medical field including MBChB and physiotherapy, teaching as well as sport psychology. Two groups of participants were gathered. Group 1 was composed of 13 participants while Group 2 had 6 participants. The composition of the groups of participants is shared with the reader to assist in acknowledging where the participants come from in their backgrounds and in

their views. The researcher therefore acknowledges the diversity of these groups and takes it into account when facilitating the research process as well as in the writing of the research.

In order to maximise the functioning of the focus groups, it was thought beneficial that the members share at least one important characteristic. The characteristics shared could potentially have been that they are facing similar developmental processes, they are university students at the same university and are females. The members of the groups displayed more potential to identify with each other, as well as to share mutual understanding, than if they had not been homogeneous at the suggested levels (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). It was however useful to assign homogeneity in terms of background rather than attitude or point of view regarding a certain concept or concepts related to the topic of the research (Barbour, 2007). The main factor concerning the sampling method seemed to be the insights advanced by the participants, rather than a concern with the number of people obtained (Flick, 2007).

Participants became interested in the research after reading the information letter (Appendix A) which they received from the researcher. The prospective participants would have known of the proposed research by means of word of mouth. Before becoming part of the focus group, a prospective participant needed to submit a consent form (Appendix B) to the researcher as an acknowledgement of the research expectations listed on the information letter. A prospective participant would also have to be available for the scheduled two hours of the inquiry situation.

#### **4.4.2 Activities designed for obtaining information**

To obtain information that would supply guidance and insight into answering the questions asked in this research process, various activities were included. Previous research has acknowledged the benefit of including an appropriate variety of material in an inquiry process (Flick, 2007). It has been suggested

that a variety of material is helpful when it is different enough to cover a range of experiences or attitudes to the issue of interest (Flick, 2007). The inquiry took place in two phases. The first phase included icebreakers and an introduction, while the second incorporated a creative or artistic representation of the participants' sex stories, a nominal group technique exercise as well as a focus group discussion. The researcher met with each group once for two hours respectively to facilitate the two phases of the inquiry.

Group 1 provided valuable information that furnished an idea of possible answers to the questions the inquiry posed. To obtain thicker, richer and deeper descriptions of the reality of young women, the researcher took the decision to facilitate another focus group. Facilitating a second group, seemed to offer more potential to assist the researcher and the reader to gain further understanding of a young woman's life with regard to the issues being investigated. Group 2 also had the potential to echo or disagree with the first group, therefore advancing suggestions that might open up a reality of which the researcher and / or the reader had not been aware, or possibly had been aware of, but which could then been brought to the foreground for the first time.

Group 2 was facilitated in a similar way to Group 1, with some adjustments. Group 2 undertook the same activities with the same aims as Group 1. In Group 2, however, participants included a written narrative with their art expression. The aim of these narratives was to obtain a deeper understanding of the symbols and expressions which the participants had used than had been achieved in Group 1. The discussion below gives the reader a detailed description of the activities, which includes an explanation of what the activities entailed, the aim and rationale of the various activities and how the activities were facilitated.

#### **a) Icebreaker**

The first phase of the inquiry was aimed at introducing the researcher, the

topic and the research context, as well as allowing the participants to become acquainted with each other and with the research situation. The researcher therefore introduced herself at the beginning of the inquiry sessions, and communicated her research stance. The participants were afforded an opportunity to introduce themselves to each other by sharing about themselves with each other, for example, telling each other where they were living, what they were studying, and so forth. The researcher also shared her expectations of the sessions and invited the participants to share their expectations. The process was briefly introduced as well. Participants were encouraged to share their views and ideas about the questions asked in the research process.

During this phase consent forms were collected; participants were welcome to ask questions in order to clarify what they did not understand in the information letter and in the researcher's introduction. Participants were also welcome to add or adjust aspects of the inquiry's preliminary plans as communicated by the researcher in the introduction. The participants held a conversation with each other about topics which were unrelated to the topic of this research, such as discussing their upcoming tests, hostel food, and etcetera. The random conversations were helpful in building group rapport and assisting the group members to become comfortable with each other before moving into the activities related to the research questions.

#### **b) The creative / art expression**

The second phase included a creative or artistic representation of the participants' identity, sexual identity and / or sex stories. This activity included the use of paper and / or pens, crayons or koki pens either to make a drawing, write a song or poem or make / construct something with paper which would represent the young woman's story (Oaklander, 1988). In both groups of participants, the creative or artistic expression served as a thought provoker for the participants. In the second group the creative or artistic expressions also formed part of the written narrative. These furthermore facilitated rapport

building, as well as group cohesion processes in both groups.

The probe provided in order to stimulate participants to engage in the creative / artistic expression took the form of a statement. This sought to engage the participants' thoughts in terms of representing the social construction of, and / or factors that contribute to this construction of identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions, but without holding any discussions with each other. The probe was therefore communicated as follows:

- Please pick up a sheet of paper and together with the art material in front of you to create a creative / artistic expression that would represent how you understand yourself, including how you understand yourself as a sexual being. The creative / artistic expression could also include factors that contribute to the sexual decisions you would make. The creative / artistic representation can be a drawing, a writing of any form or even using the paper to build anything that may be representing how you understand yourself, your sexual identity and / or how you make or would make sexual decisions.

### **c) The nominal group technique (NGT)**

The NGT is a simple but structured technique used to facilitate discussion by eliciting individual input, stimulating group discussion and also developing group awareness (Moon, 1999). It seemed advantageous to use the NGT in a setting where a focus group would occur, as it prevented a single person from dominating the discussion (Delbecq & Vande Ven, 1971). Furthermore, the use of the NGT may have also encouraged passive group members to participate (Delbecq & Vande Ven, 1971) in the focus group later on. The principles of the NGT were consequently used to facilitate the process of discourse among participants (Dobbie, Rhodes, Tysinger & Freeman, 2004).

The NGT (Sample, 1984; Dunham, 1998) was used during the second phase to explore themes stimulated by the creative or artistic representation activity.

Without engaging in discussion, the principles of the NGT were applied in the group activity, for participants to identify the group narrative pertaining to the topic of discussion. Although it did not constitute a strong conversationally expressive activity in itself, the NGT supportively facilitated sufficient openness for the participants to share their stories verbally.

The NGT was facilitated in the same way in each group of participants. The researcher posed the three research questions which are stated earlier in this chapter. In the event that the participants requested the researcher to clarify the questions or to elaborate on them, the researcher expressed the questions in the following manner:

- What is the social construction of young women's identity?

What particularly in your social environment constitutes your identity or may be factors which play a role in your identity as a woman, that is, how you understand yourself as a woman?

- What is the social construction of young women's sexual identity?

What particularly in your social environment constitutes your sexual identity or may be factors which play a role in your sexual identity as a woman, that is, how you view yourself in terms of your sexuality or as a sexual being?

- How do young women make sexual decisions?

What particularly in your social environment constitutes your sexual decisions or may be factors which play a role in your sexual decisions?

Each group member was accorded an opportunity to reflect on her creative or art expression in answering the questions above. The main ideas / factors were written on a sheet of paper so that the whole group could see (Sample, 1984). The facilitator (the researcher) read out the ideas on the sheet, after

which the group was afforded an opportunity to ask questions about what had been captured. The participants therefore were given a chance to explain their ideas further, while still avoiding a discussion. The participants thereafter each respectively wrote down ideas that seemed important to them in rank-order (Dunham, 1998). After the group members had expressed their ideas while working alone, the views of the group were represented in rank-order of priorities (Sample, 1984). The views were placed in this order by means of a voting system (Dobbie, Rhodes, Tysinger & Freeman, 2004). The NGT therefore assisted in identifying the guiding metaphor, the dominant narrative of the group, as well as in facilitating a communal artifact.

#### **d) Focus group**

Since the researcher's interest centered on hearing the participants' stories, focus groups were facilitated after the NGT to permit further discussion of these. The facilitation of the focus groups assisted in gaining fuller descriptions of the said stories (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). Focus groups in the research world are formed for the purpose of conducting a discussion (Barbour, 2007). Such a group in this research inquiry was preferred, in order to aim for interaction amongst the group members, as opposed to gathering information by means of an interview. In conducting a focus group, the researcher was more interested in group consensus while listening to the respective narratives of individuals (Flick, 2007). The dominant narrative is important to the aim of a focus group because common knowledge is elicited in the process (Van Vlaenderen & Neves, 2004). Focus groups assist one in aiming to provide descriptions of the making of social situations (Flick, 2007). The views of individuals are, however, not viewed as unimportant since social constructionism considers multiple realities (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007). The aim of facilitating a focus group was to identify the common voice amongst the participants. This would be regarded as the dominant narrative. Other voices such as views differing from the dominant narrative are also considered as they may form part of either the silent, shadow and / or counter narratives.

The researcher acknowledged that the narratives are told in the form determined by the participants and not in one guided by the researcher's questions or interest (Dalton, Elias & Wandersman, 2001). The researcher however provided a probe to the participants as a means of getting the focus group started. It was worded as follows:

- So we have done the creative / artistic expression to break the ice and provoke our thoughts in terms of the topic we are discussing today. We have also, without much talking to each other, explored the topic a little further by using the activity we have just done now (referring to the NGT). So, at this point, we will take the process further and talk to each other about the topic we are discussing today. I would like for us to share our thoughts on the factors that play a role in how we understand ourselves as young women, as sexual beings, and in how we make sexual decisions or things that contribute to the sexual decisions we make.

The participants then engaged in the focus group discussion. At some points of the focus group discussions, particularly at the beginning of group 2, the discussion contained an exploring of the meaning of the words, 'social construction', 'identity' and 'sexual identity' within the context of each group specifically. These explorations led to and formed part of the discussion about the topic of this research.

## **4.5 Meaning making**

### **4.5.1 Discourse analysis (DA)**

From a social constructionist point of view, data is not split or reduced but is used to understand and create reality (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 2002). Discourse analysis (DA) seemed to be the most relevant method of analysis for the current research as it is a method used to study how the use of language is utilised to create reality (Schiffrin, Tannen & Hamilton, 2001). DA offers a way to investigate meaning (guiding metaphors) and to show how

meaning constructs everyday life (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). Discourse analysis therefore presents a strategy to deconstruct stories and open them up (Creswell, 2007). The latter can be achieved by exposing dichotomies, examining silences, attending to disruptions and contradictions, hearing the most frequently told stories, and so on. For the purpose of this research process Feminist Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis (FPDA) was used (Baxter, 2003).

#### **4.5.2 Feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis**

The feminist position is focused on the stance pertaining to issues that women face in a way that seems relevant to them and the spectacles they wear (Fonow & Cook, 2005). Feminism is viewed as offering a perspective to study the social construction of gender (Lear, 1995). Poststructuralism approaches meaning as being context-dependent and fluid, implying continuous change (Coyle, 2007). Furthermore, the poststructuralist position is insistent on viewing the meaning of experience as constituted in language (Gavey, 1989). Discourse comprises conversations held within a group of people in which meaning specific to the group is constituted (Flick, 2007). FPDA therefore provides a way to study the information gathered according to the above mentioned assumptions.

Since the research sought to understand the experiences of young women, FPDA was the method chosen to facilitate this process. The language of young women was studied in this case since it is thought to transparently reflect their unique experiences (Gavey, 1989). From a theoretical perspective, the FPDA thus offered a specific method to study the language of women as it also took the feminist position into account. To obtain the meaning of the conversations held in the research inquiry, the researcher needed to do the following, according to FPDA: Firstly, she identified discourses and, secondly, presented a synchronic-diachronic discussion which refers to issues of power in the discussion. In addition, the researcher presented a denotative-connotative discussion which includes concrete

descriptions and institutional / social discourses in the discussion. Thirdly, she assessed intertextuality and lastly provided a FPDA commentary (Baxter, 2003).

The researcher identified discourses by considering which words, terms or phrases were used repeatedly in the focus group discussion as obtained from the transcript. The researcher also looked at themes and issues which were common in the transcript. Furthermore, the researcher examined viewpoints which seemed to be contradictory to or in opposition with each other.

To present her discussion in terms of the synchronic-diachronic dimension, the researcher identified, and demonstrated by means of quoting, the moments where speakers experienced shifting positions of power. The speakers negotiated power by what they said, how they said it and when they said it. The participants also negotiated powerfulness or powerlessness by encouraging discourses or shifting between discourses. Also included in the synchronic-diachronic discussion was the researcher's noting which speaker may have been considered as 'powerful' in terms of the responses to the speaker in given moments. These include moments where the 'powerful' speaker spoke, remarked verbally or non-verbally and also used facial expressions to respond to the other speakers' responses or comments etcetera. The researcher also noted the verbal and non-verbal ways in which speakers interacted with each other and observed how the two ways of interaction positioned speakers in terms of power.

In presenting the discussion of the denotative-connotative dimension the researcher took note of concrete descriptions of what was occurring in the text by making reference to verbal and non-verbal interactions of participants. She furthermore actively sought to identify institutional or social discourses that seemed to appear in the transcripts and in the research context.

The researcher looked for dominant discourses contained in the two transcripts obtained from the focus groups and for how these were reflected differently or similarly in the respective texts. She therefore assessed

intertextuality by foregrounding and highlighting ways in which the dominant discourses in any spoken narrative were reflected in other discourses such as in the silent, shadow and counter narratives.

Finally, in producing a FPDA commentary, the researcher investigated how social construction of gender had been placed in the centre of the inquiry. This was done by considering gender to be a significant discourse in terms of understanding the practices of the group of speakers. The researcher proceeded from the assumption that various sources may have contributed to the story of the young women. She therefore basically wove together the voices of the participants by hearing a common voice. The latter may be considered to represent the story of a young woman which may be contained in the contributions made by society, the participants, the researcher's previous knowledge and the literature read in order to inform this research process.

#### **4.6 Ethical considerations**

According to the ethical principles and code of conduct of the American Psychological Association, such principles provide a guideline for psychologists as regards attaining the highest ideals of psychology (APA, 2002). One of the purposes of such a code is that it forms a dominant narrative among psychologists, as a way of conducting themselves when interacting with people outside the profession (APA, 2002). According to the aim of this text, the setting to be applied to the above mentioned principles is a research context. The ethical principles of the American Psychological Association, the Professional Board for Psychology's (HPCSA's) ethical code of professional conduct, as well as the Health Professions Act of 1974, were followed to ascertain good ethical practice during this research process. Furthermore, research principles as laid down by the respective higher education institutions involved in this research were also followed.

It is important that the ethical implications regarding this research process

have been verified by the universities concerned. The process of obtaining permission from the university where participants are registered for their undergraduate degrees was followed so as to ensure that the participants were respected and not taken advantage of. The necessary applications to have the participants partake in the research process were approved by the higher education institutions concerned. The Ethics Committee of the said institution approved the application and communicated its expectations to the researcher. The supervisor of this research process was also requested to verify the legitimacy of the research process.

One of the trends that have become evident in the current research process is the issue of transparency. Adequate information as well as opportunities to ask questions about the process was also provided to the participants. While participants were involved in the process of sharing their stories, confidentiality and privacy were highly prized (Flick, 2007). Clauses pertaining to confidentiality, the use of a pseudonym at the request of a participant and information about informed consent were included on the consent form.

The researcher was also aware that the details of the research process, especially in the focus group discussions, could potentially impact on the participants in some way or another. Debriefing was therefore offered to the participants and referrals to the phone numbers of support services were made available to participants (Barbour, 2007). Participants could also have access to the material obtained in the research process. They could furthermore avail themselves of the opportunity to be involved in the process of confirming the accuracy of the transcription of the recording and the reflections of the researcher on the information obtained (Creswell, 2007).

Lastly, the researcher took responsibility for beneficence. This refers to protecting the wellbeing of the participants by seeing to it that unnecessary harm is not wrought through the research process (Flick, 2007). It was also important that the participants were aware of the benefit and the burdens placed on them by the research process so as to ensure justice in the

research process (Barbour, 2007).

#### **4.7 In a nutshell**

The aim of this research was to capture the stories of young women pertaining to the social construction of their identity and sexual decisions. A qualitative research approach seemed fitting as it offered room for intensive contact and discussion with the participants. The meta-paradigm guiding the research inquiry was the narrative approach. The emphasis of the research inquiry was placed on becoming acquainted with the various narratives in the lives of the participants, including identifying the dominant narrative and the existence of possible silent narratives. These narratives were identified by encouraging discourse and using discourse analysis (FPDA) to study the conversations that had been held in the focus group. A variety of activities were used to capture the stories of the young women in terms of the research questions, including a creative / art expression, and NGT as well as a focus group discussion. The information gathered in the process using the above mentioned activities will be discussed in the next chapter. Possible answers to the research questions are also considered in chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5: INQUIRY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 The ushering**

The aim of writing this chapter is to communicate to the reader the information gathered during the research inquiry. Furthermore a discussion and interpretation of the information gathered will be provided in this chapter. The first part of the chapter will summarise information gathered during the various activities mentioned earlier in chapter 4. The second part includes an interpretation of the information according to FPDA. Lastly, the threads are tied together as a summary, in an attempt to furnish answers to the research questions.

The researcher notes that, while writing this chapter, reflections of her own interpretations, founded and grounded on cultural, social, gender and personal politics brought to the research process, may have been played a role in the thought process and they are provided (Creswell, 2007). The writing of this research therefore reflects a point of view within a social constructionist stance and in terms of the assumptions that the researcher has made pertaining to the research questions and the topic (Beyer, du Preez & Blokland, 2007, Creswell, 2007). It is therefore constructive and beneficial for the researcher to engage in self-disclosure since she is considered to be a participant in the study. Self-disclosure, according to previous writers, provides opportunity for transparency and acknowledges the role of the researcher as an active participant in the research (Hiles & Čermák, 2008).

### **5.2 Creative or art expression**

The creative or art expression activity was used to allow participants to represent their stories stemming from the research questions in a creative or artistic manner. The assumption of the researcher was that the young women would project their stories onto their creative or artistic expression (Oaklander, 1988), which might provoke their thoughts and warm them up regarding the

research questions for the purpose of the discussion.

### **5.2.1 Group 1**

Most participants produced drawings. Of those who did so, most included a heart on their drawings. The rest made drawings using patches of colour on a page or represented their stories by symbols such as a stove, a cup, a book and flowers. Some of the participants described their stories by drawing a path with some depicting a hand. The participants who did not create drawings told their stories by making mind-maps and used paper to make a bird as a description of their story.

### **5.2.2 Group 2**

All participants preferred to make drawings. There was a common theme in the form of a drawing depicting a sun. The participants used the sun to refer to light because they saw themselves as a shining light in some way or another. Other participants employed the colour pink to symbolise femininity, gentleness, and softness. Most drawings had a story to tell about the participants' roles as those who provide nurturance. Most drawings also depicted relationships and connectedness.

### **5.2.3 Integrative remarks**

It is interesting for the researcher that there was a pattern in the participants' producing a drawing according to a common theme in the respective groups. While Group 1 participants created a drawing of a heart, Group 2 participants drew a sun. The acknowledgment of this pattern compels the researcher to assume that connectedness (Gilligan, 1982) had constituted an important aspect of the research situation from the beginning of the inquiry. Connectedness showed itself even before the participants had an opportunity to speak to each other.

### **5.3 The nominal group technique (NGT)**

Adhering to the three research questions, the NGT aimed to obtain prioritised themes related to the three topics of interest. The discussion below will furnish an outline of the themes obtained in ranked order according to each question asked. Themes which participants considered to play the same role in their identity, sexual identity and / or sexual decisions, or factors that participants could not necessarily rank one higher than the other, are grouped together in the list below. The following discussion will also explore and elaborate on the themes identified, according to the participants' interpretation of the themes listed. The themes will first be discussed for every group and each research question separately. The researcher will thereafter provide integrated remarks.

#### **5.3.1 Themes related to identity**

##### **a) Group 1**

##### **Themes obtained listed in prioritised order**

- Parents
- Need to be wanted, and confidence
- Friends (peer pressure)
- Independence, and expectation referring to social norms
- Social acceptance
- Looks
- To be different, and role of emotional being

The researcher acknowledges that all of the above themes relate to other people than group members as individuals in some way or another. The group however prioritised parents, the need to be wanted and confidence, as well as friends, as factors that play a significant role in the construction of their identity. The meaning that the group attached to their parents involved the

norms and grooming that the latter had taught them in previous years, especially during primary socialisation. The meaning of parents also included the expectations of the parents regarding them as females. These expectations seemed to be informed by the cultures and traditions as well as religions with which the parents affiliate themselves.

According to previous literature, socialisation is a process whereby individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and character traits that enable them to participate as effective members of a group (Berns, 2001). In the group's discussion of the theme of parents, the latter reference is evident. Furthermore, according to the literature such as Giligan, 1982 men and women seem to be socialised differently. The group seemed to be aware of this factor. The acknowledgment of differences in socialisation appeared to give rise to the next prioritised theme.

The second such theme, according to Group 1, was the need to be wanted and to feel confidence. The group attached the need for acceptance / to be wanted, or rather the need to fit into their groups of affiliation and groups with which they are associated, to the theme of confidence. The group reported experiencing a need to be wanted, which they fulfilled by adhering to the norms taught by their parents and significant others, which in turn gave them confidence. The group therefore felt that it was important to them to pursue self-sacrifice so that they could fulfill their need to be wanted and therefore feel confident about themselves. This is congruent with the findings of previous literature which suggest that women may not be as accepted by their immediate environment when they hold views independent from their significant others (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005).

Thirdly, members of Group 1 considered peer pressure as a factor that played an important role in their identity or social construction of their identity. Peer pressure, according to the group, included how well they fit into friendship relationships, opposite-sex relationships, how well they perform academically, as well as how well they are accepted by the university environment in terms of fashion, varsity life, and so forth. The more the young women felt that they

fitted in the various contexts, the better they felt about themselves. When the participants felt confident about themselves they identified themselves as good, successful and as people who are able to achieve. The theme of peer pressure may be linked with the proposal of Gilligan (1982) that women may be likely to know themselves in terms of the connections they have with others. The researcher infers that it seemed important for the group to be connected with their friends. She furthermore infers that the group may have felt as though they fit into their peer groups according to the above mentioned factors.

## **b) Group 2**

### **Themes obtained, listed in prioritised order**

- Beliefs
- Parents
- Values
- Being a child
- Family
- Love
- Self-knowledge
- Friendships
- Society
- Norms
- Stereotypes
- Bravery

According to Group 2, beliefs, parents and values were prioritised as factors that play a role in the construction of their identity. According to this group, beliefs included the rules by which one lives, whether these were informed by culture and / or religion. The group reported that they had acquired their beliefs by means of socialisation and that they seemed to modify them as they grew older. The latter appears to the researcher as congruent with Butler's

(1999) suggestion that one is not born a woman but grows into one. The young women participating in this research expressed the reality of growing into women as they grew older within their respective cultures and communities as well as in their interaction with other people.

According to literature, communities enter a process of negotiation as to the rules by which they will live in order to maintain homeostasis in the community (Burr, 2003). Freedman and Combs (1996) suggest a process of typification, institutionlisation, legitimation as well as of reification to achieve the latter. As the individual grows up she or he may enter into further negotiation with other contexts to which they are exposed and acquire an adjusted or new reality (Delamater & Hyde, 1998, Halperin, 1989). This may involve the process of secondary socialisation as discussed in chapter 3. The process of secondary socialisation may also therefore somewhat inform the process of self-differentiation as defined by Bowen (1978).

Similar to Group 1, Group 2 identified the role of parents as an important theme in the construction of their identities. The theme of parents involved the norms and teaching of their parents as informed by socialisation. The theme also included the expectation of parents regarding the participants as women, according to the gender role that has been assigned to them.

Group 2 prioritised values as a third factor in their identity construction. Values also included processes of socialisation, particularly secondary socialisation. According to previous literature, secondary socialisation includes the exploration and evaluation of internalised values which were learned during primary socialisation (Berns, 2001). The individual in the process of secondary socialisation may therefore acquire her own values pertaining to a certain matter, which may or may not be related to the values learned in primary socialisation (Bartle-Haring, 1997). The researcher therefore infers that the individual may therefore master a certain level of growth in their view of themselves or understanding of themselves.

### **c) Integrative remarks**

According to the theory of social constructionism, identity is acquired by the exploration of inherited quality such as genetic and physiological attributes, the influence of family and community, as well as the embracing of the individual characteristics of the person (Halperin, 1989). According to the themes that were identified in the groups, the latter suggestion would appear to be confirmed. It seems that processes of socialisation, both primary and secondary, may be important in the social construction of identity. Furthermore, it appears that these processes may have to be taken further to explore self-differentiation. It moreover seems as if, while these processes occur and may seem to be important, females may need to feel connected to the people with whom they are in relationship. According to Gilligan (1982) females know themselves as they are known through their relationships with others.

### **5.3.2 Themes related to sexual identity**

#### **a) Group 1**

##### **Themes obtained listed in prioritised order**

- Values, and experiences
- Parents and upbringing, peer relationships and mental state
- Culture and religion
- Expectations as in social norms
- Media
- Friends (Peer pressure)

With regards to themes related to sexual identity, Group 1 prioritised values and experiences, parents and upbringing, peer relationships and mental state, as well as culture and religion, as important factors that play a role in their view of themselves as sexual beings. The meaning that the group attached to values is similar to that of Group 2, as discussed above regarding the first

question. The group defined values as the rules one lives by to assess behaviour that would seem acceptable or not to oneself. As mentioned above, the process of secondary socialisation as well as self-differentiation may play a role in informing the values one would have.

Experiences, according to the group, referred to previous encounters, such as sexual experiences with the opposite sex, conversation with parents and / or peers, as well as the previous experiences of those close to them. The group related their experiences to their values because they felt that the values they held would be strongly informed by their experiences. The young women reported that they viewed themselves as sexual beings. The researcher suggests that the latter may be informed by Gilligan's (1982) idea of 'what would be right for me and right for the other person' in terms of the values they held as informed by their experiences. The crisis of identity vs. moral belief (Gilligan, 1982) therefore seemed to be apparent here.

With regards to sexual identity, the theme of parents seemed to be defined as the group defined the theme of parents for the first question response. The group furthermore added the theme of upbringing and separated this theme from the theme of parents as they viewed them to possess different meanings. The group defined upbringing as the parents' own views on parenting, excluding the expectations of culture and other factors as discussed above. Upbringing, as defined by the group, made provision for the acceptance of people being socialised differently, depending on the specific family in which they were raised. Previous research may concur with this point as it suggests that although women are the same they are also different (Lips, 2005; Matlin, 2000). Women differ in a number of ways, ranging from the life choices they make, their personalities and upbringing as well as responses to biological events (Lips, 2005; Matlin, 2000). Van Vlaederen (2004), as well as Beyer, Du Preez and Blokland (2007), reinforce this viewpoint in suggesting that a family, as a system level, may create a local knowledge for itself which may accord it a different reality from the bigger system in which they exist.

Group 1 furthermore defined peer relationships as the relationships of its

members with their friends. These include the people with whom they live in communes or residences at the university, people with whom they attend classes, as well as people with whom they engage on a regular basis including parties, church, social clubs, sports and clubs. According to the group, their relationships with their friends were important in their understanding of themselves as sexual beings, since these relationships affirm them and fulfill a need for acceptance and belonging. This theme also appears to be congruent with the findings of Gilligan's work where she highlights the importance of connectedness in the life of females with regards to their identity. Furthermore, the thoughts behind the theme are evident in the previous literature which suggests that sexuality may be a concept that is produced in social interaction (Blackwood, 2006; Foucault, 1990; Giles, 2006). The young women therefore acquire the view of their own sexuality from the social interaction in which they are involved.

The group furthermore referred to one's mental state as an important theme informing sexual identity. The group related the theme of mental state to the themes of parents and upbringing, as well as the theme of friends, because they thought that the themes informed each other. The participants felt that one's own thoughts and feelings about sexuality may be constructed or informed by the information one receives from parents and one's upbringing, as well as from friends. The group therefore defined mental state as the way one feels about oneself in relation to sexuality. The linking of the themes makes the crisis of identity and moral belief evident for the researcher. According to Gilligan (1982), this crisis is characterised by a woman's struggle to disentangle her voice from the voices of others so as to discover her own language. The researcher therefore suggests that the social construction of young women's sexual identity, according to Group 1, involves the conflict that young women may experience inside themselves.

Group 1 referred to culture and religion as the rules and norms by which society lives. These communicate behaviour which is acceptable to society and behaviour which is not. Group 1 therefore reported culture and religion and the related rules and norms as informing their views of themselves as

sexual beings. The participants reported holding different rules and norms from each other. They also reported that this difference was informed by various cultures and religions, including religious ideas or beliefs which they held. According to previous literature, from a social constructionist perspective, sexuality appears to be a product of social interaction with particular desires, meanings and behaviour constructed by culture (Blackwood, 2006); therefore sexuality may be regarded as a socially or culturally produced construct (Foucault, 1990; Giles, 2006).

## **b) Group 2**

### **Themes obtained, listed in prioritised order**

- Beliefs
- Internal conflict
- Self-knowledge
- Parents
- Values
- Self-esteem
- Norms
- Peer pressure
- Fear

According to Group 2 beliefs, internal conflict and self-knowledge are key role players in the social construction of their sexual identity. These are discussed in further detail below.

The group defined beliefs as they did in response to the previous question. These also included beliefs about sex and sexuality, which were reported as being informed by significant others, as well as culture and religion. Furthermore the said beliefs were reported to be informed by one's own processes of forming independent ideas, including processes such as secondary socialisation and self-differentiation.

Internal conflict, according to the group, included viewpoints that one would hold which are different from those informed by significant institutions such as parents, family, friends, culture and religion. According to the researcher's understanding of the group's meaning of internal conflict, it seemed to be closely related to the crisis of identity and moral belief as described by Gilligan (1982). The young women appeared to experience a challenge in feeling satisfied with the acceptance of their own voices by themselves and others. However, they expressed a need to speak in a different voice from others, because this would make them feel like individuals. This opinion also sounds somewhat like the concept of self-differentiation as described by Bowen (1978). As Gilligan has described, females experience this conflict: while desiring to be self-differentiated, they also have the need to be connected to others and have also been socialised in the ethic of care. The reference to the theme of internal conflict may also identify the women's moral development stage.

Inferring from Gilligan's work, the researcher proposes that the young women of this group may be situated between the conventional and the post-conventional stages of moral development. Females in the conventional stage seem to be concerned with the needs of others, so much that they may disregard their own (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Females in the post-conventional stage, however, are aware of the dysfunctional outcomes of disregarding their own needs. She, therefore, recognises that connection may be distorted when she disregards her needs. It seems therefore that the internal conflict to which Group 2 is referring to may have to do with the managing of the needs which the women have in relation to other people's needs. Group 2 may therefore find the constitution of their sexual identity in the midst of the internal conflict or, in Gilligan's words, in the crisis of identity vs. moral belief.

Group 2 also identified self-knowledge as a factor in their view of themselves in terms of their sexuality. The group defined self-knowledge as the way people know themselves and how comfortable they are in the knowledge they have of themselves. According to Bowen (1978), self-differentiation also

includes a sense of self-knowledge which does not depend on the acceptance or approval of others (Carter, 1989; Charles, 2001). The group therefore reported themselves as referring to self-knowledge to obtain information about their own sexuality. According to the literature, females may engage in sexual expression as a means of bringing affection or intimacy to the relationship (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). The researcher therefore infers that the group may be concurring with Gilligan's suggestion that females may experience identity exploration as fused with developmental tasks concerning intimacy (Gilligan, 1982).

### **c) Integrative remarks**

The researcher finds that in both groups, the participants regard self-differentiation as an important aspect in their views of themselves as sexual beings. The latter seems also to be heavily informed by scripts written by the process of socialisation. These appear to be received from significant others and the social context. Considering self-differentiation and socialisation, the researcher proposes that the crisis of identity vs. moral belief is central. The females may therefore experience a tug of war between self-differentiation and socialisation in the social construction of their sexual identity.

### **5.3.3 Themes related to sexual decision making**

#### **a) Group 1**

#### **Themes obtained listed in prioritised order**

- Perceptions of love relationships
- Experiences
- Values, religion, and mental state
- Responding to natural desires
- Acceptance, insecurities, issues, and social acceptance
- Loneliness
- Boredom

In terms of sexual decision making, Group 1 prioritised the themes of perceptions of love, experiences, as well as values, religion and mental state as important factors that inform their sexual decisions. The group regarded values, religion and mental state as a third priority, as they felt that the three factors seem to inform one another-regarding sexual decision making.

Group 1 defined the theme of perceptions of love as the ideas or views they have about what love is, how it is expressed and the thoughts they have about love in relation to sex. Part of their concepts about love, as related to sex, included the notion that sex was an expression of love. According to previous research, the experience of sex for females includes ideas of passion and romance (Hoggart, 2006; Maxwell, 2006). According to this group, sexual decisions are therefore made with the aim of giving care and nurturance to the partner. This thought is also expressed by Gilligan (1982) who considers that women are more prone to act in a way that will provide care to another person, in terms of the ethic of care.

Furthermore, according to previous literature women may view sex as a way to love a man because they may have been socialised to prioritise his needs by being submissive and providing for his needs from a young age (Kigozi, 2006). Since men are socialised to prioritise sex in romantic relationships (Breakwell & Millward, 1997), women may feel the obligation to meet that priority (Maxwell, 2006) by perceiving it as being love. Previous research seems to suggest that the context in which sex is most likely to occur is in the romantic relationship (Montgomery & Sorell, 1998; Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000). The researcher therefore infers that the romantic relationship may be the context in which the theme of perception of love may be mostly evident.

Group 1 furthermore prioritised the theme of experiences regarding sexual decision making, as they did with regards to sexual identity. Here, previous sexual experiences also played a role for this group. According to previous research the meaning one accords to sex, which may relate to subsequent sexual decisions, may be informed by previous encounters, particularly the

first sexual encounter (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000). Depending on the meaning acquired at the initial sexual experience together with the scripts with which one is in contact, the young woman may create a meaning of sex which may inform the sexual decisions she makes at a later stage (Halperin, 1989; Lacasse & Mendelson, 2007). The researcher therefore suggests that the young women in Group 1 may have been proceeding from a similar point of view as that identified in the research mentioned.

Group 1 furthermore prioritised values, religion and mental state, as they did when considering previous research questions. The group felt that values and religion both inform an individual as to what the appropriate behaviours are with regards to sexual behaviour. The group, in addition, regarded the mental state of an individual as important in accepting the scripts written by values and religion. The mental state of the individual included the amount of conflict in so doing. The latter may also refer to the crisis of identity vs. moral belief as discussed by Gilligan (1982). Furthermore, the mental state that Group 1 is referring to may be related to one's intrapersonal scripts about sex. According to the scripting theory (Simon & Gagnon, 1986) with reference to sexual scripts, intrapersonal scripts include internal conversations that give rise to the clearly differentiated personal description of self, as well as one's own private world of wishes, fantasies and desires. The researcher therefore infers that where females' scripts, written by values and religion, are more aligned with the intrapersonal script, the less conflicted they will be in their mental state. In the latter case, the sexual decision may therefore be a less conflicted one.

## **b) Group 2**

### **Themes obtained, listed in prioritised order**

- Personal vision
- Beliefs
- Perception of love
- Parents
- Peer pressure

- Dependency / neediness (fear of losing the relationship)
- Acceptance
- Affirmation
- Maturity
- Fear
- Curiosity
- Status
- Loneliness

According to Group 2, personal vision, beliefs and perception of love play a significant role in affecting a sexual decision. Furthermore, according to Group 2, personal vision, beliefs and perception of love may inform each other in this respect. The group however placed them in order of priority as to how they would go about making the decision.

According to Group 2, the theme of personal vision referred to one's own desires and goals for life and romantic relationships. The personal vision for the group included prioritising gaining their degrees, building meaningful relationships with other females, as well as developing themselves to be better people and avoiding pregnancy.

According to Group 2, beliefs included scripts written by different sources. The meaning the group accorded to beliefs was similar to the sexual script according to the scripting theory. Cultural scenarios as informed by various factors were discussed. These scenarios include institutional guides as set by family, family dynamics and values. In addition the cultural scenarios discussed include symbolic contexts, such as the young person's understanding of age- and gender-appropriate sexual behaviour. These various factors include the young person's emotional stability, characteristics of the relationship with the boyfriend, sexual behaviours of peers and so on. Interpersonal scripts according to different situations were also discussed. Group 2 felt that beliefs could be negotiated to reach a consensus with the partner about a sexual decision. Intrapersonal scripts particularly pertaining to

avoiding pregnancy and not engaging in sex constituted part of the discussion of this group.

Group 2 defined perception of love as did Group 1. Group 2 also felt that the ideas one holds about love in relation to sex would inform the person's sexual decision. Group 2, like Group 1, linked the sexual decision with a romantic relationship.

### **c) Integrative remarks**

It seems clear from the two groups that a romantic relationship sets the tone for a sexual decision. The young women therefore refer to the sexual scripts in order to be informed about the decision they will be making. It seems that the factors constituting a sexual decision for them are also surrounded by the double bind script, as the young women are on the one hand taught that sex is an act of shame and danger while on the other hand they are taught to be submissive to males and meet the needs of the young men. Because the young men are socialised to prioritise sex in the romantic relationship, the young women are therefore faced with making a sexual decision should the young man require sex in the romantic relationship. The young women may therefore pose as gatekeepers or virgin-protectors and the young men as initiators of sexual intimacy (Lear, 1995). A sexual decision may therefore be met with ambivalence and anxiety by the young woman.

Other scenarios such as acculturation and the like create a different picture from the one depicted above. When young women have been exposed to other cultures and social setting, the meaning of sex may be adjusted and be met with less conflict in terms of the above suggested double bind script. Acculturation may assist the young women to deviate from the norms of viewing sex as a cultural taboo. The deviation may move the young women to openness to talking about sex, to negotiation regarding sex and possibly opening doors to an adequate vocabulary to express the sexual expression and experience of young women

## 5.4 Feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA)

The focus group conversation transcripts will be considered in the discussion below. The dominant, silent, counter and shadow narratives will be considered so as to identify the discourses in the focus group. A consideration of the synchronic-diachronic and denotative-connotative dimensions will follow. Intertextuality will thereafter be assessed and a FPDA commentary will be provided.

### a) Identified discourses

The identified discourses included the stories of the young women, both heard and unheard. The researcher wished to acknowledge the stories of the young women on various levels and thus identified discourses so as to communicate the stories she recognised as part of the discussion. The researcher includes a discussion of the words of the participants related to the identified discourse together with the supporting theory as discussed by her in chapters 2 and 3. She also includes evidence of her inferences according to the words of the participants. The latter is supplied by discussing particular words or parts of sentences from the transcription of the focus group so as to illustrate these identity discourses. The words of the participants are denoted in quotations and are taken verbatim from the transcription. The quotations are therefore not edited by the researcher although the researcher may select portions of quotation to illustrate the respective discourse that is being discussed.

- Dominant narratives

Narrative of parents as primary constitutes of social construction of young women's identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions.

According to the focus group discussion held amongst the two groups parents seem to form part of the dominant narrative. They are viewed by both groups as important factors in constituting identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions. The young women's socialisation by their parents as well as

parents' expectations of them appear to dominate the social construction of these young women's identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions in both groups. The latter inference is derived from the following quotations:

Quotation 1

*I think it's interesting that actually everybody agrees with the whole social construction, uhm, your parents, your family relation, that your family was number one for everybody*

Quotation 2

*When you make a sexual decision, ehm, lots of things come to mind, like what are peoples' exceptions of you, my parents expectations and religion. and..all. that kinda thing*

Quotation 3

*My parents will kill me if I have sex with you but ooh! My goodness, that man there in front of me.*

Quotation 4

*But then especially the perception of love and relationships we got them from our parents*

According to the above quotations, the opinions and expectations of parents seem to be important in the decisions of the participants, and also in the thought process leading to the decision. In quotation 1 the participants are agreeing that parents are "number one" for everyone in terms of the topic of discussion. The quotation seems to relay that, when the participants consider sexual decisions or the way in which they understand themselves, their parents will be regarded as primary. Quotations 2, 3 and 4 seem to support quotation 1. In quotation 2, the participant puts her point across in the very words that when a sexual decision is to be made, then parents' expectations are accorded importance. Quotation 4 relates that the perceptions held by women are communicated by parents. In the same quotation the word "especially" is used to convey the primary role that the parents are playing in

constituting the ideas the participants have regarding the discussed topic. Quotation 3 contains the word "kill" to illustrate the depth of expectation displayed by parents that their adolescent and young adult children will not engage on sexual activity.

As suggested by the process of typification in chapter 2, the participants seemed to have accepted the reality which their parents and society have adhered to regarding the topic of interest. The gender norm of expected female behaviour suggested by Carter & McGoldrick (2005) and referred to earlier in the text seems to be illustrated here. Carter & McGoldrick (2005) have proposed that since the primary caregiver in the early years of development is the mother, who is female, girl children tend to identify with her. Furthermore, because of the latter, the expectation placed on the girl child's development seems to have been narrowed into female norms such as having to display self-sacrifice and being viewed as selfish when defining her own values or viewpoints. The researcher infers that this point seems to be clearly illustrated, particularly in quotations 2 and 3.

In quotation 2, the participant communicates that "*lots of things come to her mind*" when she is thinking about the topic of discussion and parents seem to be one of these. This remark suggests to the researcher that the participant's mentioning that "*lots of things come to her mind*" emphasises that parental expectations are important as a theme. The latter is evidenced by acknowledging that the participant has isolated "parents" from the "lots of things" that she could have been thinking about. In quotation 3, it is clear that in experiencing conflict when she has to make a sexual decision, the participant is faced with the expectations of her parents, to the point that she feels that she will be strongly penalised if she decided against these expectations. The latter is demonstrated by the use of the word "kill"

#### Narrative of self-differentiation and crisis of identity vs. moral belief

Personal insight with regard to self-knowledge and value systems, as well as the need to self-differentiate, also seem to play a large role in this regard for

the two groups. Related to the latter, the crisis of identity vs. moral belief seems to dominate the social construction of the young women's identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions. The young women appear to live in the reality of the struggle to disentangle their voices from other voices in their contexts. They therefore apparently live in the reality of conflict when considering factors that constitute their identity, sexual identity and sexual decisions. These inferences made by the researcher are based on the following quotations:

*Quotation 5*

*So I think it's about who you are, I would like stress on the point that it is who you are and how far you take things; and I think it's not only about the environment you are in but it's about who you know as yourself, who do you know as yourself; if you love yourself then you will be able to;(pause) if you love, accept and know yourself,*

*Quotation 6*

*So where do we get to the point where we can actually say, I know who I am? (pause), 'cause I think like with a lot of decisions like I still like I don't know, so then I then I think of what my parents would say and then I go to my beliefs and then that's what my beliefs say but when is it ever me making the decision?*

*Quotation 7*

*Wanna be the housewife you know but a CA..... I wanna be a CA*

In quotation 5, the participant uses the words "*I would like stress on the point that it is who you are*", which demonstrates the need to know oneself separate from other people. The researcher wishes to emphasise the word "*stress*" to illustrate this point. Furthermore, the participant speaking in quotation 6 makes the same point by asking the question "*but when is it ever me making the decision?*" To the researcher it feels that when the factors to make a sexual decision are considered, the participant or young woman may experience a sense of being disempowered possibly by social pressures and /

or expectations. Such pressures and the like are evident in findings by previous researchers where young women are encouraged not to engage in sexual activity as a means to avoid pregnancy or as a way to possibly maintain the perception that sex is a shameful act (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiyi, 2005; Hyde & Jaffee, 2000; Leigh, 1989).

Young women are furthermore taught by their mothers to be submissive to men and be caring towards them by looking after their needs (Kigozi, 2006). These conflicting inputs may leave one in conflict, hence experiencing what the participant speaking in quotation 6 may be referring to. The needs for self-knowledge and self-differentiation seem to be important for the participants in terms of making decisions about their lives, for example, career choices, as well as owning the choices that they make. Another conflict referred to in quotation 7 may furnish evidence for the latter. While the latter may be true the participant speaking in quotation 6 expresses a sense of powerlessness in the phrase "*I don't know*".

In a nutshell, having parents as the dominant narrative of the discussion suggested inferences about the participants' experiences of self-differentiation as discussed by Bowen's family system theory. As observed by Gilligan (1982), women find their identity in being connected with others, which made itself apparent in this discussion. Parents, experiences, values and norms all refer to relationships the participants have with others. Being content with those relationships seemed important to the participants which was to be expected according to Gilligan's work. The dominant narrative therefore prioritised responsibility to others.

- Silent narratives

#### Narrative of anxiety around discussing sex and sexuality

The researcher suggests that the silent narrative of both of the focus groups is contained in the silences, giggles, laughs and pauses in the discussion. She adds that these could represent an anxiety that may be attached to the topic

of discussion. Considering that talking about sexuality may be a cultural taboo, participants might have been uncomfortable with the topic and therefore held back. In addition, the researcher suggests that these responses may have been linked to the shortage of words to express the participants' views. According to Lear (1995), there seems to be limited words or vocabulary to express the sexual and related experiences of women in society. The following quotation contains words such as "uhm, ehm, sho, ya" which may allude to the anxiety being discussed.

Quotation 8

*I mean when you are sitting by yourself and maybe John has just left and has asked you to like ehm think about it and we might do it next time you might think but at the exact same time you might think sho! my mommy would kill me but I love John so much, we have been together for so long so your personal reasoning and your personal desires come forth and could possibly override what your family upbringing has taught you*

In the above quotation the speaker uses "ehm" as a break to finish her sentence at the place where she would have referred to engaging in sexual activity. She referred to sexual activity as "it" which may further confirm the possible discomfort she may have experienced in talking about sex.

Quotation 9

*I think, ehm, it is a very important, ehm, because for example I have a friend that, who with her parents they talk about sex often and they are very comfortable with it, and she can share with her mom her sexual experiences, like very openly and ehm whereas in some families ehm you know up right up bringing as you said you are not in a such a a relationship and you kinda perceive sex as a more ehm ehm like a ya a big thing to overcome and uhm ya something to be careful about*

The researcher suggests that in this above quotation, the use of "ehm" is also used as a break to possibly shift the focus away from sex. Although the participant is referring to her friend who is comfortable in talking with her

mother about sex, the participant also seems to be expressing a discomfort by referring to sex as "it" and also using "ehm" in her sentences.

The use of "ehm" as well as referring to sex as "it" in the above quotes may be relating a silent narrative as regards talking about sex or issues referring to sexuality or of a sexual nature. The researcher notes that the discomfort or anxiety in this regard is not blatantly referred to by the participants but can be inferred from the use of grammar or words by the participants. Words such as "ehm, it, uhm" seem to be used particularly in response to referring to sex and related issues.

- Shadow narrative

#### Narrative of relationship of sexual intimacy with emotional intimacy

The shadow narrative may be characterised by the themes of sexual intimacy being linked to emotional intimacy. The focus groups did refer to the theme but it was unexplored. The researcher feels that the participants did not offer a thick enough indication of how they experience this theme. Previous research, however, suggests that women may experience sexual intimacy as a task fused with that of emotional intimacy (Breakwell & Millward, 1997) which provides the legitimacy of the identified theme.

Part of quotation 8

*But I love John so much, we have been together for so long*

In quotation 8, the participant relates her decision to have sexual intercourse with John to how long they have been together. The researcher infers that the reference to the length of the relationship may refer to an emotional intimacy. In turn, the researcher suggests that the participant's decision to have sex, that is, sexual intimacy, may be linked with emotional intimacy. The researcher is aware that this inference may be farfetched. However, she refers to the fact that this idea has not been explored in the discussions; hence it may be referred to as a shadow narrative. The participants also explored the idea of

being married as the context of having intercourse which may support the inference that the researcher makes. The following quotes refer to the participants' exploration of marriage as a context for sexual activity:

Quotation 10

*It got to 21 and that was the aim, get to 21, without getting into it and then she is alright, she's great, then she is a woman whatever but when you , or for me it was getting to marriage*

Quotation 11

*Let's say I am going to keep my virginity until 21 or I should keep my virginity until I am married you*

After the participants were asked to comment specifically with respect to sexual decisions, they replied using the quotations below, amongst others.

Quotation 12

*Being in a relationship for the first time you don't know anything about it you are not really clear on what is expected of you in the relationship*

Quotation 13

*Relationships are important in our lives*

The researcher consequently uses these two quotations (12 and 13 above) to support her inference that the narrative speaks of a relationship between sexual intimacy and emotional intimacy. The inference is made based on the heavy weight that the participants accord to the importance of being in a relationship, that is, emotional intimacy, as a context necessary to have intercourse or making a decision to do so. This heavy weight is assumed as the participants only refer to a relationship context as a context for sexual intercourse, not to any other.

### Narrative within the internal conversations

In addition, the researcher posits that the shadow narrative may also be contained in the pauses occurring in the focus group conversations. These pauses may reflect unexplored stories as they appear frequently in the transcript yet remain uncharted. Often the pauses occur in a moment when the speakers are seemingly uncomfortable with what they are saying or are about to say, or when what they are talking about seems to be socially unacceptable. The pauses may contain a narrative of the internal conversations that participants had with themselves during the discussion. Similar to the reasons for the pauses, the researcher argues that there may be a use of other words that appear to be general when they are most probably used to refer to something specific. These words are for example 'hmm, wow, okay, ya' etcetera. The silences and the uncomfortable nature of some moments in the conversation may suggest reference to the topic of discussion being a cultural taboo.

Consistent with the theme of the narrative of internal conversation was a recurring pattern of participants deviating from the topic. The researcher suggests that, since women seem to identify with each other in the context of connectedness, they may have preserved the pattern as a means of their way of maintaining homeostasis in the focus group. The pattern may have a story to tell in terms of the questions asked, but one which remains private to the group of participants. Also consistent with this kind of narrative, there seem to be no quotations to evidence this narrative as the participants seem to have not voiced anything in connection with it. The internal conversation would furthermore be a non-verbal conversation that the participants may have held with themselves and is therefore without words.

### Narrative of not trusting self: decisions made in connectedness

Finally, the researcher infers that one of the stories told as a shadow narrative is the narrative of the participants' not trusting their own experiences or judgments to make decisions suitable for themselves. This may possibly be

consistent with the notion that young women make decisions that are appropriate to the ethic of care or in terms of prioritising a relation or a connectedness (Gilligan, 1982). This story is highlighted in the following:

Quotation 14

*So where do we get to the point where we can actually say, I know who I am?(pause), 'cause I think like with a lot of decisions like I still like I don't know, so then I then I think of what my parents would say and then I go to my beliefs and then that's what my beliefs say but when is it ever me making the decision?*

Quotation 15

*I have some moments where I don't trust my own experiences, like I'd rather ask, I'd rather call my mom first or sometimes I even, like even with dumb things like what to wear, I still ask my sister do I look good in this because I don't know like (long pause), ya, I'd rather learn from what I have been told than from my own experiences and I am not saying it's a good thing or a bad thing I'm just saying.*

In quotation 15, the participant firstly refers to not trusting self by employing those very words. The participants speaking in both quotations explain the process they follow in making decisions which involve ensuring a homeostasis in a relationship. This homeostasis is ensured by consulting people with whom the participants are in relationship with such as friends, family and so on. It seems to the researcher that the participants are communicating that when they make a decision without consulting with others in their lives then the decisions may not have been adequately thought through. In both groups the participants have alluded to the importance of other people's involvement in their decision making. Although the latter may highlight the importance of connection to these young women, it may also tell the story of not trusting self, as one participant explicitly stated above. The researcher recognises this narrative as a shadow narrative, particularly because the participants communicate their need to be connected as a dominant story which at the same time is unexplored.

- Counter narratives

### Narrative of the story of acculturation

The counter narrative is categorised as the story of acculturation. Instead of falling into the expected female norm behaviours, the participants expressed their exercising of choice. The career options, such as qualifying as a CA, seemed to be appealing to the young women particularly in Group 1. In Group 2, the young women were occupied with ideas suggesting the need to individualise, which appear to be deviating from the traditional norm. The researcher posits that the wish of the participants to individualise may be informed by interacting with contexts and cultures which are different from the environments in which the young women have been traditionally brought up. The young woman may therefore not only have her own culture and norms to consider when constructing her identity and sexual decision, she may also conduct a conversation with other stories outside of her culture and norms. The young women furthermore expressed a need for communication about sex with their parents, particularly their mothers. The latter need also moves away from the traditional strategy for handling sexuality (Eaton, Flisher & Aaro, 2003; Richer, Norris & Ginsburg, 2006). The quotations below indicate how the participants may have told the story of acculturation.

#### Quotation 7

*Wanna be the housewife you know but a CA..... I wanna be a CA*

In quotation 7, the participant seems to be experiencing a conflict which may be a result of input from two different sources. The one source may be the culture from which the participant stems, while the other could be the envelopment to which the participant may have been exposed during secondary socialisation. The use of the word *but* gives evidence of the conflict between the two priorities that the participant seems to be exploring. The pauses in between the sentences also offer proof of this conflict. Particularly in the context of the university, the participants are necessarily exposed to different ways of doing things from those in the culture within which they had

experienced their primary socialisation. By referring to the desire to be a housewife together with the desire to be a CA, the participant seems to be experiencing conflicting priorities, which may be a by-product of acculturation.

Quotation 16

*In this time where they are preaching independence and you know you don't have to be housewife, you don't have to, do the cooking and cleaning and looking after your man and like if you want to do it then you know.... it's great, cos before it was just a matter of that's who you are, that you were, that you would be defined as that, that you 9 month footed in the kitchen but now it's a matter of you want to do that and it's not everyone who wants to do that, I am sure that in the past even if they didn't want to they had to do it but now it's a matter of living the way that you want to, do you want to take care of your kids, do you want to take care of your husband but I think now if you were in a situation that you were forced to do it, it might have been a different story, where it wasn't coming from yourself, and the fact that your mother, seeing your mother doing it and the role that she played in taking care of you and feeding you and nurturing you, you want to fulfill that role in some, and it's it's natural but in some way if you were forced to do it, it would have been a different story, you know*

The above quotation (16) further affirms the deviation from the traditional norm. The participant shares the view that one no longer seems to be expected to fulfil the traditional definition of femininity such as cooking, cleaning, caring for one's husband and so forth. This quotation therefore thickens the narrative of the story of acculturation by challenging the traditional norm.

Quotation 17

*So I think it's about who you are, I would like stress on the point that it is who you are and how far you take things; and I think it's not only about the environment you are in but it's about who you know as yourself, who do you know as yourself; if you love yourself then you will be able to;(pause) if you love, accept and know yourself,*

In addition, the above quotation (17) further affirms the story of acculturation. In it a challenge is posed to the traditional norms of the environment one has come from as important to affirm one's decision. This challenge is uttered by placing the focus on the person making the decision and on what is important to that person. The words *yourself* and *you* are used numerous times to highlight the importance of this focus.

In the three quotations (7, 16 and 17) above, the traditional norm seems to be challenged. The researcher suggests this takes the form of the story of acculturation. As participants come in contact with influences different from their traditional norms, they in turn challenge these norms. The latter is evident in the radical difference from the dominant narrative and contradiction to the traditional norm found in the above three quotations.

#### **b) Synchronic - diachronic dimension**

The participants' negotiation for power with each other, the researcher and other conversations to which they may have been exposed (Baxter, 2003), will now be discussed as part of the synchronic - diachronic dimension of textual analysis. The researcher discusses the latter by providing her reflections on the ways in which the negotiation of power may have occurred and supports her views with extracts from quotations or full quotations from the respective focus group discussions. She furthermore comments on these extracts or complete quotations by offering a justification for her reflections. This justification may for example include a discussion of a certain word or a phrase in the quotation.

Firstly, the researcher acknowledges the groups' need to agree. The group used the word "ya" to demostate agreement. This word is commonly employed in day to day conversations in order to agree or communicate agreement within a group of people. The word "ya" is used ten times throughout the whole discussion in Group 1. The participants' need to agree is congruent with Gilligan's (1982) work where she suggests that females find connected learning to be important. Noting the need women have for

connected learning, it appeared likely that they would spend most of the conversation negotiating to agree. Agreeing may have made them feel connected and might therefore have been fruitful for them.

Furthermore, the young women did thus undertake a constant negotiation for power so that they could agree. Several of the participants stated their individual views about what was being asked, while also at times arguing what the person or people who spoke before them had been talking about. They ultimately reached their main themes and stuck to them. The participants' negotiation of power to agree may have been taking place in the following statements:

Quotation 18

*I think it's interesting that actually everybody agrees with the whole social construction, uhm, that your parents, your family relations, that your family was number one for everybody and I believe that is true*

Quotation 19

*I agree with, um, what L(participant's name), was saying about parents being absolutely crucial in the social construction of women's identity*

Quotation 20

*Group quarrels.*

In quotation 18 the participant argues that "everybody agrees" while in the next quotation (19) the participant states that "she agrees" with another participant. The latter implies to the researcher the great importance accorded to agreement. In addition, in the last quotation (20) the participants quarrelled as soon as they experienced much difference of opinion. The researcher regards the group quarrel as still firmer evidence of how necessary it was for the participants to agree. The participants seemed to have quarrelled to show each other where the other was coming from, so that the other participants could accept their views; this may have served as a means of agreement.

According to the researcher's observations, some participants were allowed to talk more than others even if this may have felt uncomfortable for some participants. The participants non-verbally agreed on who amongst themselves exercised the most power. The young woman silently nominated as possessing the most power had the opportunity to speak more than others in both groups. She had a longer period to talk; her comments were almost all the time lengthy. She was the first person to talk and was referred to by other participants in their comments, particularly in Group 1. The main themes included comments made by the person who spoke first and the person who spoke the most, as well as the one who was accorded the most floor time in both groups. The participants furthermore negotiated power by commenting on each others' views and / or deviating from the previous point of view and starting a discussion about a different point, particularly in Group 2.

Moreover, the participants negotiated power with previous conversations in their lives that had been related to the topic under discussion. These moments could have taken place in the silences, in the laughs, pauses and quarrels that occurred in the focus group discussion. These could have also occurred in some of the comments expressed, for example:

Quotation 21

*You don't have to, do the cooking and cleaning and looking after your man and like if you want to do it then you know (hesitation) it's great, cos before it was just a matter of that's who you are, that you were, that you would be defined as that*

The use of the hesitation in the above quotation (21) in the researcher's view seems to imply an internal conversation. This might have taken the place of a previous conversation that the participant may have conducted prior to this focus group discussion. The words of the participant also seem to suggest that the participant is neither for nor against the cooking, cleaning etcetera and may be debating this in the internal conversation while expressing her conflict verbally. The researcher therefore reflects on the latter as a negotiation of power between the participants in the focus group discussion

and the viewpoints established in previous conversation.

During the focus group discussion of Group 2 terms such as 'easy girl' were used to refer to a girl who is not perceived to be assertive or who is promiscuous, as perceived by the participants. The use of this term may have been involved in the process of negotiating power. The researcher infers that had there been a young woman in the group of participants, who had been termed an 'easy girl' at a conversation outside this conversation (or a young woman who perceived herself as an 'easy girl'), she would have possibly adopted a position of powerlessness, influenced by the use of the word. 'Easy' might have confirmed what previous conversations would have said to the young woman. The story of being an 'easy girl' may have been thickened by the group discussion where she may have not had the power to defend herself, even had she desired to, since she could have been outnumbered.

These terms are contained in the following extracts:

Quotation 22

*But maybe I don't know about the experiences, because if for example learn from your experiences and you are sleeping with a guy and it makes you feel terrible then you are not going to do it again, but then girls who (pause) are (pause) 'sluts' (pause) ehm, then do they just ehm, obviously they learn but do they just keep doing it because that's what their priority or because that's the role they've been put into in their little (pause) group like, at the party, like they are put in a box like she's the (pause) like*

Quotation 23

*Well I feel because everyone wants acceptance they want to be or they need to be dependent but it's a choice where you are going to put that dependence and I think once you have made that choice, it will be hard to, to change especially for those people who maybe make the wrong choice (long pause). Cause I also think like the, the 'easy girl' whatever (some participants laugh) are like, if she decides this is not what she wants then she suddenly like, starts acting like no she doesn't want to what what what then (pause) I think then people then don't know how to treat her, ya, and I think it's really difficult*

*'cause people now think she is a hypocrite or she just changing her mind all the time, I think it's (pause) mmm, hard.*

The researcher claimed her power in both groups by occupying the researcher's position and being the one who knew the procedures of the inquiry. She possessed the power to begin and end the discussion. She did, however, present herself as being liberal and open to participants' ownership of the process.

The use of an audio recorder played a role in the process of shifting and negotiating power amongst the participants. In addition, its use performed the role of negotiating power between the researcher and participants, particularly in their interaction. Its employment facilitated the process of denying the researcher the expert role because it acted as a tangible instrument to show who dominated the conversation at different moments in the conversation. The researcher was therefore able to facilitate the conversation rather than dominate it as an expert or the person who spoke the most.

### **c) Denotative-connotative dimension**

In this section, the researcher will discuss how institutional and / or social discourses were operating in the research process by means of the denotative-connotative dimension of FPDA (Baxter, 2003). As in the discussion of the synchronic – diachronic dimension above, the researcher will offer an indication of her reflections while supporting them with quotations and / or extracts from quotations. Some of the researcher's comments will likewise include observations that she has made.

According to some previous studies discussed throughout this text, there may be certain discourses that are tied into the topic of interest. One of these discourses has been discussed in the work of Maxwell (2006) and Campbell, Foulis, Maimane and Sibiyi (2005). These researchers have included in their work what the current researcher refers to as the double bind script. This

social discourse has been evident in the current conversation of this research process as noted under the NGT discussion earlier, as well as in the discourses identified above.

As elaborated earlier in this text in reference to the double bound script, young women seem to be, on the one hand, socialised to please the man and be submissive while on the other hand they are taught that sex is a shameful act from which a young woman needs to stay away. This social discourse appeared to form part of the discussion as highlighted in the following quotes:

#### Quotation 24

*You know up right up bringing as you said you are not in a such a relationship and you kinda perceive sex as a more ehm ehm like a ya a big thing to overcome*

In the above quotation (24) the participant seems to be demonstrating a perception congruent with the above mentioned socialisation as in being taught that sex is a shameful act. The researcher infers this based on the words the participant uses, expressing the view that sex is "a big thing to overcome". The "upright upbringing" she mentions seems to refer to traditional cultural / societal views, which are likely to represent the environment where the view that sex is a shameful act is to be found.

#### Part of Quotation 8

*My mommy would kill me but I love John so much, we have been together for so long so your personal reasoning and your personal desires come forth and could possibly override what your family up bringing has taught you*

Here the participant expresses her conflict, where she wishes to please John though she is aware that her mother would "kill her" if she went through with the sexual act. This appears to be a classic example of the double bound script. The researcher infers that the participant communicates to the group what her mother's reaction would be if she engaged in sex with John because of the teaching she had received that sex is a shameful and act and an activity she should stay away from. However, she seems to experience a

need to please John as they have been together for a long time.

The discourse of desiring to adhere to the traditional norm while being exposed to acculturation was also highlighted in the discussion. The following extracts may serve as an example for this kind of discourse. These quotes may also suggest the conflict the young women may be experiencing in terms of the crisis of identity vs. moral belief. While acculturation may suggest that the young women can be independent and make decisions that are not necessarily linked to others, the cultural norm may be telling the young women to be relationally driven. In addition to the quotations below the reader is advised to refer to quotation 16

#### Quotation 25

*Oh! Okay. I think that ehm, women (pause) do know themselves (giggle), we all have certain values that we believe in but sometimes because of society, peer pressure ehm, it makes issues like sexual activity seem okay and if you are not involved you feel like you are not conforming to society, so I feel that we all have as women we have self-knowledge ehm, manners in which we take things but sometimes ehm peer pressure from society makes us ehm make certain decisions*

#### Quotation 7

*As you will soon be in the corporate world, so how you soon as you going to view yourself as a woman of a household, that is what I thought as sexual identity cos for me (pause) I grew up with a mom who was like you know house wife, you know she was there all the time at home, cooking, doing all that stuff so my sexual identity I think, I fell like I'd wanna like do that, you know I wanna be the housewife you know but a CA (laugh) , (group laughs), I wanna be a CA, I wanna do that stuff, I wanna, I feel like that part of me, that's part of my sexual identity, that's part of me being a woman, that's part of my femininity, doing that stuff, cooking for my husband, cleaning, providing a good (pause) household of warm loving place, I don't know, you know, ya that's how I feel, that is sexual identity*

The quotation (25) above seems to demonstrate the participant's statement

that although women may know what they want, they may be greatly influenced by the expectations of society. The words "*so I feel that we all have as women we have self-knowledge ehm, manners in which we take things but sometimes ehm peer pressure from society makes us ehm make certain decisions*", may serve as evidence of the latter. Furthermore, in the above quotation, the participant giggles after she mentions that young women know themselves, which may suggest an internal conversation that might be questioning the legitimacy or agreement of her suggestion with institutional expectations.

The young women speaking in quotations 7 and 16 may be expressing the same conflicts as the participant speaking in the above quotation. The person in quotation 7 seems to wonder how to balance the demands of the corporate world with the expectations of her culture and society which may define her female identity, such as cooking, or her own view of being a woman in a household. The participant speaking in quotation 16 seems to be experiencing conflict with herself while speaking, as to whether she wants to fulfil the role she had seen her mother fulfill. Her considering the evolution of life's demands, and societal norms, expresses the view that women must adhere to the traditional expectations of women in her society. She seems to highlight the evolution of norms by making an entrance using the word *independence*. She furthermore remarks that females are no longer forced to do things the way traditional norms expect them to. The researcher consequently hears the voices of these participants expressing the social discourse relating to the impact of acculturation on traditional discourses.

In addition the participants speaking in quotation 7 and 16 seem to be expressing the conflict arising from questioning whether they should please themselves or others. They seem to acknowledge what others, or society, say while at the same time wanting a different outcome for themselves. The young woman speaking in quotation 25 expresses the view that although she knows what she wants she may feel cast out by society or as if she is not conforming to it. The participant speaking in quotation 16, expresses her awareness of learning new ways of doing things. It seems to the researcher that she

consequently attempts to make sense of how to adhere to the expectation of being a housewife or playing the traditional female role at the same time. The researcher hence identifies the latter as possibly a demonstration of Gilligan's suggestion that women may struggle with either pleasing themselves or others, that is, asking "what is right for me and what is right for others?" (Gilligan, 1982). She terms this the crisis of identity vs. moral belief (Gilligan, 1982).

Secondly, the scripted refusal discourse was alluded to in the discussion. This discourse seemed to be congruent with the discourse in previous literature where it is suggested that women may feel obligated to initially tell their partner that they do not want sex when / while they may agree at a later stage (Lear, 1995; Maxwell, 2006). Men therefore apparently do not regard the refusal as definite because they may expect the woman to tell them something different at a later stage. The following extracts offer an indication of how the scripted refusal discourse may have been discussed in the two groups:

#### Quotation 26

*It's also like, he says let's go on a date and you say yes then to a kiss then you got to like next step you say yes and say yes and you can't turn around on it now (laugh), I think that influences a lot 'cause that that's what they think is who you are and that's who you act and it might not be who you are, but*

It seems to the researcher that, according to quotation 26, there is a certain expected way to behave in a romantic situation. The participant remarks, "that's what they think is who you are and that's who you act and it might not be who you are" as though a certain response in a romantic relationship may accord one definition in terms of identity or sexual identity. The researcher therefore infers that a script may occur in communities in terms of responding to romantic relationship situations relating to sex. The researcher also infers from the quotation that to say 'no' rather than 'yes' may be acceptable. A scripted refusal is therefore implied.

#### Quotation 8

*I mean when you are sitting by yourself and maybe John has just left and has asked you to like ehm think about it and we might do it next time you might think but at the exact same time you might think sho! my mommy would kill me but I love John so much, we have been together for so long so your personal reasoning and your personal desires come forth and could possibly override what your family upbringing has taught you.*

This speaker alludes to a situation where she may have been sitting with John and he might have asked her to think about it and they would be engaging in sex next time as a hypothetical situation. The researcher infers that the participant's speech as well as the group acceptance of it may seem to be a common scenario to propose. The way in which the speaker refers to this possibly common situation, gives the researcher the impression that it may seem to be normal first to refuse, be asked to think about it and later agree. The speaker also communicates a possible "yes" *next time* which she poses as most likely to happen as she thinks about her mother's reaction. The researcher therefore gains the impression that if this is a common situation and common process, then a scripted refusal is implied.

#### **d) Intertextuality**

The aim of engaging in a consideration of intertextuality is to foreground and highlight the ways in which the dominant discourse had been contained in the other discourses. Earlier in this chapter it was pointed out that the dominant discourse included parents, the need for self-differentiation or to individualise, as well as the crisis of identity vs. moral belief.

The researcher is of the opinion that the silent narrative may have been loaded with the dominant narrative. The silent narrative, as observed earlier, may contain the discourse that sex is a cultural taboo not subject to discussion. Since parents are the people who communicate and decide what is taboo or not (Gavey, 1989), participants may have conveyed the dominant

narrative into this silent narrative. The need to self-differentiate may however motivate the participants to engage in this kind of conversation, since it may be important to them at the time according to the environment they find themselves in, for example, that of romantic relationships. The crisis of identity vs. moral belief may therefore raise anxiety during the discussions which may have displayed itself in the form of giggles and other gestures.

The discourse of missing vocabulary or words to express women's sexual experiences and / or related experiences (Lear, 1995), may also be conveyed by the dominant narrative, again particularly that of parents. The researcher suggests that during the processes of typification, institutionalisation, legitimisation and / or reification certain words may or may not be allowed in the vocabulary of women. The latter may also occur or form part of the socialisation in which parents are involved. On the other hand, as the female grows up and seeks to express herself, she may experience the need for these words.

The researcher posits that the amount of acculturation which women allow in their lives may be regulated by their parental input, their success in self-differentiation, as well as by how the female copes with the crisis of identity vs. moral belief. She further suggests that the latter, together with the change that acculturation may bring, may inform the extent to which young women are prepared either to be closed or open to acculturation.

#### **e) Feminist poststructuralist discourse analysis (FPDA) commentary**

The above discussion in this chapter may have the potential to tell a story about the experience of being a young woman in South Africa, where issues of young women's identity and sexuality were previously and may still be taboo topics. The limited vocabulary in this regard may be fostered by the previous position in which women found themselves in our country. However, in the liberated environment that South Africa aspires to be, where freedom of speech is advocated, these taboo topics may begin to expand, and the

hitherto limited vocabulary could be enlarged.

This silent narrative may have told a tale about the psycho-political experience of young South African women which possibly has not been narrated previously. It may convey the theme that a communal artifact amongst young women may be necessary to enrich the vocabulary and create the platform to discuss their story.

### **5.5 In a nutshell**

The researcher has taken advantage of this section of the text to summarise the overall ideas that have been threaded through the two focus group conversations. Firstly, the young women have suggested that the social construction of their identity is achieved in a relationship context. The young women find connectedness to be important in gaining a definition of their identity. In both conversations or groups, the researcher argues, the young women felt that a communal artifact is essential to the social construction of their sexual identity. She arrives at this interpretation because the young women in both groups mentioned contexts that involve or are sources of communal artifacts, such as parents, beliefs, peer relationships etcetera. The factors the young women identified as playing a role in constituting their sexual identity also included the crisis of identity vs. moral belief. Lastly, they felt that the intrapersonal script narrates one's sexual decision. The ethics of care also informs the decision making process.

## **CHAPTER 6: CLOSING THE CURTAIN**

### **6.1 The ushering**

This chapter concludes the text by furnishing a brief discussion of how future research could build upon the current study. The writer will offer an indication of what could have been of benefit for this study in the hope that other researchers can use her observations to thicken and broaden the story of young women pertaining to the social construction of identity and sexual decisions. The writer also shares her final thoughts about this text and her stance pertaining to this text.

### **6.2 Inquiry findings**

In the previous chapter the researcher has noted the findings of this research process. The topic was explored in this study in terms of a three-pronged purpose that, firstly, sought to understand the factors that contribute to the social construction of young women's identity. Secondly, the researcher sought to understand the factors that constitute the social construction of the sexual identity of young women. Thirdly, and finally, she sought to understand how young women make sexual decisions as informed by the social construction of the identity and sexual identity of young women. This section therefore includes a summary and integration of information obtained in the research process, as well as its application and integration to relevant previous research that has been discussed earlier in this document.

The participants in this research process seemed to be clear about the dominant character of their socialisation by their parents as well as the input they had received from parents, particularly mothers, in the process of the construction of their identity. As discussed earlier in the text, socialisation allows an individual to exist harmoniously within a social group (Beyer, Du Preez & Blokland, 2007). The existence of a shared metaphor in a community is therefore shown to be important in the social construction of young

women's identity. The latter is therefore thoroughly understood from a systems theory point of view, which has been discussed in chapter 2. The participants suggest that it is essential for them to achieve a form of separatedness from their family, which the researcher formulates as a form of self-differentiation, as discussed by Bowen in chapter 3.

This need to self-differentiate, according to the participants, is motivated by a need for self-knowledge and self-definition that is not dependent on others. Carter (1989) and Charles (2001) have established the same finding in their previous work. While the participants felt a need to self-differentiate to come to know themselves, they have also highlighted the significance of connectedness to others by means of relationships in their lives, in relation to how they come to understand themselves. The latter suggestion is regarded by the researcher as congruent with the views of Gilligan (1982). The participants reported that a relationship context is essential for the social construction of the identity of young women. It appeared, from their reports, that connectedness is important in defining identity as a young woman. Also, as emphasised earlier in the text, Gilligan (1982) suggests that women get to know themselves in terms of the relationships they have in their lives. According to other researchers (such as Bukler, 2005; Carter, 1989; Lamcombe & Gay, 1998), intimacy accompanies the identity of females, which further theoretically grounds the findings of this research.

The participants have also found conversations to be significant in their decisions and construction of meaning, pertaining to how they understand themselves as well as their sexual identity. The latter seems to echo the suggestions of Burr (2003) that the heart of social constructionism is language and, in turn, discourse since people use language to discourse (talk) and construct meanings. The position adopted by the participants, that conversations are important, suggests to the researcher that this position is consistent with the concepts of social construction, that is, discourse is significant in the processes involved in meaning construction.

The researcher therefore accepts the participants' position as not only

acceptable in social construction theory but also one that could be firmly established in such theory. Conversation may occur during primary socialisation with parents and / or authority figures as well as in secondary socialisation with peers (Sternberg, 1997). This conversation may also include the questioning of the teachings of socialisation that the participants may enter into because of various factors (Burr, 2003) which may include self-differentiation, processes of acculturation and the like. The existence of multiple realities therefore allows room for the individual to explore the gender role further than that which was acquired during socialisation. This exploration, according to systems theory, is likely to occur within the limits of maintaining homeostasis in the system or community and context within which each individual lives. The researcher finds the latter also congruent with Bartle-Haring (1997).

The conversation that may occur during the social construction of sexual identity and which may inform the social construction of identity and of sexual decisions may include various items discussed in chapter 3: some of these have been referred to by the participants. They may include the socialisation of females within the boundaries of femininity according to the specific context rather than allowing any exploration of sexuality by young women. As mentioned, young women are taught that sex is a shameful and dangerous act (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya, 2005) with the focus on the avoidance of pregnancy in adolescent and early adulthood years (Hyde & Jaffee, 2000, Leigh, 1989). Young women are also socialised to be submissive and caring towards men (Kigozi, 2006). Such caring is defined by satisfying the man's needs and obeying his instructions (Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya, 2005; Maxwell, 2006).

These items may also furthermore include the role of the gatekeeper of sexual intimacy (Krahè, Bieneck & Scheinberger-Olwig, 2007) or the discourse of the virgin protector as it is termed by other authors (Lear, 1995). These items, as also described by the participants, tend to shape how the young women see themselves as sexual beings. This view also tends to inform the sexual decisions that they make. Since, according to Gilligan, women seem to judge

themselves in terms of their ability to care, a crisis of identity and moral belief may be experienced in the case of making a sexual decision following the socialisation process discussed above. This crisis is characterised by the struggle to decide what is right for the female while the ability to care is characterised by prioritising responsibility and loyalty towards the other.

The participants took the above mentioned process further by expressing the need to self-differentiate. They felt that in a situation where they would have gained adequate self-knowledge and were able to find approval from sources, excluding other people, they would be able to make sexual decisions that might leave them satisfied. The latter confirmed for the researcher that the ideas of Bowen (1976) remained important to acknowledge for the purpose of this study. The latter confirmation stems from Bowen's discussion of self-differentiation which prioritises the same aspects as do the participants.

The participants finally reported that one's intrapersonal script appears to inform the sexual decisions of young women. They seemed to hold the view that such a script is informed by socialisation, context (family, friends, religion, beliefs and so forth), as well as by past experience, among other factors. This view is congruent with the suggestions made by Giles (2006), as well as Simon & Gagnon (2003), when discussing sexual scripts. According to the researcher the participants categorised family and religion and beliefs as their cultural scenarios. Romantic relationships seemed to be important to the participants for a sexual decision to occur. The researcher is of the opinion that the romantic relationship seems to constitute the interpersonal script for the participants. The participants confirmed that personal insights, self-knowledge, would comprise what the researcher would term the intrapersonal script informing the sexual decisions they would make.

In conclusion, while acknowledging the dominant narrative of this study, the researcher also acknowledges the differences between women. These may stem from and might include differences about life choices, personalities, upbringing, the responses of women to biological concepts as well as the thoughts that the participants might have had about the inquiry (Baron &

Byrne, 2003; Butler, 1999). The researcher therefore acknowledges that if the questions of this research were to be posed to the same participants at another time, different answers might be obtained.

### **6.3 Strengths and weaknesses of the inquiry**

The research process reflected a few strengths and weaknesses which the researcher would like to discuss. This discussion may serve as a means for the reader to acquire 'inside information' so as to understand the inquiry and its outcomes better.

The limitations in the process as a whole included the fact that the research project was registered at a higher education institution different from the one where the participants in the inquiry were registered. This implied that both the higher education institutions needed to give permission for conducting the research. The process of obtaining permission prolonged the planned schedule, which caused frustration for the researcher. The expected completion time was also prolonged. The latter resulted in having the inquiry take place at a pressured time of the year for the participants of Group 1. The researcher and the participants of Group 1 were therefore fatigued, which may have affected their concentration during the inquiry. This may have limited the potential information that might have been gathered.

On the other hand an advantage of selecting students from a different higher education institution is that the participants may have felt more comfortable and open to discuss their stories. The contents of their stories could have represented delicate and private information. The participants may have been reassured by the fact that individuals who would have access to the material were not from the same university, and hence were comfortable and open to discuss their stories for the purpose of this study. The researcher was familiar with the environment in which the students were living as she had been a previous student at the same university and had been working at the particular campus at that time. She therefore formed part of the same community as the participants, which made gatekeeper(s) unnecessary as the

participants should have felt safe. A possible increased openness to the researcher and the inquiry could therefore have yielded thick descriptions of the participants' stories.

One of the most valuable strengths of the research process on the whole included the establishment of a strong researcher-participant relationship. As was discussed in previous chapters, the establishment of such a relationship offers numerous advantages. In short; the participants were accorded room to own the process and were therefore free to share as much as they were comfortable with. A strong relationship of this kind was expected to encourage thick descriptions, which were indeed obtained. Furthermore, the researcher was young, unmarried and still studying, with which the participants could identify. This created a comfortable, nonthreatening environment which also facilitated thick descriptions of the participants' stories. Furthermore, participants volunteered to be part of the research inquiry, which likewise fostered thick descriptions.

The participants' life stories were not considered during the inquiry. The researcher was only interested in hearing the narratives of the participants' stories regarding the topic. However, her not having taken their life stories into account may have restricted the scope of the stories pertaining to the topic of discussion. Moreover, while the art expression served as an icebreaker and thought provoker in the inquiry the resulting narrative was not explored in depth, which might have thickened the stories.

The decision to extend the inquiry by facilitating a second group seemed to be valuable to the research process as it appeared to thicken the narrative found in group 1 pertaining to the topic of interest. The researcher was more fully equipped and empowered as she had been through an inquiry process previously: that of focus group 1. The new group of participants brought freshness to the inquiry with different group dynamics. The inquiry occurred over the weekend, which the participants appreciated. Their activities after the inquiry were fewer; they were therefore more relaxed than if the focus group discussion had occurred in the week.

The participants of Group 2 seemed awkward to talk about the questions posed, which therefore limited the thickness and richness of the narrative. They were also a smaller group than had been expected. Therefore, they may have not experienced enough debate and / or heard a sufficient variety of views to exchange and bounce off each other.

The researcher however acknowledges that sexually experienced women may have a different story than the participants of this research process. The inquiry findings are therefore discussed from the point of view of the participants of this research process. The researcher would like to highlight for the reader that information about how sexually experienced or not experienced the participants were, was not requested. The researcher viewed the social construction of sexual identity and sexual decisions as a more important focus than sexual experience. However, it may have been valuable to consider the participants' sexual experience as it may have given the information obtained a sharper focus.

The literature or previous research that has been explored to inform this research was appreciated from various sources and authors or researchers from diverse cultural context as well as research facilitated in various cultural contexts. The researcher acknowledges that although it remains beneficial to explore South African specific literature to inform this research, Western literature has had a dominant voice in informing this research process. Efforts have been made to acquire South African sources to inform this research hence the work of Kigozi (2006), Campbell, Foulis, Maimane & Sibiya (2005), Meekers & Ahmed (2000), Rosenberg (2002) as well as Richter, Norris & Ginsburg (2006) has been used. The researcher therefore acknowledges the limitations of the South African, cultural and context relevant literature used in this research process as compared to previous studies consulted in this study carried out by researchers from other countries, such as the American context. The researcher furthermore hopes that this research text can be included in increasing the existing knowledge in the field of psychology and sexual related studies in this country. Culturally, context specific and relevant research may assist the particular communities to be informed about their

own functioning so as to be more empowered and achieve a sense of growth.

The interpretation of the information obtained in the research inquiry was done by the researcher. As a primary research instrument the researcher's own experiences and motivations of choosing the topic of interest need to be acknowledged as having played a role in the interpretation process. The role of the researcher in interpreting the information obtained included obtaining clarity from the participants about words they used, reflecting and probing when necessary during the inquiry. The researcher also used her own experiences whether personal or related to her experience in working with young people in the sexual related field to do the interpretation. The researcher's background in psychology training and knowledge of psychology theory also played a role in the interpretation of the information obtained. The researcher would like to highlight to the reader that the participants did however have the opportunity to contribute to the interpretation of the information as invited by the researcher during the inquiry introduction. The researcher is not particularly aware of the reasons of the participants not contributing to the interpretation of the information. The researcher therefore refrains from making assumptions of possible reasons for the participants not contributing to the interpretation.

#### **6.4 Looking ahead**

A brief discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the inquiry has been furnished above. At this point the researcher examines how the research could be improved and how other researchers could build on the current research.

She suggests that more focus groups may be helpful to research of this kind. The thicker, deeper and wider the stories obtained from the participants, the more the researcher should be able to gain a clear picture of the experiences of the young women (Dalton, Elias & Wandermans, 2001). It may also be beneficial for future research processes to invest in time to run focus groups

in more than one setting. Other environments may include more than one higher education institution or settings that are not higher education institutions. Furthermore, young women who are not in higher education institutions could be involved in the research process. The benefit of exploring more than one context may be that context specific meaning could be obtained and assessed. Moreover, an exploration of other settings could also include holding a focus group or groups with males of the age of interest.

Although focus groups are useful for considering the individual participants' voices, as well as for obtaining a group meaning, the researcher suggests one-on-one interviews for future research processes. Such interviews may assist in thickening the voice of the individual and also in identifying the individual experience of each young woman (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2002). While the researcher attempted to hear the stories of individual young women by means of art and creative expressions she considers that one-on-one interviews might help to capture more of the stories of the young women. In addition, the person's life story, otherwise termed her life history (Creswell, 2007, Hiles & Čermák, 2008), may constitute another avenue to explore in terms of obtaining thicker and deeper individual stories.

The definition of sexual in this text also needs to be considered. Future researchers may wish to use the word 'sexual' to mean something else. Such researchers may also wish to employ the definition used in this text, while also building in other references to the meaning or definition of sex. Other writers have already indicated the use of 'sex' to refer to hugging, kissing or other affectionate actions (Rostosky, Galliher, Welsh & Kawaguchi, 2000). In a similar manner, identity and sexual identity may be given another definition according to what the research may be aiming to achieve.

## **6.5 The end**

The researcher acknowledges the insights gained in this process and hopes to have contributed to the academic world and other sectors of society that

may be interested in the topic. She hopes that, through engaging in conversation, those who have partaken in the research process may have developed new meanings about the social constructs discussed. It is her hope that, by means of this research, the young women who participated in the process, including the researcher, will have expanded their reality as regards the social constructs under discussion. The researcher anticipates that further conversations might be sparked in the contexts where the young women live.

In the event that this occurs, she hopes that unchallenged aspects in the lives of young women pertaining to the interests of this researcher may be questioned. This may further empower young women pertaining to the interests of the research. Furthermore, the researcher hopes to spark conversation in the given contexts so as to further equip young women to make more informed decisions.

The interest of the researcher regarding this research process lay in obtaining the reality or 'truth' pertaining to the social constructs discussed and explored. In conclusion, the researcher wishes to pose this question: Who determines the truth, what is the truth, where does truth come from, why is there truth at all? The researcher leaves the reader to answer the question in the reality of her or his contexts. Since research is humanly made or facilitated and written, the researcher concludes this document knowing that no research brings us closer the "the truth", but that it represents a part of the reality and a truth amongst other truths. This research gives us a glimpse of the truth for this group of women. Others may experience similar truths, while others may construct their worlds differently. Other researchers are welcome to explore this text and to build on the work done. They are also welcome to disagree with the contents of this text and are also welcome to add to the work pertaining to this text. The researcher suggests that all truth may make up one Truth, where we are all similar.

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## APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
Faculty of the Humanities

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The social construction of young women identity and sexual decisions

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### INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPATING YOUNG WOMEN

*Dear participant*

Thank you for your openness to participating in this research regarding the social construction of young women identity and sexual decisions. As the researcher, I hope that this is as exciting for you as it is for me. I also hope that it will be an insightful learning process for you as I anticipate it to be for me. I hope that the process will offer an added opportunity for you to be empowered and also offer resources to empower other young women outside of this process. This letter is to ask you to be part of this research process. It also serves to inform you about the aims of the research as well as providing an outline of your role in the research. This information is provided so that you can make an informed decision to be part of the research process.

#### Goals of the research

This research project is part of the requirements for a qualification in MSc (Counselling Psychology) at the University of the Free State. The following are the aims of the research process. According to the research approach the goals may be adapted as considered by the researcher and the participants during the research process:

- To understand the social construction (processes that are involved in the defining/making up) of young women's identity
- To explore young women's sexual identity
- To gain an understanding of what young women understand sex to be
- To understand what processes are elicited in making sexual decisions
- To explore the reality that dominates when confronted with sexual decisions

#### The role of the participant

The participant that is needed for this process is a young woman in undergraduate study at the University of Pretoria. The participant input is seen as equally important as the researcher participation in this research process. The latter rises from the acknowledgement that both the researcher and the participant have experience and knowledge to bring to the table. The experience of each young woman is essential in making the research process fruitful.

The participant is informed about the confidential nature of the information shared during the research process. It is however important for the participant to note that since the research process is part of academic study requirements, the researcher's supervisor and assessors will have access to some information. It is therefore expected that the participant will make the

researcher aware of information that the participant seeks to keep from the supervisor and assessors. Furthermore, it is important to note that the researcher is also bound by psychology ethics. Participants therefore are willing to participate in the research process with the knowledge that the information shared will be included in the writing of a dissertation as a form of a report of the process undertaken.

Furthermore, it is the participants' choice whether they want their real names or a pseudonym to be used in the writing of the dissertation. All information regarding the participation of the participants will be available to participants and is subject to adjustment as regarded by the participant so as to present a more accurate reflection of the proceedings. The participants are also welcome to possess as copy of the material shared as well as the outcome of the process. Finally participants are free to withdraw from the research process at any time without any consequences. Since the participants are involved in the research process as volunteers; no monetary remuneration will be awarded.

The research process will take place in two phases. The first phase serves as an introduction to the research topic and a space for relationship building amongst the researcher and the participants as well as amongst the participants. The second phase involves the sharing of our stories as young women. These stories are those that will add value to the research process. As being involved in the research process includes the sharing of your story, participants are encouraged to note that they will not be expected to go deeper than they are prepared to do in their sharing. The participant is furthermore encouraged to take note that the research activities do not include therapy.

Participants can feel free to request for more information in cases where this letter does not satisfactorily offer enough information. It is the desire of the researcher that participants feel knowledgeable and have understanding of their role and the proceedings of this research. The latter will assist in the participants' informed consent and will allow the research process to reach its potential.

#### Contact information

For further information or questions, please feel free to contact Neo Pule at Student Support or at 0821759703. If necessary; participants can contact the supervisor of this research at [naudel.hum@ufs.ac.za](mailto:naudel.hum@ufs.ac.za).

Thank you for taking time to read this. I hope that this will be a matter of interest to you.

Yours sincerely  
Neo Pule

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**APPENDIX B**

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**Consent form for participants**

I hereby declare that I have read the information letter. I agree with the contents of the letter. All information concerning the research process has been satisfactorily communicated. I am aware that I am free to request any further information at any stage. In acceptance to the following, I volunteer myself to be part of the research process:

I know that:

- My participation in the research is voluntary.
- I am free to withdraw from the research at any point.
- I am aware that some of my personal information may be used at the conclusion of the process in writing the dissertation.
- I am free to select my own name or pseudonym to be used in the activity.
- I will not receive any monetary compensation for my participation as my participation is voluntary.
- The supervisor and assessors of this research will have access to the information shared in the research process.
- The information shared during the research process as well as the name of the tertiary institution the participants are registered with will be held confidential.
- The research process does not serve as therapy.

Name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

