An exploration of the loveLife generation on the mobile network MYMsta.

By
Natasha Sundar

In fulfilment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree in the Graduate Programme in Culture, Communication and Media Studies.

Supervisor: Prof Keyan G. Tomaselli

2011

Ethical Approval Number: HSS/0110/10M
Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Graduate Programme in Culture, Communication and Media Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. I confirm that an external editor was used and that my Supervisor was informed of the identity and details of my editor. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

_______________________________
Student name

_______________________________
Date
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Prof Keyan Tomaselli for his encouragement and support through the process of this degree. I would also like to thank Johns Hopkins Health South Africa (JHHESA) for the funding that enabled this research. Thank you to Prof Ruth Teer-Tomaselli for her valuable advice. Thank you to the MYMsta users for the information which they generously supplied, and Esther Eskin and Duncan Hartling of the loveLife, who answered numerous questions and assisted me with vital information. Thank you to Dr Marc Caldwell for his helpfulness in introducing me to NVivo, critical advice and his help to me in finding readings; this research would not have been the same without you. Thank you to staff, colleagues and fellow students for your scholarly collegiality, support, encouragement, and reading of various drafts – John Kunda, Abe Mulwo, Lauren Dyll, Eliza Govender, Mike Maxwell, Pusetso Tsesto, Prof Lynn Dalrymple, George King’ara and Varona Sathiya.

Thank you to Jonathan Dockney, for friendship, support, an endless supply of interesting conversation, and an understanding ear. To my fellow CCMSers, Kate Finlay, Alex Vailati, Sjoerd van Grootheest, Caitlin Watson and Shanade Barnabas, thank you.

Thank you to my family for their undying support and patience in the completion of this degree. To my gran for home, and home-cooked meals. To my mom for her immense support and generosity in allowing me the chance to pursue this degree. And to my dad for instilling in me a thirst for knowledge and encouraging me to pursue further studies.

Thank you to Margaret Lenta for your generous assistance in editing this document. Thank you to Jeanne Prinsloo, for your help in planning this document. Thank you also to Emma Durden for your hard work and excellent comments on the final draft of this document.
Abstract

In June 2008 loveLife launched a mobile social networking site called MYMsta. By June 2009 there were 33,758 members, most of whom were between the ages of 18 and 25. These members had created discussions on HIV, sexuality and relationships on the site's discussion forums. It is likely that the only people on these discussion forums are young people with more questions than answers, though the anonymity of participants makes it impossible to be certain of this. This stimulated my interest into the extraordinary opportunity created by these open discussions on intimate issues. For this study, ten of the most popular discussions on relationships were selected as a sample for investigation. The data consisted largely of unmediated discussions among South African youth on contentious issues such as sex, love, relationships, sexuality and HIV.

Varied methods were employed in order to grasp its manifest and latent content. Coding was carried out using the NVivo 8 software programme. A form of thematic analysis articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006) was implemented to categorise the themes that emerged from coding. Lastly, semiotics was applied to provide a more qualitative and detailed discussion of the particular and nuanced responses to pertinent questions surrounding sexuality and HIV vulnerability. The discussions revealed varied representations of young people partaking in risky sexual behaviour. It also revealed AIDS denialism, and significant fear of stigma attached to HIV testing. Ultimately, the discussion forums form a space for young people to talk about these issues, and provide insights into issues that can be communicated more effectively with them.
Table of Contents

Declaration .......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................... iii
Abstract ............................................................................................................................. iv
Table of Contents .............................................................................................................. v
List of Figures .................................................................................................................. vii
List of Tables .................................................................................................................... viii
List of abbreviations ......................................................................................................... ix

Chapter One: Introduction ............................................................................................... 1
  The South African Context and HIV ............................................................................... 2
  Research aims .................................................................................................................. 6
  Value of the research ..................................................................................................... 7
  Summary of chapters ....................................................................................................... 7

Chapter Two: Theory, Gender, Identity and Participation .................................................. 9
  Identity .............................................................................................................................. 9
  The social construction of gender ................................................................................. 15
  Youth as a social construct ............................................................................................ 19
  Participatory communication ......................................................................................... 20
  Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 26

Chapter Three: loveLife context ....................................................................................... 28
  loveLife – the organisation and disorganisation ............................................................ 28
  MYMsta – objectives, strategy, and rationale ................................................................. 32

Chapter Four: Communication, Community and Mobility ................................................ 36
  Social Network Sites (SNS) .......................................................................................... 36
  Discussion forums ........................................................................................................ 40
  Virtual Community or network? ..................................................................................... 43
  I type therefore I am: identity in the internet Age .......................................................... 45
  Youth and Mobile Media ............................................................................................... 46

Chapter Five: HIV communication and mobile media ...................................................... 48
  Youth .............................................................................................................................. 48
  Media, sex and HIV ...................................................................................................... 48
  Moving messages: Mobile Technology for Social Change .......................................... 50
  Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 54

Chapter Six: Navigating the method ................................................................................ 55
  Research positioning .................................................................................................... 55
  Data collection .............................................................................................................. 55
  Methods ......................................................................................................................... 56
  NVivo.............................................................................................................................. 57
Coding in thematic analysis .......................................................................................................................... 58
Signs and myths .......................................................................................................................................... 64
Use of semiotics ............................................................................................................................................ 66

Chapter Seven: Exploring MYMsta’s mobile discussion forums on sex, love and HIV ............................... 67
Demographics ................................................................................................................................................ 67
Negotiating relationships and sexuality ......................................................................................................... 71

Chapter Eight: Discussions and questions ................................................................................................. 105
Questioning the medium ............................................................................................................................... 112
Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................... 114

Chapter Nine: Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 116

References ..................................................................................................................................................... 120
Online sources ................................................................................................................................................. 136

Appendices ................................................................................................................................................... 138
Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance Form ............................................................................................................ 138
List of Figures

Figure 1: Steps of thematic analysis. Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)........ 61
Figure 2: Example of tree nodes ............................................................................. 62
Figure 3: List of references under Poverty ............................................................... 62
Figure 4: Circumstances contributing to sex for things .......................................... 63
Figure 5: The Phaneroscopic table. Adapted from Tomaselli (1999: 37)................. 64
Figure 6: Sex 4 things discussion ........................................................................... 73
Figure 7: Top five reasons for the prevalence of sugar daddies .......................... 73
Figure 8: Consequences ....................................................................................... 80
Figure 9: Sending naked photos via technology ...................................................... 87
Figure 10: HIV Testing ......................................................................................... 91
List of Tables

Table 1: Poverty and Money themes ................................................................. 61
Table 2: Ten most popular forums on MYMsta ................................................. 71
Table 3: Table of top five reasons for sugar daddy prevalence ......................... 74
Table 4: rudz dilemma ................................................................................ 81
Table 5: Whether or not to date a lecturer ...................................................... 84
Table 6: Responses to sending naked pictures via technology .......................... 86
Table 7: Factors that encourage and discourage HIV testing ............................ 91
Table 8: Factors that discourage HIV testing .................................................. 92
Table 9: Dating rural or urban ........................................................................ 100
Table 10: List of desirable traits ...................................................................... 101
Table 11: Teenage pregnancy ......................................................................... 103
List of abbreviations

3Ds: Diversity, Dialogue and Development
ABC: Abstain, Be faithful, Condomise
AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ART: Antiretroviral therapy/treatment
ARV: Antiretroviral (drugs)
CADRE: Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation
CMC: Computer Mediated Communication
DOH: Department of Health South Africa
DramAidE: Drama in AIDS Education
HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSRC: Human Sciences Research Council
ICT: Information Communication Technologies
IM: Instant Messenger
MCP: Multiple and Concurrent Partnerships
MYMsta: Make Your Move Star
MSM: Men who have sex with men
NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
PMTCT: Prevention of mother-to-child transmission
SMS: Short Message Service
SNS: Social Networking Site
UNAIDS: The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF: United Nations Children’s Fund
USSD: Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
USA: United States of America
VCT: Voluntary Counselling and Testing
WAP: Wireless Application Protocol
WWW: World Wide Web
Chapter One: Introduction

LoveLife is a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) which focuses on young people in South Africa and HIV prevention. HIV and AIDS communication aimed at this group do not always prove to be effective in terms of reducing risk-taking behaviour in sexual relationships. In June 2008 loveLife launched MYMsta (Make Your Move sta¹), a mobisite built for access from a mobile phone. MYMsta is a Social Networking Site (SNS) available on mobile phones with internet access that allows people to communicate with each other online. LoveLife created this platform in order to communicate with young people interested in the loveLife organisation (often referred to by loveLife as “the loveLife generation”) in areas such as sexuality, romantic relationships and HIV. This introductory chapter introduces MYMsta and offers a rationale for this study. It then briefly describes national HIV data and the socio-economic context of young people in South Africa. This is followed by a discussion of pertinent issues relating to vulnerability to HIV, including the recognised drivers of the epidemic such as early sexual debut, transactional relationships (the Sugar Daddy syndrome), intergenerational relationships, multiple and concurrent partnerships (MCP), and condom use. The chapter continues with an explanation of my research focus, research aims and the value I claim for this research, and ends with a summary of all the chapters.

MYMsta is a site available to all those with Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) enabled phones. WAP is a means of browsing the internet using a mobile phone, and is available on most new phones on the market since 2003 (Goldstuck 2005: 112). Users gain access by signing onto the site, thus obtaining membership. The price of connecting and interacting on the site is a few cents, making it as cost-effective as South Africa’s biggest mobile networking site MXit². MYMsta allows for the building and maintenance of online profiles, joining chat groups, access to discussion forums, to loveLife counsellor Mizz B, and to educational bursary information and competitions (Seopa

¹ Thabisile Dlamini, of loveLife, informed me that the ‘sta’ has no fixed meaning and has been left open for users/participants to interpret (CMC 2009).
² http://www.mobileindustryreview.com/2009/02/mxit.html/trackback
My study focuses on the discussion forums pertaining to “relationships” (mostly romantic or sexual) on MYMsta.

The forums reveal young people’s keen interest in topics related to relationships and sexuality. Readers of the responses in discussion forums find that the issues that young people are dealing with in the time of HIV and AIDS come across strongly. The responses indicate that real young people are, at least covertly, preoccupied with problems, desires, needs, confusion, and questions. This research will investigate how the MYMsta members are discussing relationships and sexuality on the forums and what dialogues they are creating around sexual practices. Linked to this objective is an evaluation of these dialogues in terms of their allowing participants to discuss their own experiences, their understanding of HIV and AIDS, and the need to be tested for HIV.

South Africa’s proliferation of mobile phones and mobile internet users, combined with strong trends towards social networking among young people worldwide, makes a strong case for loveLife’s mobile venture (Seopa 2008, de Tolly and Alexander 2009).

**The South African Context and HIV**

HIV data from South African antenatal clinics indicate that the epidemic may be stabilising (Department of Health 2010: 2); however there is no evidence yet of significant changes in HIV-related behaviour. The figure of 5.7 million South Africans living with HIV in 2007 makes this the largest epidemic in the world (UNAIDS 2008; UNAIDS 2009; UNAIDS 2010). Young people, especially females between the ages of 15-24, are reported to be most at risk (UNAIDS 2008; UNAIDS 2010). The fact that these statistics are collected in antenatal clinics means that most of those tested for HIV are young women who are simultaneously tested for pregnancy. The infection figures for women are thus higher in comparison to, men, fewer of whom are tested. The findings of the largest representative survey of youth in 2006 indicated that one in every ten South Africans in the age group 15-24 is HIV-positive, with 77% of these being female (Cairns et al. 2006). The UNAIDS 2008 Report on the global AIDS epidemic puts prevalence rates in South Africa of 15-19 year old males at around 4-5% and females at 15-17% (UNAIDS 2008). The high prevalence of HIV infection is partially due to factors such as
MCPs, transactional relationships, intergenerational sexual relationships, lack of correct and consistent condom usage, early sexual debut, teenage pregnancy, mother-to-child transmission and substance abuse, among other factors (Shisana et al. 2009; UNICEF 2011).

Socio-economic difficulties may also play a role in young people’s attitudes towards risky sexual behaviour. Economic need is a common factor in many families. “South Africans are experiencing high rates of household food insecurity, higher than the norm in a middle-income country” (HSRC 2008/2009: 55). Aggravating these shortages are high fuel and food prices, unemployment and low incomes (HSRC 2008/2009: 55). Young people may be victims of these circumstances and may be tempted to supplement their lack of resources with transactional relationships. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) poverty, lack of opportunity, and gender inequalities underlie young people’s risk of infection (UNICEF 2011: 2).

**MCPs and condomising**

MCPs and low condom use are among the risky sexual behaviours associated with HIV infection. MCPs are a major contributing factor to the exponential growth of infections. Despite this fact, these partnerships are often normative in South Africa (Parker 2004). MCPs are partnerships that overlap in time, either where someone maintains more than one sexual partnership simultaneously, or where they begin a new relationship before ending the last one (Parker et al. 2007). Multiple partners coupled with concurrency increases the chances of HIV infection by creating multiple pathways for transmission (Shisana et al. 2009: 2). This results in the creation of sexual networks of infection. These networks, together with the higher viral load within the first few months of infection, greatly increase the chances of transmission (Halperin and Epstein 2007).

Low, inconsistent and non-use of condoms makes MCP even more dangerous (Lichtenstein et al. 2008). While some may prefer to use condoms, others do not, perceiving condom use as something that detracts from physical pleasure (Kunda 2008: 3).
Sex is considered by Kunda’s informants to be a biological drive. The use of a condom is considered to detract from spontaneity (Kunda 2008: 165; Mulwo 2009: 169). Many of Kunda’s informants consider requests for condom use as a marker of unfaithfulness; if you ask for a condom, you do not trust your partner, or you cannot be trusted yourself (Kunda 2008: 233). People who engage in MCPs report 46.5% condom use with non-primary partners and 15.4% with primary partners according to the South African Demographic Health Survey (DHS) (DOH 2003).

**Transactional and intergenerational relationships**

Transactional sexual relationships occur where gifts or money are exchanged for sexual favours (Parker et al. 2007: 6; Ridgard and Struthers 2010: 42). Intergenerational relationships occur where an age gap of five years or more exists between partners (Ridgard and Struthers 2010: 42). In South Africa the percentage of young women who report having sexual partners more than five years older than themselves rose from 18.5% in 2005 to 27.6% in 2008 (Shisana et al. 2009: 41). Researchers identify a link between transactional and intergenerational sexual relationships (Ridgard and Struthers 2010: 42). Consumerism and materialism have been identified as significant factors driving these relationships (Shisana et al 2009: 41). Economic need, unemployment, and lack of parental support can simultaneously influence young people to engage in these types of relationships (Ridgard and Struthers 2010: 43). Economic disparity and age difference render one partner more powerful than the other, and may expose young people to violence, abuse and other risks such as HIV infection and unwanted pregnancies (Pettifor et al. 2004; Mercer et al. 2009). The protection of women from HIV is linked to protecting them from gender-based violence and financial independence on older men (UNAIDS 2010: 10).

**Sexual Debut**

In contexts where coercion and social pressure to engage in sexual relationships are strong, early debut is a factor affecting HIV vulnerability of young people. In a 2008 survey of HIV prevalence and behaviour among teenagers, Shisana et al. (2009) found
that the percentage of males and females aged 15-24 reporting sexual debut before 15 were 11.3% and 8.5% respectively. The early sexual activity of their peers places an enormous amount of pressure on both sexes. For young men, aspirations to be a ‘playa’ – a man who has and is able to acquire many sexual partners – is often consistent with dominant ideas of masculinity. For young women, transactional relationships are encouraged by peers in favour of materialism (Kunda 2008; Mulwo 2009).

Substance abuse and risk

Substance abuse has been identified as closely related to risky sexual behaviour such as unprotected sex, multiple sex partners, and engaging in sex for money and/or gifts (Fisher et al. 2007). Social drinkers and recreational drug users may also fall into this category. Alcohol and recreational drugs impair judgement and decision-making powers, and appear to lead to risky sexual behaviour (Kalichman et al. 2008).

All the factors discussed above form part of the socio-economic context in South Africa and the social realities with which many young people are faced in their everyday lives; they provide a background for this study. The following sections will define the focus of the research, the main objective and aims, as well as the value of the research.

Focussing on the discussions

The contextual factors mentioned above, all of them tending to increase sexual activity amongst young people, relate to the importance of social messaging and the sharing of information in this area via the internet in South Africa. My research here focuses on a facet of the loveLife’s Make Your Move campaign, the mobile site MYMsta, and specifically on the discussion forums regarding relationships on the site. While the discussions on MYMsta on sexuality, HIV vulnerability, and relationships are extensive, as are the opportunities for self-expression and experimentation in the definition of the
self – there is little guidance\textsuperscript{3} on the site to aid MYMsta members in sexual and relationship decision-making. Since young people from very harsh socio-economic contexts are using the site’s discussion forums (HSRC 2008/2009: 55; Shisana et al. 2009), their engagement with key issues effecting HIV vulnerability are of particular importance to HIV communication research.

The site provides a view into the way youth on MYMsta perceive themselves and their circumstances, as well how they perceive and negotiate their relationships and sexuality. The site provides insight into their attitudes and behaviour around safe sex and HIV testing. While these are valuable insights, they do not appear to be utilised at present for any initiative that engages youth on these issues. Neither does the site assist them in their sexual decision-making. There are no publically available internal or external evaluations of MYMsta. My thesis investigates how young people engage on MYMsta, how they discuss relationships and sexuality, and discusses the question of whether sites like MYMsta could be used as tools for other programmes which aim to combat the spread of HIV and AIDS.

Research aims

My primary research question (1) and sub-questions 2 and 3 are:

How are young people negotiating their relationships and sexuality on MYMsta?

What kinds of dialogues are created around sexual practices and their safety?

In what ways can participation in discussion forums relate to formation of identity?

Further questions include:

Is the MYMsta site viable as a tool for communication concerning HIV and AIDS?

\textsuperscript{3}"MizzB" is available for one-on-one consultation, but this service is private and I cannot therefore access it. The LoveLife campaign report (June 2009b) suggests that there is little trafficking in this area, as compared to the discussion forums.
How could the site be made more effective?

An area of concern which will be discussed later in this study is that the site designers appear to have no sense of facilitating discussions: most forums on relationships, sexuality, and HIV are left to run without any input from loveLife staff.

Value of the research

The susceptibility of young people, especially young women to risk of HIV and AIDS is alarming. MYMsta has introduced an extraordinary opportunity, through its discussion forums, for dialogue with people in dire need of attention and guidance. The loveLife staff however, have left MYMsta members largely unaided, despite having sparked discussion. A close investigation of MYMsta can nevertheless help reveal how young people relate to issues such as sexuality, sociability, identity, and HIV vulnerability.

Summary of chapters

Chapter One provides background information on the South African context. In it I briefly discuss some of the socio-economic and cultural factors that affect HIV vulnerability. I discuss the research site MYMsta, in view of the dialogue generated around relationships and sexuality, and the lack of facilitation by the organisation. The focus of research is discussed as well as the overall research aims and questions.

With the research questions in mind, Chapter Two presents a theoretical framework appropriate to answering the questions. Cultural studies provide an approach from which to explore questions of representation, identity, and, specifically, gender and identity. The discussion is also informed by gender theory that identifies a patriarchal order working to endorse unequal power relations between men and women, a critical aspect in relation to HIV and AIDS prevalence and, prevention. Theories relating to participatory communication form the last part of the theoretical framework.
Chapter Three provides a context for the study by providing a discussion of loveLife’s past campaigns as well as of the MYMsta site. In Chapter Four I shall discuss online communication, research on SNSs, discussion forums, mobile media and notions of virtual community and online identity. In Chapter Five I shall attempt for my purposes to define youth as the group with which I am specifically concerned, as well as to elaborate on sex and HIV as represented in South African media, and the use of mobile phones for social change projects. The chapter also examines what media South African youth are exposed to, and provides examples of development projects geared to reach youth via new media.

The methodology applied is qualitative and focuses on the forum discussions on the MYMsta mobisite. The study analyses discussions from the public space of the MYMsta mobisite\(^4\), with regard to their relevance to HIV and AIDS. The vast and varied sample which I collected from discussion forums on the mobisite required multiple methods. NVivo 8 qualitative software programme, which I used, is discussed, as well as the applications of thematic analysis. Semiotics is used to tease out deeper meaning from the text.

The results of the ten discussion forums sampled from the MYMsta site are offered in Chapter Seven. They are analysed in relation to certain central themes that emerged. Chapter Eight provides a discussion of the findings in relation to theory and a summary of the key findings.

Chapter Nine offers conclusions of the research project.

---

\(^4\) This is classified as public domain, and is thus permissible to use in a study.
Chapter Two: Theory, Gender, Identity and Participation

Cultural studies is a cluster of ideas, images and practices, ways of talking about forms of knowledge (Hall 1997: 6). The field is concerned, amongst other matters, with the representations of marginalised groups and the critical evaluation of these representations (Hall 1992). Power is a central concept in cultural studies, with emphasis on subordinated groups in terms of class, race, gender, age, and nation (Barker 2003: 9). Cultural studies offers a number of ways of understanding gender representation and identity, both of which are points of analysis in this research. Gender representations are linked to gender relations in society, which are rife with inequalities between the groups. Gender representations also affect the way that young people negotiate their relationships and sexuality on MYMsta, and the kinds of dialogues they create regarding safe sexual practices. Cultural studies help to explain how MYMsta discussion participants construct and display their online identities on MYMsta.

Cultural theorists take an anti-essentialist approach to identity, arguing that identities do not possess universal qualities. Rather, they are approached as discursive constructions constituted by representations - particularly by language (Barker 2003: 11; Foucault 1972). Early feminist studies postulated that womanhood comprised of essential qualities (Tuchman et al. 1978). Later cultural studies informed by poststructuralism view all representations as cultural constructs (Nicholson 1990; Weedon 1997; Barker 2003: 307). This perspective draws attention to the consequences of particular representations of men and women and the effect of these on gender relations.

Identity

The politics of ethnicity, feminism, and sexual orientation received significant attention in the 1990s, and remain deeply connected with the politics of identity (Barker 2003: 219).

In the Western world, the idea that identity pre-exists sociability is common (Barker 2002: 109). Identities are comprised of cultural representations and cannot exist outside
social and cultural interactions (Hall 1992; Hall 1996; Barker 2002: 109). An essentialist view of identity is that it is a fixed entity which we possess. A cultural studies and anti-essentialist approach maintains that identity is changeable, and language does not simply describe identity but helps to construct it (Barker 2003: 221; Barker 2002: 109).

The research offered here consists of an analysis of ten discussion forums relating to sexuality and relationships on MYMsta. The comments in these discussions reflect the identities (and therefore the genders as the individuals understand them) of the discussion participants, which are essentially representations of self, created in the participants’ social interaction on the site and elsewhere. MYMsta members make identity statements on the forums by revealing their opinions on subjects such as transactional sex, sexual orientation, risky sexual behaviour and HIV testing. These statements are revealing even when they are brief.

According to Antony Giddens (1991) the formation of identity involves our capacity to sustain a narrative about ourselves. These identity stories help people to decide how to act in different situations. A coherent identity narrative can help someone to envisage his or her future path (Giddens 1991). Identity is self-constructed and is always in process (Giddens 1991). The identity statements made by young people on the forums may at times be reflections of their aspirations rather than their reality. They may provide a view into possible trajectories desired by participants. The statements may also adhere to what the discussion participants deem to be socially acceptable sentiments. This adherence may manifest itself in statements rejecting transactional relationships, or risky sexual behaviour.

Identity construction is also a social process. The construction of self takes place in the context of social relationships (Giddens 1979; Giddens 1984; Barker 2003: 222). Acculturation is a process of learning culturally specific forms of identity through social interaction (Berkson 1969; Berry 2003). This process contributes to our conception of self, and our positions relative to others.
**The fracturing of identity**

Three different ways of conceptualising identity have been identified (Hall 1992): the enlightenment subject, the sociological subject, and the postmodern subject. My research centres on the postmodern subject and the fractured and decentred nature of identity.

**Three concepts of identity**

The Enlightenment\(^6\) is characterised by the notion of a person as a centred and unified individual. This conception of identity is highly individualistic and emphasises an inner core that is the person’s identity (Hall 1992: 275). Rational capacities are pre-supposed and highly valued (Barker 2003: 223).

The second model of identity is the sociological subject, formed through social interaction. There is still an inner core of self, but this is formed through interaction with significant others. These others mediate values in a particular cultural context and enable the individual to acculturate and fit into a social structure (Hall 1992: 275-276).

The postmodern subject has no fixed, essential or permanent identity (Hall 1992: 277; 1996), being composed of various fragmented identities (Hall 1992: 277). The multiple identities that the postmodern subject embraces may vary according to the situation, and are potentially contradictory (Hall 1992: 277; Barker 2003: 224). The postmodern subject can only obtain a unified concept of identity by constructing a comforting self-narrative (Hall 1990). This coherent identity is a fiction, challenged by the myriad of possible identities we can adopt at any particular time. The postmodern subject resembles most closely the online identity displayed by MYMsta members on the discussion forums sampled. Participants who identify themselves as young people, young women who agree or disagree with transactional sex, or young men who want to be ‘playas’ are displaying fragments of the identity they wish to claim. Participants may exhibit more than one identity in a statement, and these may be mutually contradictory and partial. The fragment of the identity they portray may vary according to the subject of the forum.

\(^6\) See for example Cassirer 1965 for a discussion of this term.
Hall (1992) outlines five major ideologies which contribute to an understanding of the decentred subject. These are Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, the centrality of language, and the work of Foucault. I will briefly explore how each of these feed into the notion of the decentred subject.

**Marxism**

The argument that ‘men make history, but only on conditions not of their own making’ was popularised by Karl Marx (1961 [1845]). This was widely interpreted as meaning that individuals lacked agency, since the conditions they acted upon were historically created (Althusser 1969; Hall 1992; Barker 2003). Ultimately, Marx (1961) displaced two key prepositions of modern philosophy, firstly that there is a universal essence of man, and secondly that this essence resides within the individual subject (Hall 1992: 285-286). This interpretation, modified by Althusser (1969), favours a de-centred and fragmented identity rather than a unified one. Many of the young people on the forums may have domestic and peer-group identities that differ from those which they describe and enact online.

**Psychoanalysis**

The second theory de-centring identity according to Hall (1992) is Freud’s (1977) psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic thinkers postulate that processes of the unconscious motivate our desires, identities, and sexuality. They propose that there is no essential self at birth; rather the conception of self is formed through our interaction with others and alters over time (Lacan 1977; Hall 1996). Psychoanalytic thinkers view identity as an ongoing process. This understanding of identity formation relies on the premise that discourses present outside the individual give rise to a formation of identity and a conception of self inside the individual (Lacan 1977; Hall 1992). Since identity changes slowly and involves many contradictory elements, the self is divided and fragmented. This conception of identity further de-centres the rational subject and remains at odds with the notion of an essential and stable identity (Hall 1992: 288).
The idea that processes of the unconscious rather than reason motivate desires, behaviour and sexuality may have significant bearing on why many young people still place themselves a risk of HIV infection. If sexual decision-making were purely rational, the choice of refraining from risky sexual behaviour, emphasised in sexual health programmes, would be accepted by the population. However, this is not the case.

**Language and identity**

The third de-centring comes from Ferdinand de Saussure (1960), the French linguist, and his theory of language. According to Saussure (1960), we are confined by the restrictions of language when we express ourselves. Language is social, not individual, and does not provide for a direct expression of our thoughts (Hall 1992: 288). Meaning is also derived through difference; i.e. what something is not (Derrida 1976; Hall 1992: 288). This robs us of fixed meaning, a definite identity. Furthermore, language does not depict the world, but constructs it (Saussure 1960). There is no essential objective reality, only discursive construction (Barker 2003: 228). Hence, there are no essences or essential identities.

Participants in forums are confined to written language when communicating. The discussion participants may also restrict themselves to modes of expression or ways of communicating that they perceive as commonly acceptable on the forums. The language they use not only describes their identity but also their social setting. They therefore construct identities through language on the forums.

**Foucault**

Foucault saw subjects as being historically constructed and particular to a time and place (Foucault 1984). This challenged the great myth of an interior in which subjects’ identities remained the same, regardless of their positions. Foucault asserts that a subject does not possess a unified identity; he or she is fractured into many identities (Barker 2003: 230). Foucault’s point of identities changing according to individual circumstances has relevance to the changing and changeable nature of online identities. MYMsta
discussion participants may make identity statements that they later contradict, and may be particularly prone to do so because many – perhaps the majority – are adolescent.

**Feminism**

The fifth de-centring of the subject for Hall (1992; 1996) is feminism, both as a theoretical critique and a social movement (Hall 1992: 290). Feminism asserts that sexual difference is a key facet of social organisation (Connell 2002). Furthermore, it is concerned with gender as an organising principle of social life. Its proponents claim that social life tends to be dominated by power relations which subordinate women to men (Hall 1992; Barker 2003: 227; Connell 2002). Feminism also questions the distinction between public and private with the slogan ‘the personal is political’ (Connell 2002). By doing this, it made domestic violence, sexuality, child-rearing and domestic labour, previously private if not secret, political and public issues. It highlights our formation as gendered subjects. In other words, feminism politicised the process of identification – of people as mothers or fathers, sons or daughters (Hall 1992: 290). Poststructuralist feminism views gender as a cultural construction (Nicholson 1990; Weedon 1997). These assertions challenge masculinity and femininity as fixed identities, and introduce the idea of multiple masculinities and femininities.

Dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity are key factors in many sexual relationships in South African society. This may take the form of the man as a provider (who could also take the form of a sugar daddy) and women as the subservient or beneficiary. UNICEF acknowledges that promoting economic independence from older men will aid in protecting young women from HIV infection (2011: 10). However, the perceptions regarding female identities and the limitations proper to females in the acquisition of power, authority, respect and financial freedom may require attention.

The rejection of a fixed or unified identity supports the anti-essentialist conception of cultural identity within cultural studies, which prefers to see the self as made up of multiple, changeable identities (Barker 2003: 230).
The following section highlights the constructed nature of gender. As noted in Chapter One, the levels of HIV of infection in young women are considerably higher than in young men (UNAIDS 2008). Reasons for this may include the subservient position of many women, particularly rural women, in South Africa to partners who have multiple and concurrent partnerships and their refusal to wear a condom with their wives or girlfriends. Risk of HIV infection could also stem from risky sexual behaviour in transactional relationships, and could also emerge from the fact that biologically women are more prone to infection than men because of the susceptibility of vaginal tissue to infection.

The socially constructed nature of gender is important to this study as it forms part of the context in which young people negotiate their relationships. Dominant ideas of femininity as well as women’s social positions may affect women’s attitudes towards safe sexual practices, as well as identity. Thus, gender is an important point to consider in analysis of discussion forums on MYMsta, where young men and women comment on sexual relationships, safety in sexual relationships, and identity.

**The social construction of gender**

Masculinities and femininities in this study are viewed as discursive constructs. They are ways of describing and, at times, disciplining people (Nicholson 1990; Weedon 1997; Connell 2002). Poststructuralist thinking opens up a discussion on multiple possible femininities and masculinities instead of a singular masculinity or femininity. Representation concerning gender is continually contested. There are no doubt biological factors that separate the categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’ (Halpern 1992: xi; Hoyenga and Hoyenga 1993; Moir and Moir 1998), but much of the behaviour and expectations associated with genders are culturally constructed. The continuing construction and replication of particular gendered representations contribute to a cultural understanding of those categories and the acceptance of their ‘naturalness’.

---

7 http://www.cervicalbarriers.org/information/preventing.cfm
The patriarchal dividend

I shall discuss “the patriarchal dividend” (Connell 2002) in order to provide a context for the understanding of gender relations. Kate Millett implies that the relationship between men and women is deeply unequal in the area of power relations (1972: 23). Power, wealth, social standing and authority are some of the resources at stake. A startling example of this is the income disparity between men and women in all societies. Figures from 2002 show women’s average income world-wide as being 56 % of men’s; men’s average incomes worldwide are 179 % of women’s (Connell 2002: 142). This inequality is what Connell describes as the patriarchal dividend: “the advantage to men as a group from maintaining an unequal gender order” (2002: 142). Over the past few years women’s average income has increased in relation to men’s, this increases gender equality and reduces the patriarchal dividend. Money is not the only benefit at stake: authority, respect, institutional power, and control over one’s life are also concerns.

The benefits derived are to men as a group, and not all men benefit equally. Wealthy businessmen benefit differently from working-class men, and some men hardly benefit at all, or are denied respect and authority for not embodying traditional forms of masculinity (Connell 2002: 142). Some women even gain from the gendered accumulation process in capitalism by being married to wealthy men. Overall, the patriarchal dividend makes patriarchy worth maintaining for the men who benefit from it. These advantages are often less important than the desire of those in power to preserve arrangements that keep men in power, and at an economic and social advantage (Connell 2002: 143).

The concept of gender order is important in understanding gender relations within a society. Gender regimes comprise regular sets of arrangements within institutions regarding gender, i.e., who performs what tasks (men – manual and outdoor/ women – domestic and in the home), how are people divided (boys/girls), how people behave towards one another (domination/subordination). These relations can change when people challenge them, indicating that gender regimes are dynamic (Connell 2002: 53-54). Gendered regimes are a regular facet of institutions like schools, factories and armies. The gendered regimes of organisations form part of wider patterns in society referred to
as the gender order. The gender order of a society is usually reflected in the gender regimes within institutions (Connell 2002: 54). However, changes in the gender regime of institutions can affect the gender order of a society, for instance, if women were allowed to join the military, or when schools became largely co-ed; this affected social relations in society (Draper 1993). Shifts in the gender regimes of institutions that break down gender divides affect social relations in society, so the way in which young women and men related when these divisions were in place since their childhood may be different from how they relate to each other today. The fact that young men and women communicate with each other every day at school and on an SNS would seem to indicate increased contact between the genders.

*The four dimensions of gender*

Connell (1987) outlines four main structures in modern gender relations. The first of these structures is power relations, followed by production relations, emotional relations, and symbolic relations.

*Power relations*

Power is central to the concept of patriarchy. This power is both organised institutional power, and diffuse discursive power (Foucault 1977; Connell 1987; Connell 2002). Male power in patriarchy is present in court proceedings that unofficially place women on trial in rape cases, and promotional criteria that favour men over women (MacKinnon 1983; Burton 1987). Besides operating institutionally, power operates discursively (Foucault 1977); in the way we write, talk and think. This power is diffuse and is intimately linked with our identities. Discourses on fashion and beauty, both constitute pressure on women. Both men and women perpetuate (though not unchangeably) the rules of what is acceptable in terms of womanhood and beauty. Conversely, both institutional and discursive power can be resisted (Connell 2002: 59).
Production relations

Production relations are another structure referred to by Connell (1987). The gendered division of labour or production relations refers to the labour at work and home. In many societies, certain careers have been labelled as men’s or women’s work, defining the tasks men and women performed, their benefits and their social standing. This led men to follow technical or scientific career paths, and obtain more income and more respect within society. During the late nineteenth and throughout the twentieth centuries these divisions began to diminish over the years. However, the salary differences between men and women, even for relatively similar work, still favour men (Connell 2002). Participants in MYMsta reflect these divisions in their interactions, with differences that relate to their cultural groups and class placing.

Emotional relations

Sexuality is a major factor in emotional attachments in adolescence. Most modern households are formed through romantic attachment between two people, of which sexual attachment forms an integral part (Connell 2002: 63). These unions may be hetero- or homosexual, while heterosexual unions remain the norm. Misogyny, a prejudice against women, and homophobia, a prejudice against homosexuals, often form part of the emotional relations in society (Connell 2002), and are discussed on the mobisite.

Symbolic relations

Symbolic relations in gender refer to the associations that accompany the terms ‘woman’ or ‘man’. Symbolic relations also refer to the rules of gender attribution, in terms of how certain actions and behaviours are assigned gender categories. These associations are largely historical and cultural, and differ according to circumstances (Connell 2002: 65). Rules relating to how men and women should act have powerful consequences for identity and gender relations. When these rules are challenged a shift in the perception of what is feminine and what is masculine can take place.
Research on MYMsta discussion forums involves analysis of assertions made by young men and women regarding sexuality and relationships. While theories on gender help to analyse the gender relations influencing the discussions, the concept of ‘youth’ still requires attention, as the study involves the discussions of young people on the forums and how they communicate about their sexuality, and issues affecting their HIV vulnerability. In order to clarify the concept of youth for the purposes of research the next section focuses on youth as a social construct.

**Youth as a social construct**

Youth, like gender, is a social construct. Though it is often conceived of as a universal biological marker, its perimeters differ according to social and cultural contexts (Parsons 1942; 1963; Strelitz 2005: 52; Reguillo 2009: 21-22). Societies differ in terms of their definition of youth. In Western societies, the period of youth seems to be extending (Bonfadelli 1993; Barker 2003: 376). Youth is often characterised as a time of experimentation and transgression (Wilbraham 2005: 15; Reguillo 2009: 22). Consequently, young people are seen as both the future of the group and a danger to it.

Western youth and teenagers in particular are seen as rebellious, and are frequently seen as hedonistic consumers with a surplus of cash available to them from their parents’ income (Hebdige 1988). In western popular culture and media, youth are represented as consumers of leisure activities, fashion and style (Hebdige 1988; Barker 2003). Desirable youthful images become available through the purchase of commodities. These representations may appeal to some, even those without a surplus of income.

The term ‘youth’ is often used too broadly to describe young people from all societies and cultures (Reguillo 2009: 21-22) and does not acknowledge their differences in class, race, gender and sexuality. Many of the historical studies on subcultures and youth have concentrated on white middle-class males in developed countries (McRobbie and Garber 1991). This description differs significantly from the subjects of this study, whose environment reminds them continually of the multicultural nature of South African society, a homogeneous concept of youth is treated with caution in my investigation.
Because MYMsta makes use of participatory media in its intervention, I shall give details of theories relating to participatory communication, which forms the third part of this theoretical framework. I shall discuss the concepts of participatory media, and the resulting empowerment, as well as theories of Participatory Development; and Diversity, Dialogue and Development (3Ds).

**Participatory communication**

**Participatory media**

Participatory media are organised along democratic lines; and contribute to the empowerment of ethnic and linguistic groups; they are “a collectivity of individual autonomous units rather than one that is homogenized and one-dimensional”, and require a varied and creative reception from the audience (Servaes and Malikhao 2005: 99). “The value of participatory media is not in being instruments of transmission but of communication … exchanging views and involving members” (Waisbord 2001). Numerous examples of participatory media in practice are documented, from participatory radio in Bolivia, ‘grassroots video’ in Brazil to participatory theatre in Africa. In terms of dialogue about health, community participation in theatre has helped rural communities to engage in health care. Rural communities helped construct infrastructure that aided in alleviating preventable diseases such as cholera. Participation was significant for the impetus in improving the communities’ lives and health (Kalipeni and Kamlongera 1996).

**Participatory media and Youth**

Many theorists have noted the empowering effects and success of participatory media with youth (von Feilitzen and Carlsson1999; von Feilitzen and Bucht 2001; Pecora et al. 2008). When youth use certain media they develop pride; power; self-esteem; critical understanding; and increased media competence (von Feilitzen and Bucht 2001). There are also many examples of youth using as well as producing content on websites

**Communication for Development**

From their campaign material, loveLife’s approach to messaging seems unclear (see Chapter Three). However, the organisation makes use of participatory media in the form of the social networking site MYMsta, on which discussion forums are available in which youth may express their views on their circumstances, their futures, their sexuality, and other issues affecting their lives. The use of the MYMsta platform seems to indicate a valuing of local knowledge and participation from beneficiary communities. These sentiments are echoed in the writings of theorists exploring the use of participation and communication for empowerment, or advocating the participatory development paradigm. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) also offer debates concerning access, participation and self-management (Servaes and Malikhao 2005). This research will use the participatory communication theories named above when evaluating the efficiency of the medium as used by loveLife for development and health communication.

**Development Support Communication and Empowerment**

Development Support Communication (DSC) is a compromise between approaches premised on belief in the superiority of western knowledge and the deficiency of local knowledge practices, and the more needs-based participatory approaches of later development communication. While DSC has launched interventions with expert internal and external personnel, these personnel facilitated communication between technical experts and beneficiary communities (Melkote: 1991; Melkote and Steeves 2001). The approach was aimed at development programmes that had input from both donor agencies and the community. The development support communicator would ensure beneficiaries had access to communication media, and would help enable them to contribute to development communication (Melkote 1991: 265). DSC was characterised by smaller and traditional media forms (participatory theatre, community radio for
example) which would make this kind of collaboration easier. It also emphasises cultural identity, empowerment and participatory communication (Burger 1999: 91). Despite these idealistic aspirations, DSC has been severely criticised as it places an enormous burden on the DSC professionals to facilitate the process. Aspects of DSC, such as expert support in local development projects, are nevertheless still used today, when guiding initiatives towards self-management by beneficiary communities.

**Empowerment**

One of the outcomes in development communication is empowerment. Who is empowered by MYMsta? It is impossible to discuss empowerment without also referring to concepts of power. Max Weber (1983) defines power as the ability of an individual or group to exercise its will, despite objections. Servaes (1999: 57) views power as centring on the “capability to regulate and structure the actions inside asymmetrical relations”. The latter view sees power in a dynamic way, as being exercised by those who are presumed ‘powerless’, and manifesting in asymmetrical relations within structures, for example, the home, the grassroots community. Those who are disempowered, like urban or rural youth, or women, may be disempowered on various levels. Allowing these groups the right to define themselves and exert their power is vital to development.

Power in the field of communication emphasises the meaning of identities of groups, and the resources utilised by these groups in development discourses (White 2004: 8). As White argues, groups employ various tactics, like physical protest, and media, like praise poetry and the dissemination of ideas through social media to place themselves in a position of benefit or social power.

Empowerment can be linked to participation in collective decision making as it involves the individuals involved retaining control of decisions and their outcomes. Empowerment makes sure that “people are able to help themselves” (Servaes 1999: 194).

Empowerment is defined as a perceived sense of control or influence, and is applicable to groups, organisations and individuals (Rappaport 1987: 121). Community empowerment
is a process of a group increasing its control over outcomes relevant for its members (Fawcett et al. 1984: 146). A collective definition adopted by Melkote and Steeves is “a process in which individuals and organizations gain control and mastery over social economic conditions, over democratic participation in their communities and over their own stories (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 37; Rappaport 1981 and 1987 Rappaport et al. 1984; Zimmerman and Rappaport 1988).

The importance of documenting local stories, as is done on the MYMsta entries, and of individuals and communities having power over their own stories is central to empowerment (Rappaport 1995; Melkote and Steeves 2001: 355). The right to express views and tell stories is usually delegated to, or appropriated by the elite of society, or to outside experts (White 2004). The people’s right to communicate their own stories should be at the centre of participatory plans for empowerment (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 355), and appears at first glance to underpin the MYMsta project.

**Participatory development**

Participatory development as set out by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation advocates two main approaches: the dialogical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1990 [1972]) and the ideas of access, participation, and self-management outlined in UNESCO debates of the 1977 meeting in Belgrade (Servaes 1999; Servaes and Malikhao 2005). This study will draw on both approaches in attempting to locate the pedagogical strategy applied by loveLife.

Development communication theorists, including Freire, advocate forms of dialogue – both interpersonal and small group – “that will lead to expanded consciousness and power – and therefore liberation. These dialogic processes enable participants to identify and explore issues that have meaning for them” (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 39). In Freire’s work, interventions relied on facilitators, and groups were not constituted without mediation (Freire 1990).
Participatory development views development communication as emancipatory, freeing people to live their lives. Development is viewed as freedom from oppression, and personal and community empowerment is possible. This perspective requires participation from all parties “not just the so-called target groups” (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 39; Servaes 2000). Participation implies collaboration between development agencies (like loveLife) and communities (MYMsta participants) in reaching set goals. The site does offer some possibilities for NGO-member interaction, but as I will show, these are merely of an informational kind relating to entertainment events. While many development initiatives have been over-influenced by overbearing benefactor organisations, and are characterised by a lack of beneficiary participation or adequate access to feedback mechanisms, the development agencies role is still important. Should agencies fail to demonstrate appropriate participation in a project, it could fail (see Parker 2004).

**UNESCO Debates**

The UNESCO debates on access, participation and self-management are a widely accepted discourse on development communication. Firstly, access can be defined as the opportunities available to target communities to choose diverse and relevant programmes, and having the opportunity of providing feedback. Secondly, participation means a higher level of involvement by the public. Lastly, self-management is a form of advanced participation where the public undertakes decision-making and formulation of policies relating to communication (Servaes 1999; Servaes and Malikha 2005). The MYMsta contributions are limited, for example, to participants’ entries, rather than discussion on how the site should be managed. The site is managed from ‘above’ while the discussion is ‘from below’, and the result is detachment, beyond the use of a profanity filter.

Another development is characterised by basic needs, participation, and self-reliance (Hettne 1995: 175; Servaes 1999; Servaes 2000). If development is to be relevant then “it must start where the real needs and problems exist” (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 338). The UNESCO discussions allow for gradual progression, where access foregrounds the process, but self-management can be postponed until it is feasible (Servaes 1996: 79;
Servaes 1999; Servaes 2000; Servaes and Malikhao 2005). Management of the site, for example, is not a feature of authors who use MYMsta.

Given the disadvantaged economic position of many people in developing countries, people and organisations expect results from communication campaigns. Quantifiable results are difficult to predict (Servaes and Malikhao 2005) (although some organizations will give detailed predictions of their projects). LoveLife (discussed in Chapter Three) for instance, has stated its aim to halve HIV incidence in many of their earlier campaigns.

The participatory development paradigm re-orientates development towards putting people first (Chambers 1986). It does this by acknowledging variability and uncertainty in a climate of change. The emphasis on participation means listening to local peoples’ views and considering them when formulating development programmes. It is not clear from my study who (if anyone) is ‘listening’ to the MYMsta discussions, or what the responses might be from loveLife

Problems with development communication

Emphasis on the value of local knowledge renders expert knowledge questionable. LoveLife may value local ‘knowledge’ found on the site, but it is not visibly employing or redirecting it. Participatory development recognises situational uncertainty, variability and relativity and emphasises the need for mutual learning, particularly the need for outside experts to learn from local people (Jamieson 1991: 44). However, mutual learning cannot issue from the MYMsta discussion forums unless channels through which the information and attitudes expressed can be taken to another level. At present loveLife appears to use MYMsta as a branding mechanism rather than a means of dialogue with young people (see Tomaselli 2011; Parker 2004; Delate 2007).

Participatory research, drawing on participatory communication strategies, involves a continuous cycle of study-reflection-action, and continual dialogue among participants, knowledge derived from real situations, and consultative return to the people (Servaes 1996: 81-82; Melkote and Steeves 2001; Freire 1990). It involves collective definition of
a problem by the group whom it affects; group collaboration in analysing causes; and group action in attempting to solve the problem (Servaes 1996: 82). Too often, external experts articulate to local communities what their problems are (and the solutions to those problems) (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 339). Communication is a continuous and multifaceted process; involving many means, and consistent interest from the development worker (Servaes 1996: 77; Melkote and Steeves 2001: 338). The dialogue on MYMsta occurs between the participants themselves.

Diversity, Dialogue and Development (3Ds): New Technologies, Globalisation and Participation

Globalisation has led to hybrid identities, consisting of a blend of traditional cultural identities with new expressions made possible by new media (Montiel 2002/2003). It is possible for local culture, expression, and knowledge to be present in new technology. Globalisation has also led to the re-assertion of cultural identities and resistance to the negative effects of globalisation (Montiel 2002/2003). While digitisation and globalisation pose threats of cultural homogenisation and social isolation, the construction of social identity is dynamic. Adoption of technology is rarely carried out as intended, and local people have a tendency to utilise technology in creative ways (Williams 1974). Manufacturers must adapt their technology to the needs of the people rather than people adapting to technology. Short Message Service (SMS) for example was only meant to be an extra feature on cellular phones whose primary feature was voice-enabled communication, but the high uptake of the SMS service by consumers meant that cellular phone network providers had to alter their strategy and include packages that facilitated the extensive use of SMS (Goldstuck 2005: 95-96).

Conclusion

Cultural studies, and especially Hall’s (1992) identity theory, help to explore issues of identity. Selected aspects of Connell’s (1987; 2002) gender theories help to provide a context and understanding of gender relations, however unequal. Lastly, participatory
communication theories help to explain the use of mobile phones and mobile internet and analyse their role in participatory communication for this particular project.

The next chapter commences with a discussion of loveLife as an organisation, which provides a context for the introduction of MYMsta.
Chapter Three: loveLife context

In this chapter I shall discuss loveLife and its approach to communication with youth, as well as the reasoning behind its Make Your Move campaign and the introduction of MYMsta.

loveLife – the organisation and disorganisation

LoveLife was launched in South Africa in September 1999 and immediately positioned itself as the programme that would halve HIV prevalence among young people (loveLife 1999a; Parker 2004). With funding from the Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and many others, including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the South African government, it developed a big-budget media campaign by appealing to the consumer culture of young South Africans (Parker 2004). LoveLife has enjoyed a great deal of support from politicians, entertainers, and big business leaders from South Africa and the United States of America (USA) (Parker 2004; Delate 2007). It has also withstood much criticism from academic and NGO circles for its lofty claims, consumerist stance, and lack of well-documented results (Parker 2003; Parker 2004, Barron 2003).

Approach to messaging

Using television, national newspapers (including pamphlets slotted into newspapers) and their in-house magazine, the organisation highlighted the high HIV infection rate; the rising rate of infection among young people aged 15-20; the number of teenage pregnancies; the presence of rape, violence and coercion; and the lack of condom usage (loveLife 2000a; loveLife 2000b). Subsequently it was accused of employing scare tactics, exaggerating the statistics and underplaying the value of existing HIV and AIDS interventions (Parker 2003). The organisation itself claimed to take an optimistic approach to HIV and AIDS messaging (loveLife 2002a: 3; 2003a: 3), an assertion which was accepted in some recent studies “loveLife apparently does not believe in fear appeals” (Jansen and Janssen 2010: 131). However, one loveLife publication contained
an assertion that ten million South Africans would die of AIDS by 2010 (loveLife 2000b). There were no facts or calculations to prove this statement (Parker 2003; 2004). Some scholars have commented on the use of unreferenced research findings and projections inconsistent with research studies available at the time in loveLife’s promotional material and publicly distributed resources (Parker 2003).

**The branding strategy**

LoveLife structures itself as a brand, incorporating a branding strategy in order to gain support and promote its ends. A big-budget media campaign helped it to position itself as the HIV intervention preferred by youth aged 12-17 in South Africa (loveLife 2000; Parker 2004). Unlike lower budget NGOs already functioning in HIV interventions, loveLife hosted large parties and equipped its clinics and Y-centres (expensively designed community centres in rural communities) with state-of-the-art equipment, and provided recreational spaces (Parker 2003). These activities and communication strategies led some critics to postulate that loveLife’s campaigns encourage materialistic aspirations and function on the premise of brand consciousness among youth (Barron 2003; Parker 2004).

A branding strategy may fail to take into account the complex socio-economic circumstances of young people in the country (Parker 2003: 7; Tomaselli 2011: 33; Delate 2007). The kind of materialism encouraged in popular culture is beyond the means of most young South Africans (HSRC 2008/2009). The desire for things they cannot afford may even encourage young people to practice crime or transactional relationships (Kunda 2008; Mulwo 2009). From a reading of loveLife documents, the organisation seems to want to encourage an allegiance to their brand and the achievement of safe sexual behaviour by youth by default (see loveLife 2000b; 2009b). This assumes that participants’ thinking will become rational and their choices responsible by the fact of participation, and disregards real life emotional responses to sexuality (Parker 2004: 11).

The complexities surrounding sexual activity include a multitude of emotions which infringe on rational judgement for individuals in particular situations. To say that people
will control their desires in a charged situation merely because they have heard of loveLife is assuming too much. According to Parker (2004), there is a “disregard for the influence of contextual variables, such as culture and gender relationships” (Parker 2004: 11) in loveLife’s strategy, in which print advertisements and billboards have been highly sexually orientated (Parker 2004: 12; Delate 2007). However, there are positive receptions of loveLife’s billboard campaigns (Jansen and Janssen 2010) A 2010 quantitative study creates a favourable impression of loveLife's campaign and its effectiveness in creating dialogue (Jansen and Janssen 2010). This study seems to differ from previous qualitative studies which test actual as well as perceived comprehension (whether people believe they understood the intended meaning) of the billboards, by testing and linking them to dialogue creation (see also Ojo and de Lange 2011). Comprehension does not seem to be high in this study and neither does willingness to change behaviour (Jansen and Janssen 2010), yet this does not seem to be the most significant point made. A choice is made to value the link between perceived comprehension and dialogue. However, this dialogue has not yet been linked to reduced sexual risk-taking and HIV vulnerability.

**Campaign history**

LoveLife has created a variety of campaigns over the years and a brief history is provided here to outline the context and emergence of the ‘Make Your Move’ campaign of which MYMsta is part. The ‘Talk about It’ campaign was launched in 1999 and consisted of many phases and sub-campaigns, lasting until 2007. In 2008 loveLife launched the ‘Make Your Move’ billboard campaign. The ‘Talk about It’ campaign was meant to spark discussion among South Africans about HIV and sex, and culminated in 2007 with a call to young people to ‘face up to HIV’ 8. The campaign did spark dialogue about itself (Jansen and Janssen 2010). Whether this dialogue can be linked to behaviour change has yet to be determined. What youth may learn about HIV and risk is sometimes at odds with how they act, though these do not seem to be explicitly or entirely cognitive issues (Parker 2004).

---

8 www.lovelife.co.za – loveLife past campaigns page.
The 1999-2002 period of the campaign featured the ‘foreplay’ billboards featuring scantily clad women in flirtatious poses, followed by others with provocative statements like ‘use your mouth’, and ‘what’s your position’\(^9\). Another controversial aspect of the campaign were the HIS&HERS billboards. In a study concerning the reception of the HIS&HERS billboards, Delate (2001) using information derived from focus groups, indicated that the participants from schools in Gauteng and Mpumalanga did not really understand the billboards. They referred to the cut out abstracted figures as toilet people, and were vaguely aware that the billboards had something to do with sex, but were not sure what message loveLife was trying to get across (Delate 2001: 15-17). Other researchers have also highlighted the unclear messaging concerning loveLife’s billboard campaigns (Delate 2007; Parker 2003; Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CADRE) 2003; Martins-Hausiku 2007; Jansen and Janssen 2010; Jordaan 2006).

The 2003 billboard campaign aimed at highlighting the connection between risky sexual behaviour and HIV. One such billboard featured the back and torso of a man with several hands touching it, the text read ‘Everyone he’s slept with, is sleeping with you’\(^10\). This makes an indexical point, but could be read as an endorsement of promiscuous behaviour as the potential health consequences are not mentioned. The 2003-2004 campaign pivoted on the bid for the 2010 FIFA World Cup, and featured young people with the slogan ‘2010 love to be there’, or a young women or man in graduation garb with the slogan ‘love to be there’\(^11\). The 2005 campaign was titled ‘Get Attitude’, largely with the ‘Born Free’ slogan featured on them. A study which tested the understanding of the billboards ‘Get Attitude’ and ‘Born Free’ resulted in a 74% positive result (Zisser et al. 2006). However, the symbolic complexity of messages regarding sexuality assumed highly literate interpreters, embedded in hyper-visual societies, and able to make the semiotic connections. These cannot not be taken for granted in South Africa, where many people are under-educated, and do not have easy access to media.

---

\(^9\) www.lovelife.co.za – loveLife past campaigns page.
\(^10\) www.lovelife.co.za – loveLife past campaigns page.
\(^11\) www.lovelife.co.za – loveLife past campaigns page.
The 2006 campaign was ‘HIV: Face it/ HIV Fact it!’: encouraging people to face up to HIV, it presented copy like ‘HIV loves skin on skin’ and ‘HIV Face it’\(^{12}\); both had images alluding to sexual activity.

The 2007 campaign was titled ‘loveLife generation’ and encouraged young people to become part of ‘the loveLife generation’ which was effectively ‘the power to decide generation’ and ‘the don’t want HIV generation’\(^{13}\). This finally led to the ‘Make Your Move’ campaign from 2008 to date, which focuses on building a sense of identity and self-worth among young people as well as introducing opportunities and means for dialogue to help combat harsh socio-economic and cultural contexts (DasGupta, quoted in Seopa 2008; DasGupta, quoted in McCloy 2008). This campaign introduced the MYMsta mobisite in June 2008. During my study period (January 2009-September 2011) it added a chat service. The campaign has introduced a television programme called *Make Your Move*, airing on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) channel SABC 1 on Monday evenings. Space on MYMsta is available for the responses of viewers to each episode, but these responses will not be not analysed in this study.

**MYMsta – objectives, strategy, and rationale**

The ‘Make Your Move’ campaign aims at empowering youth to make a positive move for their future (Seopa 2008). In line with this, loveLife advocates the provision of opportunities (via links to bursaries, employment opportunities) and sociability (inter-member communication) intended to curb the desperation felt by unemployed or unqualified youth, which may lead to risky sexual behaviour (Eskin, CMC 2011). One aspect of the campaign is the MYMsta site, which allows for the building and maintenance of member profiles (age, gender, and social aspirations), joining chat groups, discussion boards, access to bursary information and competitions, and a loveLife counsellor called Mizz B, a kind of agony aunt who does not intervene in the forums (Seopa 2008). I will provide a brief overview of the strategy and rationale behind the

---

\(^{12}\) [www.lovelife.co.za – loveLife past campaigns page.](www.lovelife.co.za)

\(^{13}\) [www.lovelife.co.za – loveLife past campaigns page.](www.lovelife.co.za)
MYMsta mobsite here, as well as loveLife’s reasons for not supervising the discussion forums.

The next section will discuss loveLife’s objectives for the site. It will also discuss how these objectives interact with their other activities and strategies.

**Objectives**

LoveLife aims to empower youth, build solidarity among them, and serve as an organising tool among them. The world of cell phone-based technology allows for new and innovative ways of doing this (Eskin, CMC 2011). The organisation states that MYMsta is a platform that will enable youth to work together for a better future (Eskin, CMC 2011).

**Strategy**

According to their Communication Manager, Esther Eskin, the loveLife strategy is to empower young people with a strong sense of self-worth, identity and resilience to enable them to navigate challenges encountered in their youth (Eskin, CMC 2011). But how does loveLife intend to do this?

The organisation postulates that introducing economic and social opportunities for youth will change negative perceptions and behaviour (Eskin, CMC 2011; DasGupta 2008b). According to the organisation the ‘Make Your Move’ campaign is geared towards helping “young people build personal initiative, strengthen their ability to negotiate day-to-day pressures and help find new links to opportunity” (DasGupta 2008a: 3). Some of the premises that drive the campaign are: i) that peer-based interaction is needed in HIV prevention; and ii) that social networking plays into the triggers of behaviour change – a sense of belonging, identity, and purpose (Refilwe Africa quoted in Seopa 2008; DasGupta 2008a).
Online and offline management

LoveLife’s Communications Manager, Eskin, says that the reason that loveLife does not facilitate the discussion forums is that the organisation has always recognised the importance of peer-to-peer networks in HIV prevention (Eskin, CMC 2011). LoveLife has 6000+ peer educators, referred to as groundBreakers and M pintshis, who, the organisation claims, has a reach of 500 000 youth per month with direct face-to-face interaction (DasGupta 2008a; Eskin, CMC 2011). The organisation designed MYMsta to complement loveLife's physical network, since they believe that a mobisite is widely accessible to youth and at a relatively inexpensive cost (Eskin, CMC 2011). LoveLife say that 75% of 15-24 year olds in South Africa have access to cellular phones, and 60% of them report using their phone daily (Eskin, CMC 2011). They believe the proliferation of cellular phones and the high reported usage makes peer-to-peer education possible on a grand scale (Eskin, CMC 2011). User-generated peer-support on the forums is “one of the most successful aspects of MYMsta” (Eskin, CMC 2011).

LoveLife notes that many people express concern that an open community discussing difficult issues without monitoring is worrying (Eskin, CMC 2011). They rationalise that community norms on the Web 2.0 are ‘self-monitoring’, and use Wikipedia as an example, where users create their own content and correct misinformation (Eskin, CMC 2011). This takes for granted that MYMsta users have accurate information which enables them to identify ‘misinformation’. Furthermore, relationships and safe sexual practices form a far more contested terrain than movie reviews or definitions on Wikipedia.

MYMsta privacy policy encourages action against inappropriate content by means of blocking and reporting tools available to users (MYMsta 2008). The youth corps of M phinshits and groundBreakers (who do not have formal training) serve as ambassadors for MYMsta and train each other on the MYMsta community’s positive peer education (Eskin, CMC 2011). Trained sexual health counsellors are also on call, although these counsellors and the youth corps are not present on the forums sampled.
Rationale

LoveLife states in campaign material that the problem is not only that young people are uninformed about HIV prevention, but that their perception of economic and social opportunities is low due to contextual factors such as poverty, unemployment, and gender inequality (Eskin, CMC 2011; DasGupta 2008b; Pettifor et al. 2004; DasGupta 2008a: 2; loveLife 2010: 3). The organisation states that the risk of infection is elevated in the first five years after leaving school (DasGupta 2008a; Pettifor et al. 2004).

LoveLife stresses that the site design, consisting of strategic information and a user-generated platform, allows for peer-to-peer interaction (Eskin, CMC 2011). The site design, therefore, lends itself to participation and an emphasis on local knowledge. The site provides an avenue of communication with and for youth on issues pertinent to them, catering for young people who may be unwilling to initiate face-to-face discussions on sexuality and HIV but may welcome the opportunity to exchange freely about these issues over peer discussion forums available via their cellular phones (see de Tolly and Alexander 2009). The organisation postulates that this type of model encourages trust and allows loveLife to engage with youth on their decision-making (Eskin, CMC 2011). Interaction and building of trust, however, between loveLife staff and youth on MYMsta does not seem to be evident on the forums. The move to introduce a mobile SNS indicates awareness that digital technologies are radically changing the communication landscape (Cranston and Davies 2009: 1). While Marc Prensky’s (2001) term ‘digital native’ (meaning an individual who is at home with communication technologies) may seem unsuitable for young South Africans, the nine million local MXit users14 (South Africa’s other mobile SNS), as well as the unprecedented popularity of cellular phones indicates a very high participation on a mobile platform. MYMsta membership is 33 758 people (loveLife 2009b).

Chapter Four: Communication, Community and Mobility

In Chapter Four I shall discuss online interaction, including Social Networking Sites (SNS), discussion forums, virtual community and networks, online identity and mobile media.

Social Network Sites (SNS)

SNSs are platforms that offer people the opportunity to connect with, expand and display their social networks in an online environment. Most SNSs offer users the option of creating a profile, identifying their friends and acquaintances, and interacting with their social networks. SNSs often differ in the kinds of services they offer, and are increasingly moving onto platforms accessible from mobile phones.

MySpace is an example of an SNS, and offers the opportunity for creative expression on the users’ profile page, using scripting which allows users to manipulate their homepage to their liking. The site is very popular with musicians and artists. This differs from Facebook, which has a generic white and blue appearance but offers a multitude of services and is available on a mobile platform. Some SNSs offer mobile connectivity and access to extensive networks of people and organisations, such as MXit and Twitter. Whatever the attraction, they have definitely made an impression on a number of young people (Cranston and Davies 2009).

The popularity of SNSs has led social change organisations to speculate as to their potential for HIV and AIDS communication. Pete Cranston and Tim Davies (2009) were commissioned by the Communication for Social Change Consortium for the aids2031 Initiative to ascertain “how social networking technology has changed and will change the way people communicate about issues and behaviours that impact on HIV vulnerability” (Cranston and Davies 2009: 2). A group of people working in Brazil, Thailand, the United Kingdom and South Africa carried out direct field research, including focus groups, surveys, case studies and analysis in non-OECD (Organization
for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries. I will summarise some of their findings below.

The interactivity and network of contacts on SNS lend themselves to organisation and coordination of events and initiatives. According to Cranston and Davies (2009), organisations and individuals are using SNS technology for counselling, facilitating peer-to-peer support, as well as coordination of their activities (2009: 5). A SNS called Orkut has a Brazilian-based HIV and AIDS community with 5000 members. The membership is predominantly gay, and it provides a discussion space for shared interests and concerns. Piczo is a Spanish SNS used by teenagers for home-page creation. Interestingly, a man living with HIV and AIDS for 20 years is using the site to provide advice and support to teenagers on the issue. Organisations and individuals use SNSs to organise events, campaigns and activities such as celebrations of World AIDS Day (Cranston and Davies 2009: 4-6).

Young people are more likely to join a network that is meaningful to them, that their friends frequent, rather than an arbitrary alternative (Cranston and Davies 2009: 9). This suggests that particular networks that interest them, or where they expect to find friends, may attain a majority of users and others very little. When I presented this research at the SACOMM 2009 Conference in Potchefstroom, one of the audience suggested that MYMsta would be more successful if it joined its efforts with MXit. He said that he would not log off MXit were all his friends to join MYMsta, it was just too much effort (pers. com, September 2009). Shortly afterward, I found that MXit users could add MYMsta as a friend or contact. While this did not constitute a single platform, it certainly provided a chance to improve the reach of MYMsta (dotMobi: 22/02/10).

SNSs like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter have attracted countless users, whose usage of the sites has become part of their daily practices (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Livingstone 2008; Boyd 2008; Murthy 2008, Valkenburg and Peter 2008; Papacharissi 2009). Research on SNSs includes the possibility of identity formation and expression (Boyd 2008; Murthy 2008; Papacharissi 2009), the building and maintenance of social capital
Ellison et al. 2007) and privacy concerns (Livingstone 2008). Other areas on which I draw below include peer-to-peer social relations (Boyd 2008; Ellison et al. 2007; Livingstone 2008; Kim and Yun 2007; Humphreys 2007), how the architecture of a site may set the tone for particular types of interaction (Papacharissi 2009) and networked publics, that is, people who are connected via SNSs (Boyd 2008).

Often, the press popularises the notion of the erosion of face-to-face interaction by online activities (Castells 2001: 117). News coverage of online interaction tends to focus on the negative impact of technology on young people (Campbell 2008: 9; Gouneden 2009: 5). Nevertheless, these sites attract young people who have made them a part of their lives and routines (Silverstone 2006; Livingstone 2008; Papacharissi 2009). What is it about these sites that are so attractive to young people? What are they expressing? How do they fit into their lives? The answers to these questions have implications for youth identities (Boyd 2008).

The facilities provided on these sites differ according to the history and aims of the site. They may incorporate combinations of activities like messaging, email, photo albums, video sharing, music sharing, diaries, blogging, and website creation, offering hitherto separate activities (Livingstone 2008: 394). A noticeable feature about these activities is their allowance for content creation. Now more than ever, using media means “creating as well as receiving” (Livingstone 2008: 394). This sentiment links to participatory communication by highlighting that online communication is increasingly interactive and often involves participation from those using a website.

Young people use SNSs to “write themselves and their community into being” (Boyd 2008: 120). This is related to the idea that “creating and networking content online is becoming an integral means of managing ones identity, lifestyle and social relations” (Livingstone 2008: 394). Through personal profiles, youth can express significant aspects of their identity, which others on the SNS will interpret. MYMsta in particular has a space for members to create personal profiles and make identity statements. Also, when
participants contribute to discussion forums they are constructing an identity for themselves through their views.

Academics are unanimous in their views that SNS allow for identity expression or impression management (Papacharissi 2009; Livingstone 2008; Boyd and Ellison 2007). The communication features and limitations of SNSs no doubt shape these expressions and attempts at impression management (Papacharissi 2009). MYMsta, for example, due to its adaption for mobile phones has few images on the site and participants must use words to identify themselves. Participants use abbreviations of words common to Short Message Service (SMS) or MXit. This type of language identifies them as either young or part of a generation that communicates in Instant Messaging lingo. Language use on the site also includes words from indigenous South African languages, and references to African-American slang. This type of language nevertheless allows for the presentation of complex identities, where individuals have appropriated from different sources to form these identities.

Identity and sociability are closely linked online. In many cases your friends determine the extent of your acceptance. Publicly displayed connections are ‘a signal of the reliability of one’s identity claims’ (Donath et al. 2004). In a climate where concerns exist about privacy and trust, pre-existing connections help pave the way to growing online networks. They also create a welcoming environment for the discussion of intimate issues. Discussion on MYMsta forums includes issues concerning relationships and sexuality. Are participants with connections to other members more likely to reveal their thoughts? Many young people admit to joining SNSs because their friends are on them, indicating that not being present on the site was equivalent to not having a social presence (Boyd 2008). Many online networks derive from offline contacts, like school friendships (Boyd 2008).

Social Supernets, are arrangements through which individuals can seek and gain a vast network of social relations through online networking (Donath 2007). Much of the early assumptions surrounding online networking are now disproven (Castells 2001). The
meeting of strangers in cyberspace is only a small aspect of online communication, common in chat rooms for dating. The majority of online networks resemble the participants’ offline networks with additions from friends’ networks (Boyd and Ellison 2007).

Much of the research on SNSs has concentrated on online relationships, or the bridging of online and offline social networks (Boyd and Ellison 2007; Kim and Yun 2007). The participants in discussion forums of MYMsta use them to discuss offline relationships: they solicit advice from online friends. Users of MYMsta frequently discuss sexuality under the heading of ‘relationships’.

It is possible that “social network sites are providing teens with a space to work out identity and status, make sense of cultural cues, and negotiate public life” (Boyd 2008). This emphasises opportunities offered by SNSs for the development of identity and sociability that may translate from the online to the offline.

**Discussion forums**

Literature on discussion boards or forums tends to focus on their use for educational purposes (Farmer 2004; Eastman and Swift et al. 2002; Thomas and Cronje 2002). This often stems from a desire for more interactive mediums in learning and the perception of a changing media environment. There are however discussion forums on a variety of different topics, from fine wine or cars to civic engagement (Bell 2001: 99). “You can’t simply pick up the phone and ask to be connected with someone who wants to talk about Islamic art or California wine … you can, however, join a computer conference on any of those topics” (Rheingold 1999: 423). Young people on MYMsta discussion forums may comment on relationships, sexuality and the risk of HIV infection as these topics are available for discussion without having to initiate a face-to-face discussion.

Discussion boards are places that “allow users to post messages to a shared area or reply to existing messages in order to form a thread” (Farmer 2004). Allowing many people to comment on an issue makes knowledge creation a shared experience (Prawat and Floden
Discussion forums have been described as interactive environments with the potential to enable collaborative group learning (Stacey 1999; Eastman and Swift et al. 2002). This potential can only be realised if the forum attracts sufficient participants. Debates over online communication point out that context, expectations and attitudes of the participants influence the success of communication (Farmer 2004).

A limitation of discussion boards may be that users may be unable to navigate them. Complex design or unfamiliarity with the medium often hinders usage. Another factor that deters users is difficulties of vocabulary or other linguistic problems (Farmer 2004). Sites that take an informal approach and are user-friendly may have more success. MYMsta for instance uses bright colours and simple language. Perseus (2003) attributes the success of Weblogs allowing for personal thoughts and public feedback to the intimacy they provide. This facility exists to an extent on MYMsta, where participants give their personal views on subjects of their choosing.

**Interaction on forums**

Under the social constructivist framework, a community of inquiry requires social and cognitive presence (Farmer 2004). Social presence can be defined as the ability of participants in a community of inquiry to project themselves socially and emotionally, as ‘real’ people, through the medium of communication being used (Garrison et al. 2000: 94). Cognitive presence is the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse in a critical community of inquiry (Garrison et al. 2000: 89). On MYMsta, participants have only written communication to confirm both social and cognitive presence. When exerting social presence, however, they have the freedom to use whatever form of speech they wish (as long as this excludes obscenity) to convey the colourfulness of their personalities. The MYMsta site has an automatic profanity filter (MYMsta 2008). Slang is permissible and formality of speech in an e-learning environment is not required. In terms of cognitive presence, participants confirm or challenge others’ views and this gives them a chance to reflect on what they have said.
In this research project I shall pursue the potential for informal learning that may arise from collaboration and participation. Sex and HIV as well as the kaleidoscope of issues that intersect with these concerns make them complex subjects. Discussion and deliberation are necessary for participants to gain perspective on these phenomena.

Face-to-face interventions can be informative but participants cannot refer to them for additional inquiries. Interaction on new media cannot replace face-to-face interactions but it can supplement them. Mobile and online networks can offer rapid feedback but can also allow opportunity for reflection and revised opinions. The discussion forum provides participants with time for contemplation so their responses “are often more thoughtful than face-to-face situations” (Eastman and Swift et al. 2002: 33).

The open debate on MYMsta by young people on sexuality and HIV and AIDS might afford an opportunity for administrators of the site to engage with young people in a positive way. However, with the exception of a profanity filter, the discussions are untouched. When writing about discussion boards for learning, Eastman and Swift et al. (2002) notes that these channels offer opportunities for faculty to participate in discussions and to provide feedback to students (Eastman and Swift et al. 2002: 34). This can be applied to MYMsta as the site offers a platform for the young target population of loveLife and loveLife staff to communicate. The discussion board medium encourages a more facilitative role for staff (Moore 1993).

Young people in Buckenmyer’s (2002) study were found to be individualistic, visually orientated, and not attracted to information sharing. This is perhaps a familiar complaint of schoolteachers and lecturers alike who often find young people uncooperative in a learning environment. However, as I noted in the earlier discussion on SNSs, young people may also seek socialisation and support from their peers through online and mobile networks. It follows that group debate on interactive media may appeal to their habits and needs. Easy access to information and information sharing were the basis of online interaction in the 1990s, as evidenced by Howard Rheingold’s (1997) account of
the WELL (Whole Earth ‘Lectronic Link), an early online community. Discussion boards can be catalysts for this type of social interaction.

Discussion forums promote an individualistic rather than an interactive mode of learning (Thomas and Cronje 2002: 362). Supervision of discussion boards in an academic context may be vital to ensure that misinformation is not being spread, and defined subject matter respected (Eastman and Swift 2002: 35). “Although messages in an online discussion forum might appear to be interactive … the branching structure of threads promotes an incoherent development of ideas” (Thomas and Cronje 2002: 363). This could be a real problem on MYMsta forums as they lack facilitators to re-direct discussions that become derailed. On the other hand, the movement of focus from one subject (for example, school friendships) to another (say, sexual relationships) might be an indication of what participants need to discuss.

Virtual Community or network?

Academic writing regarding online social interaction frequently uses the term ‘virtual community’. In this case, ‘virtual’ refers to something that is computer-simulated. In the case of the term ‘community’, notions of the “harmonious local community of an idealised past” (Castells 2001:117) are set in opposition to forms of online interaction. The image which proliferates in the media is that of the lonely computer nerd (Castells 2001: 117). Jan Fernback (2007) suggests a different approach in conceiving of interaction online. He suggests moving beyond simple characterisation of all online social interaction as either virtual community or face-to-face community, and towards what Manuel Castells (2001) refers to as ‘network’. The shift from the term ‘community’ to ‘network’ frees online interaction from the powerful connotations inherent in the word community. ‘Network’ accentuates the ties possible in online interaction and the information, support and sociability accessible without evoking ideals of old place-based communities (Wellman 2001: 1). The MYMsta forums consist of user-generated content from members. MYMsta could ideally provide young people with links to peer-to-peer information and support. The site does not claim to provide a replica of harmonious local community but has potential as an additional resource for young people.
One of the problems with the information age is the excess of information available; it is easy to gather information but difficult to discern credible sources. This is where knowing other people with access to information and experience with the medium is helpful. Howard Rheingold (1997) refers to an “informal, unwritten social contract” where people on the WELL shared information with each other, based on interests or needs. The relationships were reciprocal in spirit, and members passed on information they thought would be useful to others. Exchanges on the WELL were not limited to information sharing, but also involved emotional support. Rheingold (1997) elaborates on his experiences on the Parenting Conference on WELL. He talks of parents with sick children discussing their heartache in the hours when their regular friends were asleep, and how other parents lent their support in various ways (Rheingold 1997).

The idea of friends who are available regardless of place or time is echoed on mobile networks such as MXit and MYMsta. Members of MYMsta cohere around similarities like age and background, yet they are also valuable to each other due to their different experiences. An aspiration for MYMsta could be the kind of camaraderie and informational and emotional support Rheingold (1997) talks about when referring to WELL. The expansion of the internet from the late 1970s has had a less dramatic impact on sociability than Rheingold predicted (Castells 2001: 119). Nevertheless, the spirit of fellowship practised on WELL may still live on in various forms of online and mobile networks. Even allowing for this, users should not “mistake the tool for the task and think that just writing words on a screen is the same thing as real community” (Rheingold 1997).

Theorists debating virtual community are split between those who believe Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) rejuvenate community (Rheingold 1997; Castells 2001) and those who believe online community encourages a withdrawal from real life community (Robins 2000; Kroker and Kroker 2000). Kevin Robins (2000) suggests that Rheingold’s (1997; 1999) writing sets up virtual community as an alternative to real life community. He suggests that online communities are “not an alternative society, but an
alternative to society” (Robins 2000: 89). Theorists opposing online interaction see virtual culture as a rejection and withdrawal from real life (Robins 2000; Kroker and Kroker 2000). Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (2000) refer to online interaction as ‘bunkering in’, where an individual shuts out real life and stays online within the safety of their electronic bunker. They refer to being online as “being digital without being human” (Kroker and Kroker 2000: 97). This view fails to take into account the fact that ‘people’ are using technology to interact with each other online.

The discussion above indicates new ways of thinking about community, especially virtual community. ‘Community’ seems inaccurate when describing the groups at present forming on online networks. Interpersonal ties formed on online networks may be weak, “but this does not mean that they are unimportant” (Castells 2001: 128). They are sources of information … of communication, of civic involvement, and of enjoyment” (Castells 2001: 128). Barry Wellman (2001) offers a useful working definition of online community as a network: “communities are networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging, and social identity” (Wellman 2001: 1).

I type therefore I am: identity in the internet Age

Managing impressions

Young people utilise all the devices at their disposal in order to explore their identities and socialise. One of the items in the artillery of teenage social life is SNS, which provides a space to work out status and identity (Boyd 2008: 120). Young people may not find all the answers online but they may find their peers in the same struggle for understanding of their world, recognition and acceptance. A central representation of identity online is a profile page. Teenagers often look at others’ profiles on a network to find out what is socially acceptable (Boyd 2008: 128). The profile becomes a way to indicate one’s tastes and express one’s identity (Liu 2007; Papacharissi 2009: 200).
The cues that we put forward on SNSs create impressions, which may or may not be what we intend. Erving Goffman (1956) refers to impression management as the process of performing identity, interpreting the cues given to us from others, and adjusting our behaviour to give the best possible impression. Adults in general manage impressions in our everyday lives, yet teenagers make a self-conscious effort to do so online without the danger and exposure of face-to-face interaction. They may do this because SNS provides an avenue to practice impression management.

Identity in play

There are several conflicting views on online identity, some holding that it detracts from real life and feeds into the kind of role-playing that breeds deception and sometimes abhorrent or illegal behaviour (Robins 2000). Others, like Turkle (1995) believe that the multiple faceted identities created online are not destructive but positive; people are more in harmony with themselves because of the expression they have online. There is undoubtedly a large amount of identity play online, some of this takes place on online gaming networks where for example, a teenage girl selects the persona of a six foot warrior. This identity expression and experimentation can be liberating for an individual (Turkle 1995). Identity play and even identity fraud are present online, however, it is likely that the vast majority of people are themselves (Castells 2001).

Youth and Mobile Media

Young people are perhaps the most accomplished and dedicated mobile phone users and have turned SMS into a commonly acceptable form of communication. They are able to coordinate their arrangements through their mobile phones, and are usually pioneers in exploring new advancements in mobile technology (Ling 2007: 60). Mobile phones may tie youth to their parents by offering the parents a means of contacting them at all times (Fortunati 2001). The freedom to contact others renders them at the same time socially independent of their parents (Ling 2007:60).
Young people have made SMSing a social norm; and developed linguistic trends in message composition that are unparalleled. They are able to contact each other at the slightest inclination (Ling 2007: 62). In any situation that fails to interest them, a family dinner, a long bus ride, a boring conversation or movie, there is a viable and comfortable escape. They are able to contact their friends and relay their woes or achievements as frequently as they wish (Ling 2007: 62). Their friends are always virtually present, always contactable. Licoppe refers to this as a “connected presence” (2004). These practices and the potential connections they create suggest a space for young people to go to in order to work out complex or everyday experiences and feelings, a form of peer support group. This potential for peer support through mobile telephony is suggestive of MYMsta’s possibilities for social change projects.

From television programming to cellular phone usage to personal computers and uploading content online, the new media environment is changing and taking on newer and younger users. These young media users play an active role in many cases: as the media evolves so do the users, resulting in an interactive media environment. Sonia Livingstone et al. (1999) observes of new media that there now exists “a multiplication of personally owned media; a diversification of form and content; a convergence of information services; and interactive communication between medium and user” (1999). Research conducted by Skinner et al. (2006) on health promotion for youth using ICTs indicates that peer-led and interactive applications have been most effective (Skinner et al. 2006: 406).

MYMsta, is a prime example of a peer-led and interactive application where the designers pride themselves on encouraging peer interaction and support. MYMsta is one of many projects aimed at reducing HIV prevalence among youth.

Since MYMsta, is not the only project of its kind to use mobile media such as cellular phones, the following chapter will explore different projects utilizing cellular phones for development and their relevance to my own research into MYMsta.
Chapter Five: HIV communication and mobile media

Chapter Five defines ‘youth’ for the purposes of this study. The chapter proceeds with examples of HIV and AIDS representation in South African media and focuses on specific projects and initiatives that use mobile media for health communication with young people.

Youth

Childhood, adolescence and even adulthood are not facts predetermined entirely by our own physiology, or by divine authority, they are social constructs (Strelitz 2005: 52). In some communities, a person reaches adulthood when he or she marries, though this could be as early as twelve.15 In some communities, a person gains the title of adult through certain rituals or ceremonies, elsewhere through financial independence. In many societies, the status of adulthood is legally bestowed at the age of 18 or 21, regardless of marital status or financial independence. This makes placing age markers on ‘youth’ difficult. Bonfadelli (1993) notes that most researchers take puberty as the entry point, at the age of twelve. Some note the transition to adulthood as being from 18 to 25 or later, and other definitions of youth range between the ages of 16 and 24.

These differing definitions of youth highlight different definitions of youth, and determine appropriate youthful behaviour. Youth frequently challenge the limitations placed on youthful conduct (Wilbraham 2005: 15). While adolescence is characterised by experimental and often risky behaviour, the media often portrays youth as sexually innocent (Prinsloo 2007: 2).

Media, sex and HIV

The question that arises in a context where HIV and AIDS are a part of the social reality is what role do the media play in informing youth of this reality. A common strategy for HIV prevention has been the Abstain, Be Faithful and Condomise (ABC) strategy. While

15 Reynolds quoted in Van Zyl Slabbert et al., Youth in the New South Africa, 12-13
this strategy enjoyed early success in Uganda, its success in South Africa has not been clear. Media interventions need to go beyond the “repetition of the dominant ABC strategy” (Prinsloo 2007: 27).

*Tsha Tsha*, a South African fictional drama series targeting black youth, has a viewership of over two million (CADRE 2005). The series uses dance as a means of communication between people living with or in some way affected by HIV. The central characters come together once a week to attend ballroom dancing lessons where they explore relationships and intimacy (Prinsloo 2007). The creation of characters that the audience grows to care about and positive role models, both HIV negative and HIV positive, is pivotal to its popularity. The series is realistic, entertaining, and educational. In an evaluation of the series CADRE noted that there were increases in “knowledge and general awareness about HIV and AIDS and various self-reported shifts in HIV attitudes such as enhanced tolerance and empathy for people living with HIV and AIDS” (Peltzer 2008: 147).

*Take 5*, a television programme on SABC1, targeted adolescents and featured special guests who talked on various HIV and AIDS related topics, youth matters and sexuality. *Isidingo* is one of the local soap operas that have incorporated HIV and AIDS issues into some of its plots. One of the characters, Nandipa Sithole/Matabane, is HIV positive and still serves as an affirmative role model within the programme, as a rags-to-riches socialite.

*Soul City* is a multi-media edutainment project in which 60% of the health promotion content relates to HIV and AIDS (Peltzer 2008: 145). It consists of television and radio series, print media, adult education, and school life skills programmes (CADRE 2003). *Soul City* has enjoyed enormous popularity as a groundbreaking HIV television edutainment series. Goldstein et al’s (2005) evaluation of *Soul City* showed that the programme brought the reality of HIV and AIDS home to many. Before the television series people often claimed they had TB (tuberculosis) or some other disease in order to avoid acknowledging their HIV status. Many people believed the HIV and AIDS was a

---

16 South African Broadcasting Corporation
foreign disease and would never happen to them until they saw *Soul City* and began to understand the disease and how close it is (Goldstein et al. 2005: 470-472). “Exposure to *Soul City* changed the way people perceived AIDS and increased their sense of personal risk” (Goldstein et al. 2005: 150).

*Soul City’s* school life skills project also enjoyed a considerable amount of success. The school and mass media life skills education programme involved a national sample of junior secondary school learners in South Africa. Peltzer and Promtussananon (2003) evaluated the programme and found that it was positively associated with HIV knowledge and risk perception, puberty or body knowledge, and condom use. The life skills mass media programme had a positive impact on attitudes towards people with HIV and AIDS, knowledge of condom use, responsible decision making relating to sexual behaviour, and delaying sexual debut (Peltzer 2008: 151).

The examples mentioned above are only a small portion of young South Africans’ media exposure. The bombardment of constant yet contradictory messages from TV and advertising make *Soul City* and *Tsha Tsha* seem like a beacon of light in a sea of sexually explicit media content, and messages that preach abstinence and fidelity. *Tsha Tsha* and *Soul City* acknowledge the pull of sexual desire versus the perception of risk. In illustrating the realities of HIV and AIDS, they show how the epidemic penetrates the fabric of society. Media is increasingly moving into the realm of the personal and the portable, and since it is perhaps here in a new interactive landscape where many youth seem to spend much of their time that more progressive HIV interventions can be created.

**Moving messages: Mobile Technology for Social Change**

The section below will review a few projects using Mobiles for Health (mHealth) as they relate to the MYMsta initiative.

Cell-Life is an NGO based in Cape Town, South Africa “that seeks to improve the lives of people infected and affected by HIV through the appropriate use of technology” (de Tolly and Alexander 2009). Three pilot interventions use mobile phones for behaviour
change communication as part of Cell-Life’s Cellphones4HIV project: ARV adherence SMS\textsuperscript{18}, USSD\textsuperscript{19} content delivery, and content delivery via MXit.

Reminding people to take their medication can increase their adherence (Vital Wave Consulting 2009; Kaplan 2006). It is vital that people infected with HIV get treatment, and this is where Cell-Life’s daily SMS reminders to members of adherence clubs play a role. The ‘adherence clubs’ are run by the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and the Department of Health at Site B clinic in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. Members receive twice-daily SMSs which are currently available in English and Xhosa. The SMSs contain a reminder to take medication, and other ARV/HIV related information. However, despite widespread cellular phone dissemination and the familiarity of many South Africans with SMSs, the costs involved in distributing the SMS’s will remain a barrier until a way is found of subsidising them (deTolly et al. 2009).

**USSD: Soul City ‘soap opera’ and information service**

Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) is available on all mobile handsets, unlike Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) or internet which is only available on cellular phones, and is relatively inexpensive. USSD’s cost-effectiveness opens the doors for content delivery. Although USSD may be an unfamiliar term, many South Africans already use USSD to recharge their prepaid airtime. USSD allows access to text menus, through which one can browse and request information by dialling a number or code that starts with an asterisk and ends with a hash sign (Goldstuck 2005: 104). Cell-Life collaborated with Soul City to disseminate through the cellular network HIV and AIDS information (see Cassidy 2008).

The USSD: Soul City ‘soap opera’ and information service project forms part of Soul City’s ‘OneLove’ campaign that aims to educate people about the dangers of multiple concurrent partnerships (MCPs). Two services are issued, one with direct information about the dangers of alcohol and MCP and two conveying similar information in story

\textsuperscript{18} Antiretroviral drugs
\textsuperscript{19} Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
form, (de Tolly and Alexander 2009). Technical problems were experienced by users in the pilot project where they had to progress through multiple screens before reaching the content they wanted. The findings showed that USSD was better suited to content delivery of concise messages rather than narrative (de Tolly and Alexander 2009).

**MXit HIV Content Delivery**

MXit is a popular instant messaging service, which is a cost-effective form of communication at only a few cents per message. Young people use MXit for a variety of purposes, from keeping in touch with friends, to dating, to arranging meetings, to meeting new people. There are approximately nine million MXit users in South Africa, many of them teenagers. MXit has been utilised in various projects including Dr Math, a math tutoring service; Angel, a drug counselling and information service; and HIV content delivery providing information on HIV, prevention, and testing.

I will elaborate on the last example below.

Cell-life has piloted the provision of HIV-related content on MXit (de Tolly and Alexander 2009: 6). MXit collaborates with the Angel service to host information on HIV, including prevention, and testing. Although MXit is primarily a chat environment it is possible to host an information service on the site, where users can select options through a menu structure. The pilot included seven high school learners from Khayelitsha, Cape Town. They tested the navigability of the menu structure and understanding of content. All the participants in the pilot were already MXit users and there were none of the user technology problems common in similar projects. Users found the menu structure easy to understand. Some of the topics included; HIV basics and contacts; ‘Don’t get infected’; ‘Hw u get infected’; ‘Hw u dnt’23. According to de Tolly and Alexander (2009), information gathered from the pilot was: all the participants said they already knew the information but would tell their friends. The participants

23 www.mxit.co.za/wap
supported the idea of MXit chat rooms with counsellors to discuss HIV related issues. They said they used the MXit medium because it was, cheap, fast, and anonymous. They preferred the information to be in MXit language (a short form SMS/texting type lingo) and not their mother tongue, which in the case of the pilot users was Xhosa. MXit language was considered universal. The information gathered from the pilot is promising and clearly highlights the strength of MXit is chat (de Tolly and Alexander 2009: 6).

MXit HIV content delivery pilot is an example of an intervention where organisers are trying to reach youth in their social spaces and utilising media with which they are comfortable, and have a tendency to frequent. However, though the pilot group easily navigated the medium, the content was not necessarily useful. A key flaw of the MXit HIV content delivery project was perhaps its heavy reliance on the popularity of the medium to influence uptake among young people and not paying enough attention to creating compelling content. The information may be valid but the presentation may fail to touch the imagination of potential users. If for example the questions were user-generated there might have been a greater interest in the content than in the medium. Questions elicited from users and other young people might have more resonance with their peers, as many may have similar concerns. The suggestion of positioning a counsellor in MXit chat rooms to discuss HIV related issues creates the impression that a looser, more dialogical approach to the subject (rather than straightforward question-answer) might be preferred by youth.

SexInfo

SexInfo is an example of an American project that has used input from youth to inform its content. SexInfo makes use of a mobile medium for sexual health communication and thus relates to case study of MYMsta.

SexInfo is a mobile messaging service that enables users to seek answers to questions relating to sex and sexual health (Kinkade and Verclas 2008: 23-27). SexInfo researchers consulted with representatives from health and youth programme, and a focus group of young people helped to identify the key issues of interest for young people (Kinkade and
Verclas 2008: 23-27). Once the researchers had a list, they inserted links to relevant answers or information. The top three topics were “What 2 do if ur condom broke,” “find out about STDs”, and “if u think ur pregnant” (Kinkade and Verclas 2008: 25). SexInfo also provides access to information on confidential and free health services (Kinkade and Verclas 2008). SexInfo involves people from its target group in the creation of its messages, which is crucial when thinking about the adoption and relevance of its content. All members said the medium was a good way of reaching them (Kinkade and Verclas 2008). Had Cell-Life and MXit consulted youth they would perhaps have produced more interesting content in the MXit HIV content delivery pilot. MYMsta receives an enormous amount of user feedback in discussion forums but has not yet utilised this response to create helpful and informative messages for youth. The involvement of sexual health experts on the site to clarify issues about which youth seek information could be a way answering the questions so often left unanswered.

**Conclusion**

The various examples of health communication directed at youth in this chapter contribute to an understanding of the use of new media technologies in health communication and development projects. The methodology chapter that follows shows how the data was collected, organised and analysed.
Chapter Six: Navigating the method

Research positioning

My project aimed at conducting a study of an existing development project utilising participatory media (see Chapter Two). Hence, I chose not to provoke discussions but to ascertain the kinds of discussions members initiate, the nature of comments, and which topics generate the most input from MYMsta members. Scholars and members of the media have viewed loveLife’s approach to HIV and AIDS communication as controversial (Parker 2003; Barron 2003). However, the use of participatory strategies to generate dialogue with communities (Freire 1990; Melkote and Steeves 2001), and the use of participatory media that engages beneficiary communities, such as participatory radio, participatory video, and in some cases the internet, has been useful (Kalipeni and Kamlongera 1996; Ling 2007; McNeill 1999). The latter is especially successful with youth (McNeill 1999; Sundin 1999; Tufte and Enghel 2009; Carlsson 2010).

LoveLife’s approach, coupled with their use of a participatory medium (such as mobile internet) has ignited interest in the practice of participation and dialogue generation on a participatory media site. The data were from already functioning forums, and I remained a spectator rather than a participator. I still had to register on the site as a member, and so I am necessarily present in membership figures, and because of my extensive viewings of forum pages, on the usage statistics gathered by loveLife. I also receive MYMsta inbox messages and SMS updates regarding events and new initiatives. This creates a position for me as a participant observer, who is participant on record and observer in practice.

Data collection

The data used for this study were taken from the ‘debate space’ on the MYMsta website. At the time the study was undertaken, on 4 January 2010, the number of discussion forums under the title ‘relationships’ totalled over 300. These are separate from the site’s other forum topic discussions such as ‘education’ and ‘politics’ whose totals are minimal in comparison. Ten discussions were sampled from the ‘most popular’ category under
‘relationships’. These ten forums have enjoyed extensive patronage from the MYMsta members between 15 June 2008 to 4 January 2010.

**Sampling**

The ten discussion forums were sampled from the debate space on the MYMsta mobisite called ‘ringa zone’. MYMsta started two of these topics and the rest were user-generated topics; none were initiated by the researcher. The discussions (see below) under the heading ‘relationships’ were sampled, as relationships and sexuality are among the central concerns of this study. In order to retrieve as representative a sample as possible of the 368 pages of discussion topics on relationships (with four to five topics per page), the ten discussions under the title ‘most popular’ or ‘the hottest topics’, were selected. Whereas many topics may claim the interest of participants for a week or a few days, my observations over a six-months period of the site’s high turnover rate for new topics, indicate that the ‘most popular’ section received attention over a longer period of time, and received a greater number of contributions.

**Limitations of the research**

Due to the site not indicating dates or times of responses on discussion forums, there is no record of such detail. At first I believed that a week or month’s worth of discussion material would be sufficient for the study, but after review and consultation I determined that the entire history of each of the ten discussions should be examined. On 4 January 2010 the ten discussion forums identified for the sample were entered, the last page of each discussion was recorded and the history of the discussion was retrieved and recorded on Microsoft Word before transfer to NVivo.

**Methods**

The methodology applied in this study is qualitative. The data consists largely of unsupervised discussions among South African youth on contentious issues such as sex, love, relationships, sexuality and HIV from the MYMsta discussion forums. Due to the
nature of the data, which consists of discussion forums on sex, love, relationships, and HIV, varied methods were employed in order to grasp its manifest and latent content. Data were collected, transcribed into a word document and then transferred to the NVivo 8 software programme for analysis. A form of thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006), and elaborated on later in this chapter was implemented to categorise the themes which were identified from coding. Borrowing from grounded theory, a constant comparison method was used to compare themes. This led to the identification of patterns of thematic coherence. Deviant cases were also set aside and coded as possible themes. Having identified these themes and developed a pattern, I used a semiotic analysis to provide a more qualitative and detailed discussion of the nuanced responses to pertinent questions surrounding sexuality and HIV vulnerability. The results are a two-fold analysis consisting of both quantitative and qualitative insights, which are elaborated in Chapter Seven.

**NVivo**

NVivo 8 is a qualitative data analysis software programme designed to help researchers manage and organise their data. While the use of computer software cannot replace human research endeavour, its capacity for recording, linking, and reviewing data can be utilised to help researchers better answer their research questions (Bazeley 2007: 2). Before qualitative computing, most researchers achieved coding by highlighting, underlining and scribbling in the margin of paper records, and later editing in word processors (Richards 1999: 108). Visual coding presented enormous advantages although retrieval was tedious (Richards 1999: 108; Bazeley 2001: 2-3). To retrieve more information from the data, more advanced tools were required. NVivo helped manage data and ideas, to identify and reflect on particular themes and elements, to differentiate between different threads in the data, and to generate reports once coding began (see Bazeley 2007: 2-3; Richards 1999: 108).

---

24 This is where data is constantly compared to previous data in the same sample. For example, the third discussion post is compared to the first and second.
Coding in thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a qualitative method for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data (Braun and Clarke 2006: 79). It allows qualitative data to be understood and described by quantitative means (Boyatzis 1998: 4). It involves a process of encoding qualitative information, and the creation of an explicit code. A code is “the most basic segment or element, of raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis 1998: 63). The process of coding can be described as a way of relating the data to ideas about the data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 27). It allows researchers to think about their data, and make the categories themselves points of analysis. The analytical process involves the decision that a category is relevant to the project; and the choice of which data segments ‘belong’ in a category (Richards 1999: 109). The coding process can become long and laborious, depending on the data and the approach to coding (Bazeley 2001) but “the processes of theorizing from data involve making and exploring categories, not merely retrieving bits of text” (Richards 1999: 109).

The coding process may result in the formation of a list of themes. A theme is a pattern identified in the data, which organises and describes one’s observations (Braun and Clarke 2006: 79), and may also “interpret aspects of the phenomenon” (Boyatzis 1998: 4). Coding is an active process. The researchers’ theoretical framework, as well as the context in which the data were created and analysed, cannot be ignored. Themes do not naturally emerge from the data, though, there is often a misconception that “themes reside in the data, and if we look hard enough they will emerge… If themes ‘reside’ anywhere, they reside in our heads from thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them” (Ely et al. 1997: 205-6).

Inductive thematic analysis

Inductive (data-driven) or deductive (theory-driven) analysis are the two main types of thematic analysis. An inductive approach is taken in this research project, whereby the themes identified are strongly linked to the data itself (Patton 1990), and the data is coded without attempting to fit it into a pre-existing “coding frame, or the researcher’s
analytical preconceptions” (Braun and Clarke 2006: 83). Researchers however are never free of their theoretical and epistemological backgrounds, which necessarily influence them in the coding process. However, an inductive approach works closely with the data to identify themes. A theory-driven approach would narrow its gaze, only identifying themes consistent with previous research (Braun and Clarke 2006: 84). Within the inductive approach, the data are coded as closely as possible to the discussion participants’ actual words and sentiments. Patton (2002) suggests looking for local terms, especially those that may be unfamiliar or that are used in unfamiliar ways. Using the participants’ language to label terms allows the terms to be thought about within their context of use. This also makes terms easier to identify and code for other researchers and increases the chances for replicability and reliability (Weber 1990; Krippendorff 2004; Braun and Clarke 2006).

**Latent or manifest**

Another important decision in the coding process is deciding the level at which codes will be identified; that is, either at manifest or surface level, or a latent or interpretive level. The manifest level is the “visible or apparent content of something” (Boyatzis 1998: 16), that is, how many times the word ‘money’ arises in explanations of why sugar daddies or transactional sex is so popular. The latent level would involve the discourse around what people participating in the forum say poverty or lack of money means to them. It could mean anything from the inability to buy food for their starving families, to buy new clothes, or to keep up with their friends and fashion. The latent level looks at the underlying aspects of the occurrence being investigated (Boyatzis 1998: 16). While some authors believe that a thematic analysis should focus exclusively on one level (Braun and Clarke 2006: 84), others believe that it is possible to use both manifest and latent analysis at the same time (Boyatzis 1998: 16). This study takes the latter approach.

**Social constructionism**

The emphasis on a construction and interpretation of meaning leads to a statement on the epistemological approach of this project, which is within the constructivism paradigm.
Reality is conceived of as socially constructed; meaning and experience are socially produced, “the organising structures of social and cultural life are continually reproduced and modified through the myriad activities of everyday life” (Deacon et al. 1999: 7). Constructivists state that what we take as truth and knowledge are the results of perspective, emphasizing that reality can be expressed in a variety of ways, as evidenced by different language systems (Denzin et al. 1994: 125). Social constructionism focuses “on the collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes” (Denzin et al. 1994: 127). This perspective does not see meaning as existing outside of social interaction.

Now that the epistemological tendencies of the project have been revealed, an explanation of the six-step method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and used as a guide in the thematic analysis of this project proceeds.

**Step-by-step**

The method of thematic analysis followed in this analysis is closely aligned with Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step method. The diagram below summarises their process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description of process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:</td>
<td>Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes:</td>
<td>Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set; collating data relevant to each code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes:</td>
<td>Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes:</td>
<td>Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2); generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes:</td>
<td>Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Producing the</td>
<td>The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
report: compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Figure 1: Steps of thematic analysis. Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)

Phases

The first phase involved reading and re-reading the data in order to familiarise myself with it. This formed “the bedrock for the rest of the analysis” (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87). I read the entire data set twice before commencing with coding. At this stage, a list of possible codes was made for each discussion forum. Not all of these codes were retained in the final analysis: “in essence, coding continues to be developed and defined throughout the entire process” (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87).

The second phase involved applying initial codes to the data. The data was coded for as many themes as possible, in an inclusive manner to preserve context (Bryman 2001), and multiple codes were applied to the same extract or statement where applicable. For example, the statement below was extracted from the discussion forum on ‘sex 4 things’ and coded for both the themes Poverty and Money. The statement also falls under the broader theme of transactional relationships, discussed in the analysis in relation to the entire data set.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forum</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Broader theme</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sex 4 things/ sugar daddy discussion</td>
<td>jabulaphela</td>
<td>poverty is the main course that the youth engage in transactional relationships, some to support their families others to get pocket money or lift to skul (sic)</td>
<td>Transactional relationships</td>
<td>Poverty, Money</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Poverty and Money themes

The third phase “re-focuses the analysis at the broader level of themes” (Braun and Clarke 2006: 89). This involves re-organising the data by merging codes as well as
organising them into hierarchies or groups under NVivo’s tree nodes. NVivo’s tree nodes allow the researcher to group associated codes in clusters or hierarchies. The following figure is an example of a grouping under tree nodes. Associated concepts are grouped together and the extracts pertaining to each code are stored under their titles.

![Figure 2: Example of tree nodes](image)

The information under each code would look something like the following figure showing the first few statements collected under the code Poverty.

![Figure 3: List of references under Poverty](image)

Creating models of themes was also helpful in visualising and condensing themes. The model below is an example of the circumstances described by participants as contributing to the practice of exchanging sex for things.
Phase four involved refining the existing themes by merging codes or themes that fitted together, and using NVivos’ querying functions to search for connections between themes. Codes that were too similar were merged, for example the codes Peer Pressure and To impress friends were merged under the code Peer Pressure in the ‘sex 4 things’ discussion. This phase also involved utilising NVivo’s search and query functions. Word frequency queries were used at various stages of the analysis as an aide in identifying relevant themes in the discussion forums. They were used at this stage to check if any potential themes had been missed at coding level. A query can be run on any document to ascertain the most frequent words, excluding the commonest prepositions and conjunctions. This leaves the researcher with frequently mentioned words or concepts that are potential themes.

The querying function was also used to determine the potential relations between themes and codes. In a discussion on HIV testing for example, the participants mentioned Fear and Risky Sexual Behaviours. By coding inclusively and using queries it was possible to find instances when participants had identified both factors in one statement, and to reveal the frequency of the association. This ‘recontextualization’ of the data (Tesch 1990) assists in moving from document analysis to theorising (Bazeley 2007: 66). Querying was also beneficial in helping to ascertain, and therefore think about the connections between themes and codes (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). By the end of this phase the codes and themes are clear, which enables movement to the next phase.
Phase five involved naming and defining themes, resulting in a clear idea of what each theme or codes meant in terms of the research. Phase six involved the writing up of a report, using semiotic analysis as well as relevant theory, to produce a richer discussion.

**Signs and myths**

Peirce introduced the term ‘semiotic’ at the same time as Saussure (1960) was developing his ‘semiology’. Semiotics is “the study of how meaning occurs in language, pictures, performance and other forms of expression” (Tomaselli 1999: 29; also see Chandler 2002: 2-3). Semiotics also analyses how people make sense of information “how signs—words, gestures…colours, smells, things, artifacts…come to have meaning” (Tomaselli 1996: 30; also see Chandler 2002: 2-3). There is an abundance of literature on the term semiotics, and two separate traditions that scholars have followed in its development, that is, Saussarean and Peircean semiotics. However, my research will concentrate on Peircean semiotics and will utilise the phaneroscopic table to further the discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orders of Signification</th>
<th>Phaneroscopy</th>
<th>2nd Trichotomy of Signs</th>
<th>Nature of Semiotic Interaction</th>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Firstness: Central Idea</td>
<td>Icon</td>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>Being-there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Secondness: Identity in the face of the Other</td>
<td>Denotation Index Connotation Myth</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Activity/Doing Reading/writing Conceived/received texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thirdness: Codes/syntagma Modes of relations</td>
<td>Symbol: common sense Myth</td>
<td>Intelligibility Making sense</td>
<td>Public signs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5: The Phaneroscopic table. Adapted from Tomaselli (1999: 37)**

**Phanescopy and unlimited semiosis**

**Firstness**

Firstness, or the first level of signification indicates a self-contained sign (Tomaselli 1999: 38), an inactive text devoid of connotations and denotations, merely an object that exists in and of itself. An example would be a photograph of a car. An iconic sign represents an object ‘mainly by its similarity’ (Peirce 1931-58, 2.276 in Chandler 2002:
39). It resembles the object in some way and thus maintains a connection. Signs rarely exist at this level alone, tending to move into the second and third levels of signification. Firstness is ‘the quality itself, independently of its being perceived or remembered’ (Peirce in Short 2007: 75). Since signs are decoded within specific cultural contexts, and people draw out meaning according to those particular contexts; iconic signs are merely hypothetical constructs (Tomaselli 1999: 38).

**Secondness**

At the second level of signification, the indexical sign, the interpretation of signs moves from denotation – a simple sign, to a myriad of connotations accompanied by cultural decoding. On MYMsta the discussion participants read the behaviours of their peers in various ways, usually progressing into the connotative level to explain their actions or perceptions. Secondness refers to experience; MYMsta participants refer to risky sexual behaviour as a norm, and to the stigma and bias attached to a HIV positive status. What is interesting about connotation is that meaning which is decoded by different groups has radically different outcomes, demonstrating the unstable or arbitrary nature of the sign. An example of this is a counter-interpretation from the norm that ‘faithfulness’ means keeping a partner in the dark about any additional relationships. These subversive connotative ways of understanding the world move into the realm of myth, and are taken-for-granted assumptions about actions, behaviours, and phenomena. When they become shared and widespread, as on the MYMsta discussion forums, they are easy to identify, but hard to dispel. Stigma and bias against those with HIV continually generate a cycle of silence about the virus. This relates to myth as a type of speech (Barthes 1972: 117), what Tomaselli (1999) calls “structured absences” where meaning (and its consequences) is suppressed or hidden for one reason or another.

**Thirdness**

Thirdness refers to common sense, symbol and ideology. At this level signs become part of our ways of general understanding and frames of reference. Meanings do not require elaboration as they are known to us. This level accounts for “a coherent and structured
perception of reality within which a society or group or class make sense of social relations and the way the world is organised” (Tomaselli 1999: 39).

**Use of semiotics**

Semiotics presents two pivotal ideas in dealing with language use and patterns of talk, the arbitrariness of the sign, and myth. The arbitrariness of the sign refers to its unstable nature. Since the connection between words and things is arbitrary (Chandler 2002: 26; Potter and Wetherell 1987: 25), a sign is a momentary fix, working only because it is accepted and in common use. I will use the arbitrariness of the sign to explain how the participants shift meaning with their adoption of particular meanings for concepts, and how meaning cannot be taken for granted in the context of sexuality and HIV and AIDS discussions.

The next concept relevant to the discussion is Roland Barthes’s (1972) idea of ‘myth’, also referred to as the second level of signification. Myths serve to organise shared ways of conceptualising things within a culture (Levi-Strauss 1972: 90; 95; Chandler 2002: 145). They are “essentially arbitrary, culturally constructed conventions” (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 27). Myth is used to organise collective conceptualisations within groups. This relates to the way participants in discussions cling to biases which feed their fear and willingness to stigmatisse, and how certain ideas become powerful, without having a factual basis.
Chapter Seven: Exploring MYMsta’s mobile discussion forums on sex, love and HIV

In the course of my research I copied and pasted discussions (in written form) from the public space of the MYMsta mobisite and analysed their relevance to HIV and AIDS communication. The discussions are classified as public domain, and thus permissible to use in a study. The data consists of dialogues around sex, safe sex, and relationships. This research is therefore based on the perceptions of MYMsta discussion participants as well as their experiences. The discussion participants are treated as an interpretive community.

Demographics

It is possible to attain some of the contributing members’ demographic details by tracing them through their usernames to their profiles although, the large number of contributions (650 for the first discussion) would make this a mammoth task. My study therefore relies heavily on the demographics provided by MYMsta records on the membership of the website as a whole.

A loveLife campaign report dated June 2009 places membership at 33 758; loveLife could not provide me with membership figures after this date. Membership is 49% male and 51% female. Ages range from 10 to 59. The largest group of members is 18 – 25 year olds, and 18 year olds average the highest registration on the site at 10% (loveLife 2009b). The largest single group (35%) of MYMsta members hail from Gauteng at the second biggest (14%) is from the Western Cape; KwaZulu-Natal has 11%, and all the other provinces have a membership of fewer than 10%. No racial demographics are provided, as MYMsta does not request these upon registration. The language distribution of members is as follows: English 42%; isiZulu 12%; Setswana 10%; isiXhosa 9%; Afrikaans 8%; Southern Sotho/Southern Sesotho 7%; Sepedi 5%; Tsonga 3%; Tshivenda 2%; Ndebele 1%; siSwati 1% (loveLive 2009b). MYMsta members provide the above language classifications. The predominant language used on the sampled discussions is English. Other languages occur in conjunction with English.
Research questions

1. How are young people negotiating their relationships and sexuality on MYMsta?
2. What kinds of dialogues are created around sexual practices and their safety?
3. In what ways can participation in discussion forums relate to formation of identity?

Sample discussions

The table below shows ten discussion forum topics sampled for this study. Column 1 reflects the order in which the discussion forums appear on MYMsta, column 2 presents the discussion topic, column 3 indicates the username of the participant who initiated the topic, column 4 displays the question posed in each discussion forum; column 5 summaries the questions posed; and column six shows the themes associated with each topic in the analysis.

|--------|----------|----------------|-------------|------------|-----------|
| 1.     | sex 4 things (this question - mymsta initiated the discussion) | Why do you think people have sex in exchange for something (like get a sugar daddy)? is this happening around you? | Why do you think people have sex in exchange for things, like getting a sugar daddy? Is this happening around you? | Transactio
|        |          |                 |             |   | nal sex; Multiple and concurrent partnerships; Intergenerational partnerships |
| 2.     | should I move rudz iv bin wit my bf 4 11mnths nd | I have been with my boyfriend for | | | Love; Fidelity |

Participants are at liberty to use a pseudonym if they wish, and it is often impossible to know whether the real name or a pseudonym is being used.
<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>11 months. Recently he does not call and he says that he is broke. When I call at night he does not answer, and when I call again his phone is off. What should I do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>feeling s 4 u</td>
<td>vecto r</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a 16 year old boy and have been dating girls for 3 years. Recently I have changed and have feelings for the same sex, and I want to tell my girlfriend. Should I?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Lets talk</td>
<td>rt.lici ous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The issue of dating a lecturer…gud or bad?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>crazy</td>
<td>If your girlfriend or boyfriend asked you to send him or her your naked photograph, would you send it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>getting tested</td>
<td>What do you think keeps young people from taking an HIV test? What do you think encourages them to do so?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>whom to date?</td>
<td>If you are living at an urban area, would you date someone from a rural area? And also if you at a rural area would you date someone from an urban area?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>let ur voice</td>
<td>What do you look for in a lover?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**partnerships**

**Online nudity; Unauthorized distribution**

**HIV vulnerability; Risky sexual behaviours**

**Love; Relationships**

**Love; Fidelity**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9.</th>
<th>be heard</th>
<th>lover?</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>how cn u define luv</td>
<td>chocips</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Love; Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>what wud you do</td>
<td>shy bt hot</td>
<td>you stay with ur bf 4 some months and later you realise that ur caring his blood as in ur preg.n u tell him then ghe bounce(run off)o let say dump you wat wult you do.</td>
<td>You stay with your boyfriend for a few months and then realise you are pregnant with his child. When you tell him he leaves you. What would you do?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Ten most popular forums on MYMsta

All pseudonyms selected by the users appear as on the site, and it is not always possible to know whether the participant is male or female. The discussion topics, questions and content are also as on the site, and include spelling errors and colloquial expression. The pseudonyms are written in italics in the text in order to make them easily identifiable. The discussion refers to themes that emerged in the analysis and codes under those themes. Themes represent trends in the data, and codes are units of analysis within the data. Codes and themes are written in italics in the text.

**Negotiating relationships and sexuality**

MYMsta users appear to use the site to help negotiate their relationships and sexuality. MYMsta initiated the first forum on sugar daddies where participants express their views on transactional and intergenerational relationships. This forum provides insight into their
experiences, as well as how they negotiate their relationships and sexuality alongside varying social practices such as the sugar daddy phenomenon. In the second forum discussion a young woman called rudz asks the participants to help her evaluate her relationship with her wayward boyfriend. Discussion three sees a young man called vector dealing with budding homosexual feelings, and he asks advice on how to approach his current girlfriend. In discussion four, rt.licious seeks opinions on whether it is permissible to date a lecturer. In discussion five kedi seeks advice on whether she should send her boyfriend a naked picture of herself at his request. She asks if others would send a naked picture of themselves if asked. Discussion six, initiated by MYMsta, deals with HIV testing, HIV risk and participants explaining their peers’ and their own behaviour within sexual relationships. Discussion seven tackles the urban-rural divide, and jimmberito asks whether participants would date people from a urban or rural area. Discussion eight, initiated by nkhensi and nine, initiated by chocilips, ask questions concerning romantic love and relationships, yielding results in terms of relationship expectations. Discussion ten deals with a young woman, shy bt hot who is pregnant and alone; she asks other MYMsta users what they would do in her situation. These young people are using the discussion forums on MYMsta to access their peers’ views. The forums show many conflicted young people reaching out for advice and support. This interaction is valuable in terms of gauging how these young people deal with their everyday lives and the conflicts that arise.

**Transactional sex**

Discussion one relates to transactional sex or in MYMsta’s words ‘sex 4 things’. Here MYMsta asks the question, “why do you think people have sex in exchange for something (like get a sugar daddy)? is this happening around you?” The responses to this question are categorised into five main themes Circumstances; Lack of foresight; Consequences; Money without hard work; and Societal Pressures and attention seeking. These themes are reflected in the diagram below.
The themes Circumstances, Money without hard work and Societal pressure and attention seeking were identified in the analysis as the most prominent themes in discussion one. The codes Poverty and Background featured significantly under the theme Circumstances. The codes Money and Expensive things (jewellery, phones, clothes) were prominent under the theme Money without hard work. The code Peer pressure became a key point of discussion and was placed under the theme Societal pressure and attention seeking. The diagram below illustrates the themes in the ‘sex 4 things’ discussion and the codes that fall under those themes.
The table below indicates how frequently each of the above codes was mentioned in the ‘sex 4 things’ discussion as reasons that motivate sugar daddy relationships. There were 650 responses to the question posed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>17.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expensive things (jewellery, phones, clothes)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer pressure</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>9.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8.77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[N = 650\]

**Table 3: Table of top five reasons for sugar daddy prevalence**

**Poverty**

The participants on MYMsta provide five key reasons as to why people engage in sugar daddy practices. A total of 17.69% of discussion participants in the ‘sex 4 things’ forum mention Poverty (which falls under the theme of Circumstances) as a motivator. When answering why people exchange sex for money one participant wrote, “i's mostly coz ppl suffer frm poverty & da suga daddy can help out coz he got tha kash but obviously wants sumin in return” (b3auty_spot). The sugar daddy is perceived as a beneficiary and the exchange of sex for money is reduced to a bargain.

Another participant illustrates a particular situation where her friend exchanges money in order to provide for her baby, “i have a friend who have a 7moths yr old baby, she slept with some old guy in exchange for her babies food and clothing. we are both in grade 12” (eventvalidation). The two examples provided seem to rationalise the existence of sugar daddies. The exchange of sex for money is justified by poverty. For many of the discussion participants, poverty seems to connote desperate circumstances, and actions to alleviate these circumstances may be condoned.
To put food on the table

The way the discussion participants talk about Poverty in relation to sugar daddies is significant. A common perception among the discussion participants is that people around them have sugar daddies to put food on the table. Despite this being a cliché, it is accepted and replicated on the forums as a legitimate reason for transactional relationships. According to the participants, some people feel they have little choice in the matter, and feed their families with the proceeds of their liaisons with sugar daddies. One participant says, “in some cases, people exchange sex for money to put food on the table. sometimes, women feel they dont have a choice and that its the only way they can feed their families” (lady.stunna). Poverty and poor background are considered valid excuses for having a sugar daddy, “its bcoz sum ppl 4rm poor bckgroundz.and its hard 4 em 2 fnd jobz.so u cnt blame em dey also wana put food on d table” (lee-ray).

Background

Just under 8% of the participants identified Background, in terms of upbringing and living circumstances as a determinant of whether someone would have a sugar daddy. Participants seem to believe that if people are raised properly by their parents, and do not want for things at home, they would not resort to this behaviour. On the other hand, many participants mentioned that poverty or background was just an excuse and that people wanted money without hard work. This point is discussed later in the chapter. Around seven per cent (7.09%) said people did this Because their parents cannot provide everything for them, which related more to wanting luxuries rather than necessities.

Background deals with upbringing and financial circumstances. According to some of the discussion participants, girls consort with sugar daddies because “they dnt have strong family bases (cimy). Alternatively, they have a “poor family background and the family needs food” (fancy face). Some believe that background leads to “limited choices” (sk8_child_08). Background seems to be a circumstance that many young people wish to escape. The participants say that some people do not want to accept their backgrounds, and thus rebel by seeking more affluent circumstances. Cuttie.com says people from
disadvantaged backgrounds think that having sugar daddies is the only way to survive. While b'cos"he"lives says that people are “forced by situations around them”. Sk8_child_08 relates a circumstance that she feels is difficult to judge “i got a friend who does that and i think she got limited choices because the person pays for school fees, takes care of her mother, and little siblings so in those cases i do not know what to think” (sk8_child_08). In this case, the sugar daddy provides financial support for the whole family, since the girls’ parents have accepted the help, which suggests that the sugar daddy is acceptable to them. Where parents have knowledge of their daughter’s activities and do nothing, or have no knowledge and show no interest, participants identify a lack of parental guidance as a factor. Some of the participants blame parents, while others acknowledge that parents cannot guard their every action. The views regarding background differ: some believe that people are forced to have sugar daddies because of their circumstances, while others say poverty is merely an excuse.

Money

The second highest motivator for having sugar daddies in the discussion is identified as Money at 15.38% (which falls under the Money without hard work theme). Money is a broad concept in the discussion, and refers to money for ‘fun’, for (fancy) things, to help pay expenses, and to feed poor families. I have categorised Money without hard work into eight codes as follows: Money, Expensive things (jewellery, phones, clothes), as well as Take the easy way out, Because their parents cannot provide everything for them, For fun, To get whatever they want, To be spoiled by someone, and Greed & gold diggers.

The codes under the category Money without hard work are a polarization of the discussion under the code Poverty. Statements stored under the latter code refer to transactional relationships as a means of alleviating poverty. However, in the same discussion on ‘sex 4 things’ participants say that many young people use sugar daddies to meet the demands of their lavish lifestyles. For example, devoshia says, “suga daddies r 4providng cash, transport, booze, clothes so most of galz cnt afford al of those, thtz th whole point nt tht im sayng itz cool” (devoshia). Here sugar daddies are seen as a natural port of call for anything from pocket money, lifts to work or school, alcohol – and the
association of fun and partying that comes with having money, as well as new clothes. Devoshia’s statement infers that sugar daddies have a purpose – to provide certain luxuries. The transaction is considered mutually beneficial, with parties playing their roles. Women on the MYMsta discussion forums admit to seeking material benefits from relationships, while some are aware of the negative consequences, and admonish themselves, this does not seem to be enough for them to cease these practices.

The idea of wanting expensive luxuries runs through the entire discussion, relating the desire for money to a desire for material possessions and comforts. Curiously, some participants also associate Poverty not merely with a lack of essential resources like food, but also with an inability to purchase a lavish lifestyle. The importance of the connection between Poverty and Money in the discussion lies in the simple observation made by the participants that poor people need money for basics and essentials. It also suggests that a lack of goods other than bare essentials may drive behaviour that seeks material relief, and introduce increased personal risk through the dangers of transactional sex.

Expensive things

Participants attributed various reasons for the desire for Expensive things. They seem to think that those partaking in sugar daddy practices do so to keep up with the latest fashion, with their friends, and to be popular. It is considered to be cool and a trend. For example, zama j says, “most people do it to fit in society. with friends. nd even 2 prove a point dat dy cnt also be cool” (zama j). This statement relates to issues of popularity and peer pressure. Young women at school or university seem to be encouraged to keep up with their peers’ habits. Designer clothes, new phones, and other evidences of affluence are required to impress their friends.

B.side says a friend of hers has sex with an older man, and “he paid her r50 everyday so that she cn buy wats hr frndz buy” (b.side). This is a case of someone engaging in a sexual relationship for as little as R50 a day. The purchase of common commodities relates to group acceptance. Fitting into a group and appearing acceptable in the eyes of
peers may be more important than the commodities themselves, even though the commodities are necessary.

*True.luv* likens transactional relationships to prostitution, saying that “dat is prsstute and galz usually does dat 4 money or 4 free ryd in audit t or they just want kfc” (*true.luv*). The scale of exchange seems to be relatively small here, an older man and younger women have a sexual relationship and while he receives sexual favours, she receives a ride in a nice car, spending money, and is seen in popular places.

*Obk* says that girls have sugar daddies because, “they do it bcoz they want to be famous and spoiled” (*obk*). Some want to be appreciated, and for someone to take care of them (*gfox*), or to spoil them by taking them to fancy shops and restaurants (*miskt*). “[T]he sugar daddy gives u what u need or wants” (*rozendra*).

**Peer pressure**

The concept *Peer Pressure* is widely perceived as being a significant motivation for sugar daddy practices. 9.84% of the participants name *Peer Pressure* as a major factor for transactional sex. Participants identified times in their own experience when they or their friends were encouraged by others to have a sugar daddy in order to acquire fancy things. The participant *munchkinz* sums it up well by saying that “peer pressure,2 fit in a grup,make peeps thnk ure cul” and contributes to people having sugar daddies. In other words, he reasons that people have sugar daddies because of peer pressure, to fit into a group.

Fitting into a group is a powerful motivator, and includes fitting in by doing what others are doing, and fitting in by having whatever others have. Having the latest gadgets or the latest fashion accessories becomes a priority. Materialistic behaviour is encouraged by peers, perhaps as a means of legitimising their own behaviour. Friends often apply pressure to each other to have sugar daddies. The participant *magnum* recounts that her friend tried to pressure her into dating a married man for his money. Others become
enmeshed in the practices, perpetuating the cycle, “sum r just doing it to please friends or to try and have better things than others have... u may find that they dont even like doing it, or that they dnt need the things” (peakay). A degree of competitiveness seems to arise, where young women want better things than their friends, and take risks such as unprotected sex with sugar daddies to acquire them.

Busi writes that “its seems to be the in thing esp. at my skul and it makes all girls look lyk gold diggers!” (busi). This statement indicates that it may be a trend for girls at school to take part in transactional relationships. According to busi people are aware that young girls are taking part in sugar daddy practices and may see them as motivated by materialism. Another participant writes, “i see it each and every day, young people leave their homes and come to varsity to study and the life around here is tough so many of them end up dating older guys so that they too can fit in and have beautiful things in exchange of sex” (ntk). The desire for beautiful things, and to fit into a group relate to youth sociability and identity. Nik refers to life being tough, which may relate to social or financial needs. Students may desire to fit into a group that requires them to have beautiful things, for example, good clothes and spending money and this can drive them to supplement their income with transactional relationships. Studies show that sugar daddy practices, prostitution, unprotected casual sex and multiple partners are common features in the campus life of many African universities (Kelly 2002).

HIV, STDs and pregnancy

HIV is occasionally mentioned in the ‘sex 4 things’ forum, along with some of the other risks of unprotected sex. The figure below shows some of the consequences of sugar daddy practices as identified by the participants on discussion one. The participants mention HIV, STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases), and unwanted pregnancies as some of the consequences of having a relationship with a sugar daddy. The table below represents some of the participants’ ideas of possible consequences of sugar daddy practices.
In the ‘sex 4 things’ discussion, the theme **Consequences** collects the discussion of participants’ awareness that sugar daddies *Spread HIV and AIDS*, and *STDs*, and contribute to *Unwanted pregnancies*. Surprisingly enough, this only accounts for 3.85%, 0.62%, and 1.23% of the responses respectively. Therefore, although awareness of these potential dangers is present, they are seldom mentioned. *Da_ko* recognises that the desire for *Expensive things* drives young people to think that the solution to their poverty is having sex for money. This causes added problems like contracting HIV and STDs due to unsafe sexual relationships.

**Should I move on or wait?**

Discussion two presented a young woman called *rudz* negotiating her relationship with a boyfriend who has cut off contact with her with no explanation. The topic was titled, “should i move on or wait?” The question posed was, “iv bin wit my bf 4 11mnts nd recently he doesnt cal, he says his broke its bin 7weeks nw..whn i cal at nyt he doesnt answer the n whn i try again, its off..wat shuld i do?” *rudz* explains that although she has had a long relationship with her boyfriend, he has cut off contact for the past seven weeks, says he is too broke to call her, and does not answer her calls. It took only seven contributions from other members for her to realize her boyfriend was not interested in her anymore. She posted the following comment on the discussion forum to let other participants know her decision, “thanx 4 da advice..i ges i hv 2 accept nd go on” (*rudz*). 100% of the participants had advised her to move on. *Rudz* was clearly in a recently
unsatisfactory relationship, with an inattentive and probably unfaithful partner but it took time and the acknowledgement and advice of her peers to encourage her to move on. After *rudz* made her decision to move on, the discussion continued and the following results were produced:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You should move on</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>49.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is not interested in you anymore</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>22.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave him</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>18.36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[N=648\]

**Table 4: rudz’s dilemma**

There were 648 comments on discussion two. The sentiments of the majority of the participants were in agreement with *rudz* decision and earlier comments. *You should move on* was the most relevant category at 49.69%, followed by *He is not interested in you anymore* at 22.84%, and *Leave him* at 18.36%. The participants also mentioned the importance of being in a faithful relationship.

**Sexual orientation**

The third discussion was titled ‘feelings 4 u’, and the question asked by the participant *vector* was, “im a boy of 16 years old and have been dating girls for the past 3 years but now ive changed and I have feelings 4 the same sex and i want to tel my gf.shud i?” This topic deals with a young man who has dated girls but has developed homosexual feelings towards men. He is struggling with the issue even more because he has a girlfriend and he wants to tell her. He asks the MYMsta participants on the forum for help.

The advice given by participants in this discussion can be divided into three main categories, *You should tell her, Do not tell her, and Patience*, other important points also include a set of *Negative codes*, perceived *Repercussion* of what could happen if the truth came out, *Support* for *vector*, and a few *Random codes*. 
Of the 508 participants 74.41% advise *vector* that *You should tell her.* 11.22% emphasise the need to *Be honest,* while 11.22% advise him to *Tell her before she finds out herself or from someone else.* The responses indicate consideration for *vector* and his feelings. They advocate honesty for all involved. These responses bode positively for difference and acceptance on the site. The lack of public dialogue around sexuality, high rates of HIV infection, and unwillingness of young people elsewhere to speak up about their problems indicate an impasse to progress. Openness and dialogue around sexuality on this site is potentially beneficial to HIV and AIDS communication. This discussion is the first instance of a dialogue on homosexuality in the sample and the majority of participants seem overwhelmingly supportive and unbiased against homosexuality.

**Do not tell her**

Some participants advise *vector* by saying, *Do not tell her.* *Incognito* tells *vector* to break up with her “without revealing your sexual orientation because you will be hurt if she tells other people” (*incognito*). There is a considerable amount of fear that “she just might go and out you!” (*eragon*). *Vector* is advised to conceal the truth from her, and find another way to break up with her. A participant called 737g suggests *vector* ‘play both’ his girlfriend and the same sex (737g). This comment encourages *vector* to cheat on his girlfriend and have multiple partners. The discussion forums are not censored and such comments are left unchecked.

The code *Patience* encompasses sub-codes such as *Be sure this is what you want; Wait, these feelings will pass/ it might be a phase; and You are very young to make this decision.* Many participants advise *vector* to “be very sure this is what you want” (200815226). *Sassysel* says “i honestly thmk ths is sum kind of a phase u r goin thru, i min u r stil young 2 conclude by sayin u r gay!!!” (*sassysel*). The attitude towards homosexuality’s being a phase or a choice feeds into social norms regarding masculine behaviour. Despite suggesting that *vector’s* problems are just a phase, these comments stipulate that once he is sure of his sexuality he should tell his girlfriend. Some, like *luv-candy* suggest that he should ignore his feelings or “yeah jst put da feelings aside dnt hurt da gal” (*luv-candy*). *Jimmberto* says “you need help how can you have feelings for de
same sex” (jimmberto). The implication here is that jimmberto thinks that vector requires psychological help because he displays homosexual tendencies. The statement may be evidence of homophobia in the discussion forums, and or may display lack of understanding of homosexuality. Some participants even express disbelief that vector could develop feelings for men after three years of dating girls and tell him to stay with girls, as sex is better with a girl (bfg.cafu). Bfg.cafu’s statement advocates heterosexuality and heterosexual sex without leaving room for any other preference.

Participants’ believe that if vector reveals his sexuality to his girlfriend the Repercussions will be disastrous. Some of his peers emphasize that his girlfriend will be shocked and it will not be easy for her to accept. Incognito says that it will cause vector pain when people around him start judging him. B3auty_spot and sylverster cite a reference from a popular local soap opera, Rhythm City, where a character called Stone experienced an adverse reaction from those around him when he revealed his homosexuality. Many of the participants suggest caution as revealing one’s homosexuality in a hostile environment can be dangerous.

Intergenerational Relationships

Intergenerational relationships are a major cause for concern in South Africa and have been associated both with multiple and concurrent partnerships (MCP) and transactional sex. In discussion four, rt.licious asks “the issue of dating a lecturer…gud or bad?” Rt.licious seems to be trying to gauge whether dating a lecturer is a good or bad idea in discussion four. In her quest for answers, participants propose several possible responses. This topic poses the question of a generation gap in a relationship with a young student dating an older person (which is something that arose in the sugar daddy discussion). Secondly, it questions the propriety of having a relationship with an authority figure. Thirdly sexual favours may be exchanged for personal gain (money or favouritism in class and grades). These factors have parallels with concerns raised in the sugar daddy discussion.
The table below shows the participants’ responses to the question of whether it is a good or bad idea to date a lecturer. There were 400 responses altogether, and 310 said it was a bad idea, while 60 thought it was a good idea. The remaining 30 responses were unsure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The issue of dating a lecturer – bad</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>77.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The issue of dating a lecturer – good</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>15.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 400

Table 5: Whether or not to date a lecturer

*A lecturer is like a guider, a parent figure* is an idea that surfaces in 7.5% of the discussion. Some of the participants say it would be like dating a parent or a mentor figure. This indicates that some participants respect positions of authority and do not see a parent-figure role coinciding with a sexual partner. In responses saved under the code *A lecturer is like a guider, a parent figure* participants speak of their disgust at the idea of sleeping with or dating someone as old as their father. *Miss:-)smiley* said it was not possible for her to have such a relationship because the person would be “the same age as ur dad” (*miss:-)smiley*). Responses to this discussion indicate that these participants are opposed to the idea of intergenerational relationships. Intergenerational sex has been identified as common among young South Africans (Katz and Low-Beer 2008), therefore the participants cannot be seen as a representative sample of the population. Their views provide a opposition to the naturalisation of the idea of intergenerational relationships that are simultaneously transactional relationships.

Eight percent of the discussion participants state that *You will not be able to concentrate and it will interfere with your work*. This indicates that they value education and personal progress above physical attraction. One participant says that it is “really bad and will be the end to a successful future” (*legodi*). Other objections include references to using a relationship to cheat in exams and class, and to students expecting extra benefits because of a relationship. Among those who support the relationship, some even suggest using it
to their advantage. On the other hand, *lil@star likens* it to selling yourself to get higher marks. Common perceptions on the forum are that the relationship would be seen as a ploy to receive benefits from the lecturer and anyone taking part in it would be shunned as a cheat and someone who sold themselves for marks or money.

Intergenerational relationships seem to be contested terrain for many of the discussion participants. These relationships are associated with transactional relationships and questions of fidelity. Older partners seemed to be valued for the resources they bring into their sexual partners' lives. Thus, in the forum, intergenerational relationships are seen as likely to be transactional relationships, and an older lover generally connotes a married man who pays attention and gives gifts to a younger woman.

**Nudity and unauthorised distribution**

Press coverage (Boomgaard 2009) on the exchange of nude photos among minors, MXit relationships, and the plethora of possibilities for distribution of sensitive material via technology has given rise to many concerns. Discussion five deals with the issue of young people sending nude pictures of themselves via their cellular phones. A participant named *kedi* initiated a discussion titled ‘crazy’ and asked “if ur gf/bf ask u to send him/her ur naked photo wil u send it or what?” The question is phased hypothetically but after 46 responses *kedi* notifies the forum that she will not be sending her boyfriend her naked picture by writing, “thanks guys.i dnt send hm that nasty pic i told him m nt a pornstar” (*kedi*).

*Kedi* seemingly used the site, possibly among other resources, to gain support from her peers on a delicate situation in her relationship. The question of whether she should send her naked picture is linked to her sexuality, to concerns about her relationship, and to what might be considered correct behaviour. Her labelling of the discussion as *crazy* is indicative of her feelings about it. Nevertheless, she did value the views of her peers and her own uncertainty enough to post the question on a public discussion forum, and reply when she had made her decision. *Kedi* uses the forum to help negotiate her relationship
and her sexuality by voicing her concerns on sending a nude photo of herself, getting feedback from other MYMsta members and making a decision not to send a photo.

The table below represents the responses to *kedi’s* question of whether to send a naked picture of herself to her boyfriend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Those who would not send the nude photo</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>76.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People would send the photo</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[N = 397\]

**Table 6: Responses to sending naked pictures via technology**

The figure below provides a broad overview of the issues that arose in the discussion of whether to send a naked photo to a boyfriend or girlfriend via technology. It shows the main reasons why people in the forum would or would not send such a picture to their girlfriend or boyfriend, and what they advise *kedi* to do. Responses in the discussion fall under three categories with several codes under each category. *Those who would not send the nude photo, People would send the photo, Unsure.*
Participants view the concept of nakedness differently on the forum. Some state that nakedness with their partner in private is sufficient to fulfil their partners’ needs. Sumsang for example says, “seein me naked must b between us not de whole world”. Others say that if their partner has already seen them naked there is no harm in sending a naked photograph. K.love says, “wel it dependz wich level u r on if had sex 2geta i dnt c a prob” (k.love). Getto girl says she would send the photograph because “we r luvers n we share every thing this include d naked photo” (getto girl). A participant called maeu says, “i dnt mind cause he already knw it so icn do it” (maeu). These statements imply a sense
of sexually activity. Whether the participants prefer to display their sexuality in private or public, they are nonetheless more apprehensive of exposure then of sexual activity.

**Respect, dignity, and image**

The participants are also apprehensive about the ramifications of sending such an image to an unguarded recipient. Their anxiety centres on their image in the eyes of others, as well the dignity and respect they would place at risk. The distribution of a revealing photo would damage their image. The idea of sending naked pictures (even to a known recipient), seems to be associated with pornography in the discussion. One participant says, “i'll tell him to go to hell, i'm not a pornstar” (fancy03). Kedi’s response echoes this sentiment. The participants are concerned about losing their dignity and recall previous examples where young women have been ridiculed publically. One says, “i wont snd it bcz sumhw it myt end up distributd 2 other via bluetooth lyk wt hapnd 2 dis chick named tumelo who skul at holytrinity in atteridgevil pta she lost her dignity” (smartangel). The consequences of a naked picture leaking out to the public are seen to be disastrous. Considering past examples, juicybbe says that it will, “definately ruin my reputation” (juicybbe). Da gentleman says that it would be undermining yourself and “making urself look cheap” (da gentleman).

**Creative concealment**

Since exposing themselves via technology is not an easy concept, some of the participants have suggested creative ways of concealing details that would damage their image. Their strategies are to conceal identity, conceal private parts, or get a photo in return for theirs. Djbonlo said he would send his picture without his head; ghad said he would send his picture from the waist down. It is interesting to note that both these participants identify themselves as male. This reinforces the statements stored under the code Most guys would send it. Di_neyo and master-wang said that they would send pictures of themselves partially concealed. Wap proxy says her boyfriend would have to send his picture first and then she would send hers. Ghad says “i have. but b4 i did it, i thought long and hard (mostly about the bad that could result from sending it). Its now a
year later, i'm not dating her anymore and i'm pretty sure she myt stil have a portrait of my magiestick but it don't bother me at al. i stil have her picture aswell =)" (ghad). Ghad seems to be happy with sending a nude image of himself considering he has one of his ex-girlfriend in exchange. The bargain seems to instil in him a sense of security considering he has some leverage against her should she choose to expose his picture publicly.

*Unauthorized distribution*

The majority of participants are cautious when considering sending out compromising material about themselves. This is fair, considering that many young people have heard of scandals concerning naked pictures being widely distributed by jilted lovers or other malicious individuals. Many of the participants are concerned about what their boyfriend would want to do with the photos (*showty*). Others fear what will happen if they break up, “wat will happen if we break up? letsn not think for now but lets think 4 the future” (*refreshment*). Here *refreshment* suggests thinking about the future and the consequences of sending a nude photo to a significant other.

Fear of *unauthorised distribution* accounted for 14.11% of the responses and appears to be the most significant deterrent for sending a naked photo among the participants. Participants are concerned that the picture could be placed on the internet or sent via Bluetooth technology, that their whole school would see it, and that the boy would send it to his friends, or everyone they know. These are valid reservations as many young people, young women especially, have fallen prey to opportunistic distributors of such material (see Campbell 2008; Gounden 2009).

Boomgaard (2009) reports on young women on MXit selling nude images of themselves for money or airtime for mobile phones. Tomaselli and Shepperson (2010) in McLuhanesque (1967) vein, discuss the internet as a ‘brothel without walls’ in which users of SNSs expose themselves to others and engage in identity play (see also Tomaselli 2011).
Trust

Trust is a central issue in participants’ decision-making processes. Shaddy says “it depends on the level of ur relationship and how much u trust her with that "private" information about you” (shaddy). Ajl says “if u in a long term relationship n u trust ur bf.or gf u wil do it,cus u know it wil b safe. if its not dat serious dont send it” (ajl). Relationship length and trust are factors that seem to weigh heavily in whether participants feel comfortable sending out sensitive information about themselves. The issue of trust is visited further in this chapter with regard to discussion participants’ expectations from relationships.

During the discussion, participants go on to discuss what is safe and permissible to express via a medium that can be both private and public. They tend to discourage nude pictures. They promote caution and building trust in romantic relationships.

HIV Vulnerability

Discussion six was titled ‘getting tested’, and MYMsta asked the question, “What do you think keeps young people from taking an hiv test? What do you think encourages them to do so?” The table below outlines the nature of the responses to the questing of HIV testing. The 203 responses to the topic were coded into two categories; Discouraging factors, and Encouraging factors. The diagram below shows factors that the discussion forum participants believe encourage or discourage HIV testing.
The data was coded in order to explain these two categories in participants’ responses. In the 203 responses, 269 references were made to factors that discourage people from testing (some participants noted multiple reasons), and 85 references to what participants believe encourages people to take an HIV test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discouraging factors</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>132.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging factors</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>41.87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Factors that encourage and discourage HIV testing

The above figures suggest a reluctance to undergo HIV testing far outweighing any enthusiasm. Even though there were only 203 contributions, participants were prolific in offering deterring factors. Discouraging factors attained a relevance of 132.51%. This was due to participants identifying more than one factor which discourages people from HIV testing. 41.87% of the responses identify Encouraging factors. Codes under Discouraging factors and Encouraging factors are discussed below. The following table lists the main codes under the category Discouraging factors and reveals how frequently...
they were mentioned in the discussion. Four major codes arose under the category Discouraging factors, these were Fear; Stigma and bias; Risky sexual behaviours; and Denial. I will elaborate on the codes under Encouraging factors later in this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>59.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma and bias</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>31.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risky sexual behaviours</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Factors that discourage HIV testing

Fear

The codes in the above table outline some of the key issues around HIV testing. In total, fear in one form or another appears in 59.11% of the discussion. In a discussion with 203 contributions, 25.12% cite *Fearing the outcome of the HIV test and knowing their status* as a primary reason they or their friends avoid the HIV test. One participant explains her fear by saying, “the fear of finding out that u r hiv positive keeps youth frm taking a test” (*tarts*). *Tarts’s* statement indicates that youth fear the outcome of the HIV test rather than the test itself. The statement also implies that youth may believe their behaviour renders them at risk of HIV infection. *Fear* is the highest individual variable, and reflects how the participants view HIV testing. Kunda, in his study set in the Valley Trust area in KwaZulu-Natal, found that fear was a significant deterrent from accepting as friends or associates people with HIV (Kunda 2006; Kunda and Tomaselli 2009; Kunda and Tomaselli Forthcoming).

*Fear* as a motivator on its own, and often without further explanation is given by 22.17% of the participants in the discussion. Some say that testing “is scary” (*nqobzat*), or that people are afraid of facing the truth (*charmerboy*). Other statements were open to interpretation, that is, the fear of HIV, being positive, stigma and bias. Some participants
feel no need to elaborate points in their statement of this fear; the basis of the fear is perhaps so obvious to them that they feel no need to its basis.

Some participants experience a *Fear of being rejected if they are HIV positive*. Dlamini says that young people “fear they won’t be accepted if they find out that their status is positive” (dlamini). Guy goes on to say that the rejection they fear is social. Guy’s comment seems to indicate a need for social acceptance, and that an HIV positive status would possibly lead to exclusion. Queen.d also cites a fear of being judged, and gossiped about. Queen.d’s comment relates to youth identity and the need to maintain a positive image in the eyes of others. The comment could also refer to a fear of being judged for sexual behaviour that led to testing positive.

Many participants mention a “fear of the unknown” (*ms popular*). People do not necessarily know what lies ahead for them if they test positive for HIV; some participants express a sense of fatalism associated with HIV positive status. The fear of death and the unknown render many unwilling to test for HIV. The fear of the unknown sometimes relates to the responsibilities and consequences that result from knowing one’s HIV status (*princess of crunk*). Youth is sometimes characterised as a time of carefree enjoyment and the knowledge of having a virus that requires permanent and continuing treatment many be an unwelcome responsibility. Some say testing positive for HIV could lead to an unwelcome change of lifestyle (*master-wang*). This could relate to the requirement that those who have sex with many partners, consume excessive amounts of alcohol and generally expose themselves to risk change their behaviour.

**Stigma and bias**

*Stigma and bias* are important factors in the argument surrounding HIV testing. This category includes the codes *They don’t know the facts about HIV and AIDS; Stigma around HIV; HIV = death sentence; People think HIV = Sleeping around; People assume getting tested means you have the disease,* and *HIV counsellors are depressing.*
**Stigma and bias** account for 31.53% of the contributions and is undeniably a factor influencing willingness to take an HIV test. An example that encapsulates many of these fears is voiced by *scaraluv* who writes,

> as a young person always thnk wat if i got it am i ready 2 face it wat wil da world say at me wil i find a job wat my family wil say wil i be treated as i ws treatd my god if i hv it dan il die nd dis counselng thng wil make me feel bad b4 my result **** il kil my self so all dis question may run into our heads nd dat cn stop us frm gettng testd bt wit da help of our family nd takng abt thngs lyk dat at our house may help (*scaraluv*).

Roughly translated, *scaraluv* is saying, as a young person, what if I am HIV positive? am I ready? What will the world say to me? Will I find a job? What will my family say or do? Will I be treated as I am now? My God if I have HIV I will die and counselling will make me feel bad before I receive my results. I’ll kill myself. All these questions may run through our heads and stop us from getting tested. However, the help of our families and talking about things at home may help. These statements suggest great fear of social rejection, of damaged prospects, of being judged or provoking disappointment, of being treated differently, and of being ‘depressed’ by HIV counsellors before a result is even available. Noticeably absent is any belief that *scaraluv* has any control over avoiding infection. The magnitude of these fears may weigh so heavily on youth that they may contemplate suicide. Support of and dialogue with family on HIV issues may introduce some relief for those experiencing these fears.

*Anda@mymsta.mobi*²⁶ says “its the stigma around hiv tht keeps us from getting tested.” *Anda@mymsta.mobi* goes on to say that if your results are positive people will think you are sleeping around. *Westra* says that due to the stigma of having to actually pass a crowd of people in a clinic when you test, the mere fact of testing makes you feel positive. *Westra* could be referring to a fear of animosity from people at clinics. There seems to be an association between HIV testing and people assuming someone is positive. Many may

---

²⁶ This is a username as well as an email address.
wish to avoid this association. *Ruffboy* says that people will say because he has taken the test that he has the infection, and that’s what prevents teens from getting tested (*ruffboy*).

Some perceive HIV counsellors as depressing, making young people more scared than confident (*johnmasilo*). *Misty gel* says many do not know the facts about HIV, and believe being HIV positive is a death sentence. Others say they would not know how to tackle the issue if they were positive (*bby lee*). Young people on the forums feel there are few avenues open to them; they fear rejection from their friends and families and are put off by counsellors. Where do they turn? Without a support base they continue to avoid HIV testing. Even though they admit their fears and anxieties on the MYMsta forums they do not receive help or support from the MYMsta organisation. The only support they receive on the forums is from their peers who are confused and afraid themselves. Some say they were only tested because they were pregnant, or because a loved one died.

**Risky sexual behaviours**

*Risky sexual behaviours* are another factor that demands attention, and are mentioned in 24.14% of contributions. Many young people fear testing, *tppy* says this is because, “we tend 2 hav many sexual partners nd we hav unsafe sex” (*tppy*). Most mention the code *Unprotected sex* in conjunction with having *Multiple partners*. The behaviours seem to create anxiety for the participants when thinking about them in relation to HIV testing. Many see taking an HIV test as admitting to being irresponsible, and according to *nea_luv*, this is why most young people tend to avoid the issue (*nea_luv*). Participants say that many young people engage in *Risky sexual behaviour* like refusal to condomise,, drinking and then sleeping with people they don’t know (*bheels*). *Cooper* says young people are sexually active which makes them afraid to test. He asks “Who has tested amongst us?” *Wickdangel* says, “The fact is that most of us are promiscuous in the hope of seeming cool, and being a playa is considered more important than getting an incurable disease”. *Asshhh* says that young men like to sleep around to prove their manhood. Engaging in risky sexual behaviour in order to prove one’s manhood seems indicative of the dangers of identity play that ascribes to dominant ideas of masculinity in society.
Participants mention *Multiple partners, Sleeping around* and *Unprotected sex* in relation to their fear of HIV testing. According to the participants, sexually active youth fear HIV testing because they know they have acted irresponsibly and engaged in *Risky sexual behaviours*. They avoid HIV testing, and create a vicious cycle in which they are never free of guilt or fear. Nothing about their past or present behaviour assures them of a good outcome should they go for an HIV test.

**Denial**

*Denial* is an important factor in unwillingness to submit to HIV testing. Overall, 12.81% of contributions mention *Denial* as an inhibitor of HIV testing. The theme *Denial* includes codes such as *They'd rather not know; They don’t want to face the truth; What you don’t know can’t hurt you;* and *They think they will never catch HIV*. Many participants admit that if they or others have placed themselves at risk by having unprotected sex, it is better if they do not know their status (*nompie, tix, boituks*). Others say that the thought of dying scares them so much they would rather not know that “their days are numbered” (*daphney, gfox, vindzel*). *Charmerboy* says they simply can’t face the truth. *Mystie* says it is the fear of knowing that prevents her from testing, “afterall what u don’t know can’t hurt u” (*mystie*). This seems to be a common belief among participants. One participant says some people will only believe they have HIV when they are sick (*civilised*). Others say that they will only get sick after testing and knowing they have HIV (*finance*). People on the forums seem to fear the testing process and associate knowledge of their HIV status with the state of their health. These fears can be related to Kunda’s (2006) finding: his informants feared appearing sick as much as being infected with HIV. Others believe they will never contract HIV and are not interested in testing.

**Encouraging factors**

**Advice**

On a positive note, participants encourage each other to get tested; suggest abstinence for an HIV free generation; and display an understanding of what HIV is and how it
differentiates from AIDS. They say to others that God is there for you, irrespective of status. Most importantly, participants that are both tested and negative, and tested and positive speak up and reassure the other participants. Even though these encouragements are few they tie into what other participants have said about what inspires them to get tested, that is, people that have been tested, people living with HIV, and the recognition they can still live a normal life. These elements are placed under the category Advice, which is present in 15.76% of the discussion.

**What encourages people to get tested?**

Participants mentioned factors that would encourage them and others to take the HIV test. Some encourage others to take the test saying, “its better knowing your status than living in dark” (thickalicious). Others believe that the support of family and friends, and talking openly about things will help (mike; leearah). Being in a loving and happy relationship would mean they would support each other to get tested (diva). It can be a natural step in taking the relationship to the next level (phebrious).

Many think that knowing more about HIV would encourage people to get tested. Kay says encouragement comes from knowledge, and that with the right information you can never fear. Dabongz explains that people need to know that if you are HIV positive you “stil can live a normal life:” if you are taking ARVs, she thinks that encourages people.

Some are encouraged by those living with HIV: mswazi says people living with HIV and AIDS can encourage youth. Dlamini says celebrities could encourage youth as most youth (including himself) listen when they are told by someone they know, and if there is entertainment, they will attend. This statement highlights the potential value of celebrities in HIV and AIDS communication programmes.

A few young women on the forums said they went for HIV testing when they were pregnant, when they did not have a choice (debsa, slimshaddy), or when they faced
reality and saw a person dying from AIDS (levi’guess). Some were encouraged to take the HIV test because they wanted to know what the future holds (nez_luv), or because they wanted to start a family (bfg.cafu.). These examples indicate reluctance to undergo HIV testing. People may only make the decision to get tested when other life-changing decisions hang in the balance.

**Three’s a crowd: multiple and concurrent partnerships (MCP)**

The issues of multiple and concurrent partnerships (MCP), transactional sex, and intergenerational sex intersect in the lives of young South Africans, in the concerns of HIV and AIDS organisations, and in the findings of this study. Of the ten discussion topics sampled, many have direct relevance to the concept of MCP: relationships that overlap in time are an example (Parker et al. 2007). MCPs often involve people who have a main partner (wife/husband/girlfriend/boyfriend) and other partners. These other partnerships often have a range of purposes – one who takes such partners out, gives them money, and they remain distinct from the partner one loves (Parker et al. 2007). In this way, MCP and transactional relationships are inextricably linked. Married men and women often seek other partners and young people sometimes engage in risky sexual behaviour with multiple partners, according to some of the forum participants. The forum participants on the first discussion titled ‘sex 4 things’ explore the themes of MCP, transactional relationships, and intergenerational relationships. The discussion tends to revolve around sugar daddies – generally, where an older man provides gifts and money in exchange for sex from a younger woman or girl, although sugar mommies are also mentioned on the forums (Ridgard and Struthers 2010: 42).

In forum one, magnum relates an example of exposure to peer pressure regarding sugar daddies. She says, “its nt gud especialy if dat person is maried.i ve bn in da situation wheby a maried guy wants and i told him 2 back off bt he is nt giving up my frnd wnts me 2 date da guy”. In other words, a married man is interested in a relationship with magnum, she rejects him and her friend encourages the relationship despite this.
Statements on the forum show mixed attitudes towards sugar daddies. This ambivalence among peer groups can lead to some youth being pressured into transactional relationships. The comment also shows that married men seek partners other than their wives in areas frequented by MYMsta users. The participant, ggb, writes, “its a risk, coz most sugar daddies r married” (ggb). However, only nine out of the 650 responses in the ‘sex 4 things’ discussion indicate an awareness of sugar daddies often being married or see it as a problem. Caution against men who already have partners is expressed in the discussion forum four, in which the participant rt.licious asks, “the issue of dating a lecturer...gud or bad?” Here dineo responded by saying, “its bad because the lecturer might be older than you and also married” (dineo).

The high rates of HIV infection in South Africa (UNAIDS 2008) indicate the probability that the minority rather than the majority of youth have been exercising caution in their sexual relationships. Transactional sex and MCPs are real problems threatening the well-being of those engaged in such relationships, especially when combined with unprotected sex (Lichtenstein et al. 2008). Those engaged in the discussion six discuss this further under the topic ‘getting tested’, where MYMsta asks “what do you think keeps young people from taking an hiv test? what do you think encourages them to do so?”

When responding to why young people fear getting tested for HIV, tix writes “teens r hvin multiple sex partners n usually nt using protect so they knw dt thy at hy risk oe bein infectd so thy thnk is beta if thy dnt get testd” (tix). Therefore, tix believes that young people have multiple sexual partners and know they are at risk so they think it is better if they are not tested for HIV. The realities of multiple sex partners, unprotected sex, ignoring risk, and being considered a ‘playa’ knit together a social fabric experienced by MYMsta participants. MCPs accompanied by low or inconsistent condom use is a key determinant of HIV transmission (Shisana et al. 2009).

South Africa is a patriarchal society; the division of labour and resources is adversely proportional to women. The patriarchal dividend discussed in Chapter Two, where a surplus of resources are available to many men relative to women (Connell 2002: 142), is
visible in the ability of sugar daddies to purchase the affections of younger women through their resources. Many young women seek through sugar daddies what is beyond the reach of their own means. The frequent inequality in resources between men and women does not however discount the sense of materialism that often drives transactional relationships and the sense of agency exercised by women who seek multiple partners.

**Love and location**

Discussion seven shows the participants negotiating their relationships in terms of what is personally preferable and socially acceptable. The topic is ‘whom to date??’ And the question asked by jimmberto is, “if you are living at urban area, would you date someone from rural area?” and also if you are at rural area would you date someone from urban area? This question is phrased hypothetically, but is presented by a MYMsta user, rather than MYMsta itself. The user is presumably asking for his/her own edification. The question lends itself to a narrow scope of answers. Most participants answered in an affirmative or negative, with little variance in their reasoning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would date someone from a different area – rural or urban</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>88.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not date someone from a different area</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to love</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>58.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N= 191*

**Table 9: Dating rural or urban**

The code *Would date someone from a different area – rural and urban* was in the majority at 88.48%. This factor is related to the next i.e. *References to love*, where 58.64% of the 191 contributions said they would date someone from a different area and agreed that love was their reason. Only 5.24% said they *would not date someone from a different area*. This makes it clear that at least 88.48% of the participants in this discussion valued interpersonal and romantic attachments above material concerns, and the stigma associated with either rural or urban people. For example, many of the participants say that rural people are poor. They mention that some consider status and
class above love, inferring that people have negative conceptions of rural people. In addition to this, 2.09% of participants think urban girls do not have the same ‘respect’ as rural girls, that they are materialistic, and that they think too much of themselves. This shows that although biases are expressed on the forum, they are in the minority rather than the majority. This discussion then presents a case different from the sugar daddy phenomenon, where young women and men (in the case of sugar mommies) accept money and gifts in exchange for sex. The trend seems to be fuelled by the desire for Expensive things – as related the discussion of forum six, among other circumstantial and materialistic factors. In this discussion the participants establish their priorities as fulfilling emotional needs rather than materialistic ones.

**Love and respect**

The eighth discussion, initiated by nkhezi, was entitled, “let ur voice be heard” and asked: what do you look for in a lover?” Since much of the risk experienced by sexually active young people stems from their desire to be in relationships, both casual and long-term and their sexual practices in those relationships, it is helpful to learn what they are seeking in these relationships. Below is a table listing the most frequently mentioned traits desirable in a partner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>31.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>30.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>27.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness, beauty and good looks</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>24.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>15.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>14.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10: List of desirable traits*
Unlike the case in some of the other discussions, there are clearly identifiable and relevant factors. Out of the 183 contributions, 31.15% stated that they sought Respect in a lover, the second highest factor was Love at 30.05%. These may be obvious responses, but they indicate these people are seeking relationships rather than just casual sex. It could be that many act against these criteria when in society. There are several reasons for this, which become apparent when young people are negotiating their sexuality in social spaces. Honesty is also prevalent in the discussion and is desired explicitly by 27.87% of the participants. Attractiveness, beauty and good looks is valued by 25.14%, and Caring by a lover is sought by 24.59%. Trust in a lover is required by 15.85%, Intelligence by 14.21% and, Understanding by 10.93%. These are all traits sought in a serious partner, not in a purely physical relationship.

Discussion nine was titled “how cn u define luv”, but since the vast majority (75.97%) indicated that love was indefinable there is little possible discussion possible on the issue.

**Teenage pregnancy**

The tenth discussion was based on a young woman, shy bt hot, seeking advice after finding herself pregnant and deserted by her boyfriend. The participant entitled her discussion, ‘what wuld you do’, and asked, “you stay with ur bf 4 some months and later you realise that u r caring his blood as in ur preg.n u tell him then ghe bounce (run off) o let say dump you wat wult you do.” This is a critical issue considering the high statistics of single pregnant women in the country, and the alarming amount of HIV positive pregnant women. Discussion participants were supportive and advised shy bt hot to Keep and raise the baby as a single mother; Let him go and forget him when referring to her boyfriend, and made Criticisms of her boyfriend, as indicated in the table below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep and raise the baby as a single mother</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let him go and forget him</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>36.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of her boyfriend</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[N=160\]

**Table 11: Teenage pregnancy**

The participants made numerous comments, and out of the 160 contributions, the above table represents the most relevant. Many participants encouraged *shy bt hot* to keep the child; 60% said *Keep and raise the baby as a single mother*; many acknowledged that her boyfriend was unlikely to return and 36.88% said *Let him go and forget him*. *Criticism of her boyfriend* also occurred quite frequently at 10.63%. *Shy bt hot* did not explicitly state her decision on the forum but did respond to her supporters twice. First, when someone suggested that she did not need her ex-boyfriend except to pay child support and make time for his child, *lebogang* wrote “Tell him 2 keep running bt jst pay child support & make time 4 da kid. he has proved his an *****”. To which *shy bt hot* replied in the affirmative.

Here she agrees with the previous discussion participants’ comment, meaning she is prepared to move on but will seek financial assistance from her boyfriend for the child (implying that she will keep the child). The comment that she should *Ask for child support* is present in 6.88% of the discussion. *Shy bt hot* responds favourably to a common sentiment. The second instance where she replies is when someone suggests she go to her boyfriend’s parents. *Sthibo* suggests *shy bt hot* “Tell his parents” (*sthibo*), after which *shy bt hot* replies “*sthibo* how do i jus gt in his home n tell his parents that im preg wit their son baby, there were no where wen we were doin the baby”. The advice to *Talk to his parents* given by 6.88% of the participants is passed over by *shy bt hot*. 
Support of family and friends

The participants suggest shy bt hot seek the Support of family and friends in order to raise her baby and support herself. Nellygal says that it is possible to raise a baby with the help and “support of family”. Devo suggests that the first thing to be done is for shy bt hot to tell her parents she is pregnant. Shady says that she can always go home and get the love and support she needs. This may be true for shady but not for shy bt hot.

Abortion and adoption

When an unexpected pregnancy occurs, the options of adoption and abortion often arise alongside those of pregnancy. In the sample, 14 out of the 160 participants specifically spoke out against abortion, saying, “da child deserves a chance at life” (nemoza). Seven out of the 160 were for abortion: one participant said, “i will abort it without turning back” (oooo). Only three participants mention adoption, saying that many people would appreciate children and can take care of them (refreshment; nemoza; oreke arrah). This is in contrast to the majority (60%) who suggest keeping the baby and raising him or her as a single mother. The participants’ semiotic encounter with unexpected pregnancy seems to lean toward altruistic outcomes and expectations.

Now that the research results have been presented, the discussion will continue in Chapter Eight with reference to the research questions and the application of relevant theory in answering them.
Chapter Eight: Discussions and questions

How are young people negotiating their relationships and sexuality on MYMsta?

In the ‘sex 4 things’ discussion many of the participants indicate that sugar daddy relationships lead to intergenerational and transactional relationships; as well as multiple and concurrent partnerships. The intergenerational and transactional relationships are often examples of unequal power relations between men in a superior economic and social position and women who believe themselves to be dependent on them. The discussion participants say that men will own you or abuse you in these relationships.

Women are not always forced into transactional and intergenerational relationships but are sometimes coerced or tempted by financial security. The gendered accumulation process in capitalism, allows some men to benefit more than others – especially unemployed manual labourers: not all men benefit equally from patriarchy (Connell 2002: 142). Wealthy men retain the benefit of attracting women from all classes who wish to gain financially (Connell 2002: 142). The participants on the ‘sex 4 things’ discussion make it known that they or their peers are candidates for sugar daddy relationships. Some of the participants identify themselves as poor or cite poor background or unemployment as factors that influence young women to undertake and maintain transactional and intergenerational relationships.

Discussion two deals with a girl who has trouble letting go of her boyfriend. This issue may not appear to have the same gravity for HIV and AIDS communication as transactional relationships, or HIV vulnerability but it demonstrates how young people negotiate their relationships and sexuality on the site in their everyday lives. This forum highlights a significant facet of gender relations: emotional relations. Emotional relations relate to the importance of emotional attachments among people. Many couples and households are formed through romantic and sexual attachment. Men and women are attracted to each other in heterosexual relationships, as are people of the same sex in homosexual relationships (Connell 2002). Emotional attachments, relationships, intimacy
and companionship are common desires in modern life. For some their attainment is tantamount to happiness.

The desire for companionship may be valued so greatly that women may be prepared to ignore negative traits in partners or place themselves in subservient positions in order to sustain their relationships. Women in transactional and intergenerational relationships must deal with gender inequality that disadvantages them when negotiating safe sex (UNAIDS 2011). Rudz for example was prepared to overlook her boyfriend’s lack of communication with her and potential unfaithfulness until she was encouraged not to by other MYMsta users. Many women concede even more, and become victims of abuse, violence and financially and emotionally dependent.

Discussion three relates to sexual orientation. This discussion explores the perceived norm of male heterosexuality, and participants struggle to accept and relate to vector, who admits to being drawn to members of the same sex. The forum brings homosexuality to the fore, along with the concept of Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), and some of the perceived boundaries surrounding heterosexuality. In response to vector’s question, truthfulness; honesty; fear of being ostracised; and homophobia are all pointed out by discussion participants as matters of concern. The need to balance these factors and support vector are evident in their comments. Many participants want vector to tell the truth and be true to himself, but fear he will be ostracised. Expectations influenced by symbolic relations in society in terms of what is acceptable appear in the participants’ statements to vector. Some participants seem aware of the patriarchal dividend and what vector faces losing if he openly acknowledges his homosexuality. They advise him to forget those feelings and be a man; it is just better that way. Questioning dominant gender norms is risky territory that the discussion participants try to warn vector against.

Discussion four deals with intergenerational relationships. The discussion assumes rt.licious is a student at the institution where the lecturer she wishes to date works. Rt.licious is using MYMsta to decide whether she should pursue a relationship with a
lecturer. The forum introduces the ideas of intergenerational and transactional relationships and most users oppose them. The power relations between the lecturer and student would be unequal, and this is why many participants oppose the relationship. Participants assume that the lecturer is older than *rt.licious* and some say it is inappropriate to have such a relationship. An older man is considered a parental figure and this reflects the symbolic relations of an older male figure in society.

Discussion five relates to whether or not to send a naked picture to a partner. We discover that *kedi* is using the forum to negotiate her situation and decides not to send a naked photograph of herself. The participants exhibit varying ideas of image and womanhood and question the propriety of sending a naked photograph via a cellular phone. Some say they would send a photograph of themselves if requested. Symbolic relations are evident in the differing ideas displayed of how women should behave, for example being chaste, demur, have respect for themselves, and dignity – or, in some cases, obedient. Some participants argue that sending the photograph to her boyfriend would harm *kedi’s* image.

Discussion six deals with HIV vulnerability and why people do or do not get tested. Participants mention that they fear HIV testing because they have multiple partnerships, they have not used condoms, or have engaged in risky sexual behaviour. Many fear that they will appear promiscuous if people know they have taken an HIV test. The images they wish to portray and perceptions of others are important to them. For instance, some men on the forum say they have many partners to prove their manhood, and many women want expensive things to appear affluent but have not the means to purchase those things and so they sleep with wealthy men. Symbolic relations of how the opposite sexes are expected to behave and appear have powerful consequences for behaviour and identity.

Discussion forums seven, eight, and nine all have a similar theme of emotional attachment. Love, caring, and respect are some of the things that the discussion participants expect from relationships. These emotional needs discussed are largely mentioned by women. Many of the female participants state that they want love, respect,
and honesty; they also seem to realise that their reality is filled with casual relationships and multiple partners.

In discussion ten shy bt hot is pregnant and has been deserted by her boyfriend. Many of the participants advise her to keep the baby and raise it as a single mother as well as seeking child support from her ex-boyfriend. In a patriarchal society child rearing is traditionally a woman’s’ role.

What kinds of dialogues are created around sexual practices and their safety?

The consensus among most participants in the first discussion is that sugar daddy relationships are unsafe, associated with HIV and AIDS, STDs, and unplanned pregnancies, as well as being relationships with unequal power relations between men and women. Women are subordinate in many of these relationships. Some participants state that sex for money is not safe, and say young people who allow this are destroying their lives. Sugar daddy relationships are often condoned by discussion participants when poverty is a factor: they claim that this is common practice in the areas they are from. Men from advantaged areas have better incomes than women from poor backgrounds who often fall into poorly paid occupations.

In discussion two, rudz has an absentee boyfriend, whom the participants say could be cheating on her with other women since he is not paying her any attention. The participants praise fidelity and trust and say MCPs are bad and unsafe. They advise her to move on with her life.

In discussion three, which relates to sexual orientation, the participants warn vector against acting on his feelings or making decisions without thinking them through. They caution him against the dangers of homophobia if he should decide to pursue his inclinations and tell his current girlfriend about his feelings. Issues of heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality arise in the discussion. Some try to dissuade vector from indulging homosexual feelings, saying he would be better off with girls. However, vector’s feelings are largely accepted by the forum and they support him in his decision-
making. They advise him to tell his girlfriend the truth, but warn him that she might ‘out’ him, and that homosexuality is not always acceptable in society.

One participant tells vector to ‘play them both’. This means acknowledging ‘Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), that is, men who are homosexual or bisexual. Some participants make homophobic comments, telling vector that he should ignore his feelings as he is supposed to be a man; that he should get help for this; and that he should pray and it will pass. Other participants express disbelief at what they describe as vector’s suddenly becoming gay after dating girls. One discussion participant, lizwy, says that she is Christian and thus against his feeling for the same sex, she says since he was not always this way this must be an artificial decision.

In discussion four, rt.licious asks whether it is good or bad to date a lecturer. In terms of sexual practices, intergenerational and transactional relationships, as well as multiple and concurrent partnerships are generally not encouraged in the discussion. Many participants state that the lecturer rt.licious is interested in probably has many girlfriends, and a new one each year and it is not advisable or safe to be in a relationship with such a person.

It is common practice for young people to send revealing pictures of themselves via technology like their cellular phone and even on social networks such as MXit. It forms part of a relationship for those who are physically intimate. Recently there have been publicised cases of revealing pictures leaked to the public via technology (Campbell 2008: 9; Gounden 2009: 5). A jealous ex-boyfriend, or even accidental exposure could be the cause.

Participants largely agree that sending a nude photograph of themselves via their cellular phones is not safe, and that it might fall into the wrong hands. Some introduce the idea that complete nudity is too much exposure, and suggest partially covering the body or face when sending the picture. The person who initiated the discussion, kedi, says she is not a porn star, some of the other participants refer to this term as well, indicating that some of them think of sending of private nude photographs as equivalent to pornography.
*Kedi* may consider pornography as an objectification of women, and may be uncomfortable with the power imbalance that would introduce into her relationship. Some of the participants say they would rather *appear* naked in front of their partner than sending them a photograph, others refer to the request as disgusting. Sexuality and sexual relationships form part of the emotional relations in society. The discussion shows that some are willing and others uncomfortable to send their nude photographs to their partner.

Discussion six centres around HIV testing. The participants display considerable fear of testing due to their risky sexual behaviours such as unprotected sex, multiple partners, sleeping around. Many participants note a sense of fatalism among their peers: since many of them have engaged in risky sexual behaviour they fear they must be HIV-positive, and would rather not have that confirmed by a test. Therefore, one of the conclusions drawn by participants is that risky sexual behaviour such as unprotected sex with multiple partners may lead HIV infection. Symbolic relations in terms of dominant ideas of masculinity are present in the discussion, with some saying that many men have multiple partners in order to prove their manhood.

Even with the questions of what dialogues are generated around sexuality and safe sexual practices explored, there still remains the question of identity which these young people are displaying and perhaps exploring on MYMsta.

*In what ways can participation in the MYMsta discussion forums relate to formation of identity?*

Participants often construct narratives or identity stories about themselves. According to Hall (1992), the postmodern subject has no essential identity. The identities that the participants construct on MYMsta are not neutral descriptions of themselves or their relationships and circumstances: they are selective. They are managing impressions, interpreting the cues given by others in the forum and adjusting their responses to create the best possible impression (see Goffman 1956). Others may want to stand out or identify with a particular persona, for example that of an innocent victim of circumstance,
or a ‘playa’. The participants may display different identities according to their positions (Foucault 1984).

Identity construction is a social process. The participants explore and define who they are in the midst of other forum users and who they are relative to others. The circumstances in their background, their home life, socio-economic and cultural contexts, and well as their social exposure are referred to by them in their attitudes or behaviour. The forum participants seem to be in the process of acculturation, or learning and responding to how they are encouraged to act in society. For example, some of the participants condemn sugar daddy relationships – these responses often involve arguments of morality. Many of the participants note that they or their peers desire expensive things – this desire is fuelled and nurtured by the consumer culture. The sensationalising of the distribution of nude pictures on social networks seems to have made many of the participants wary of sending sensitive content via communication technology.

Participants often refer to themselves as “us”, “we”, “us young people”; many tend to identify with other participants in terms of age, gender, social standing, culture, and perhaps even race, though this remains undeclared. These statements indicate a possible feeling of commonality and community among participants.

The identities displayed by many of the participants are fragmented, as with any postmodern subject. The pull between being young responsible adults and scared irresponsible young people is visible in the sugar daddy and HIV testing discussions. Vector confesses to his homosexual feelings alongside his heterosexual relationship with his girlfriend. He is divided between his desire to tell his girlfriend and the desire to protect himself from censure.

The discussion participants convey the sense that their unconscious, rather than reason, motivates their desires and sexuality (see Freud 1977). This is evident in their responses in the sugar daddy and HIV testing forums. Participants attempt to reconcile contradictions in their actions and identities by constructing comforting self-narratives.
Some claim that what they do not know cannot hurt them when referring to their HIV status. Others avoid HIV testing by saying that they are not emotionally ready for the test, and that they will go when they are ready, older, or when they need to – as in the case of pregnancy, and new relationship, or family planning. Many identify themselves as young and able to avoid taking the HIV test in the immediate future. The postmodern subject can only obtain a unified concept of identity by constructing a comforting self-narrative (Hall 1990).

**Questioning the medium**

Lovelfie seeks to use MYMsta to encourage youth involvement in different forums, and to reduce HIV vulnerability through links to opportunity. MYMsta forums attract a large volume of user responses to topics on romantic relationships, sexuality and HIV (loveLife 2009b). There are user-generated responses to pertinent questions concerning sexuality among young people and HIV vulnerability, but expert guidance and advice of youth counsellors, health community workers and other resources is missing from the forums.

Participatory communication theories help with analysis of the MYMsta medium and evaluate MYMsta’s progress in the light of loveLife’s objectives. Empowerment is one of these concepts. In order for people to be empowered they need to gain control over their own stories (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 37; Rappaport et al. 1984). The discussion forums show participants telling their own stories, reflecting on their actions, or advising others.

Participatory development stresses the importance of dialogue. The dialogue between participants on MYMsta discussion forums may lead to expanded consciousness and power (Freire 1990; Melkote and Steeves 2001: 39). The participants in eight out of the ten discussions created their own topics, identifying issues close to them. *Shy bt hot* in forum ten told and interpreted her story of teenage pregnancy, leading others to narrate their own stories of being raised by a single mother or being a single parent. In discussion three the participant *vector* confronts the issues of sexual orientation. His bravery in
telling his story in a public medium inspires some to support him, and one participant to declare that she is a lesbian. These young people who express deviations from heterosexuality are free to express their views, as are participants who support vector or disapprove of his feelings.

In discussion five the participant kedi asks MYMsta users to help her make a decision on whether to send her boyfriend a naked picture of her. The discussion sparks a debate on unauthorised distribution of naked pictures through new media technologies. Kedi tells the forum she will not be sending her boyfriend the picture and many others tell stories of how they dealt with the issue of nudity via technology in their relationships.

The UNESCO debates on communication for participatory development identify access, participation and self-management as necessary for development communication (Servaes 1999). MYMsta is accessible to many young people. Feedback on the forums consists of participants’ responses to questions posed by MYMsta or the participants. Participation is achieved through participants’ engagement in the medium (Servaes and Malikhao 2005). Youth manage the discussions but not the mechanics of the site (Servaes 1996: 76). The narratives are constructed by the participants and may reveal comforting self-narratives or identity stories (see Hall 1990; Giddens 1991).

Development processes require participation from all stakeholders and, not merely from the target communities (Melkote and Steeves 2001: 39; Servaes 2000). Continuous dialogue with the participants information from them, and returning to them with information and strategies in response to the needs voiced would aid the development process on MYMsta (see Servaes 1996: 81-82). The rationale behind the initiative appears to rely on the efficacy of peer support, advice and experience. Peer support is present on many of the forums. The participants appear to reach conclusions of their own, and to aid each other. An example of this appears in the ‘getting tested’ discussion which explores the reasoning behind HIV testing – and behind the refusal of testing.
Management of MYMsta seems to involve providing opportunities such as links to peer networks, employment opportunities and bursaries. It involves communication from management with messages via SMS inviting members to entertainment events hosted by MYMsta. It also involves asking users for responses to forums and groups. There is no evidence of loveLife staff reviewing the discussion forums on relationships and addressing the concerns of young people voiced on them. Information provided to me on the site indicates a shallow analysis of the site, with campaign reports emphasising membership figures, and user frequency rather than any exploration of the content of the messages placed by young people on MYMsta (see loveLife 2009a; loveLife 2000b).

Conclusion

The forums have implications for HIV and AIDS communication as they are platforms for young people to discuss safe sex, romantic and sexual relationships, and HIV vulnerability and testing. The views presented on the forums indicate a need to address issues identified by young people. For instance, more information on the realities of living with HIV by ordinary people and celebrities would be helpful to young people. The discussions are cyclic in nature: though some participants may present reasonable solutions to problems, these are not necessarily acceptable to all the participants. For example, the predominant message on the ‘getting tested’ forum seems to be Fear. A facilitator could direct the discussion in a more positive and reassuring direction. Peer support and peer education is valuable but it can only achieve so much. If young people had all the information and resources, and were making safe sexual choices then the forums and campaign would be unnecessary in their present form. Semiotically, MYMsta is an online version of an offline support group where people gather to discuss areas of mutual interest and provide each other with support. However, HIV testing, sexuality, economic need, transactional sex, and coercion due to gender inequality are complex subjects without simple solutions and require the sustained attention of trained counsellors. While the participatory media of cellular phones and mobile internet serve to encourage participation from young people, the forums may also require loveLife’s attention and input to assist young people. The value of the medium for accessing young
people could be utilized effectively in other projects seeking to address HIV and AIDS communication.
Chapter Nine: Conclusion

MYMsta allows for cheap, fast and anonymous contact among young people. Participants in a pilot project held on MXit valued the medium for similar reasons (de Tolly and Alexander 2009: 6). The site affords discussion participants an opportunity to connect, in what appears to be a supportive environment, with those who have similar interests. Participants appear to seize the element of anonymity which MYMsta offers to explore their views regarding romantic relationships and sexuality. The quality of exchanges on the forums appears robust in its frankness, participants appear to express their fears, hopes, desires and acknowledge the contradictions implicit in their actions. The medium, which allows for identity expression through language, and offers the protection of anonymity, affords a chance for identity experimentation – of which adolescents are often in great need. Additionally, identity play can contribute to identity formation.

Young people using the site also appear to desire social acceptance. The opportunities for sociability on the site, as well as the apparent tolerance of varying degrees of literacy and command of the English language, are likely to be strong attractions for participants. While it is impossible to tell the ages of participants with certainty (they may list any age they desire on their profiles), participants appear to have similar understandings of the circumstances experienced by youth. In addition, they have control over their own stories on the forums. This gives them power over how they are represented.

LoveLife relies strongly on the efficacy of peer support in HIV prevention (DasGupta 2008b; Eskin, CMC 2011). This is the reason why they as an organisation do not appear as facilitators or formally engage with users on the forums. The consequence of this ‘hands-off’ approach is that incorrect, inappropriate or dangerous advice is a possibility of the ‘free’ advice offered by participants on the forums. A profanity filter is applied, and the absence of any overtly legally or medically dangerous advice suggests that there is some degree of surveillance. Nevertheless, advice like “What you don’t know can’t hurt you” when it comes to testing for HIV, or expressions of tolerance for sugar daddy relationships suggest that the organisers have taken a conscious decision that the
frankness encouraged by participants’ unawareness of any surveillance is very valuable. Since loveLife does not choose to intervene in the forums, they cannot control statements that encourage risky sexual behaviour rather than dissuade them. However, given the frankness and the individual indecision at times displayed on the forums, the statements seem reflective of participants’ real experiences, rather than them attempting to pander to what they think they should say. This frankness might disappear if they were lectured by authority figures (loveLife staff or counsellors) on how to behave. If their behaviour were condemned they might not reveal how they really feel. There is no guarantee of honesty on forums but correspondents who admit to ‘irresponsible’ behaviour or materialistic aspirations are aware that other participants are unlikely to be impressed.

The information, however flawed, is, as I have emphasised, anonymous and apparently uncensored. The openness with which participants in MYMsta discuss their lives and thoughts suggests that they are unaware, at least when actually responding, that their responses are now effectively public. Legal warnings that calls are or may be recorded are a commonplace in other situations, and the absence of any comparable warning has its own significance.

Participants seem aware that their risky sexual behaviour places them at risk of HIV infection and they therefore attempt to avoid acknowledging the consequences of their behaviour. There is a significant amount of fear and denial displayed by participants in the HIV testing forum. While communicating with each other may help these young people to feel they are not alone in their fears, it does not provide the means to overcome these fears. Encouraging HIV testing among young people is not a simple proceeding, but implementing some of the suggestions made by participants might be a way of creating inroads in terms of encouraging young people to test.

Some statements made on the HIV testing forum as well as the questions regarding STDs (in other forums not analysed in this study), and the circulation of misinformation from their peers, rather than responses from loveLife at whom the questions were directed, suggest the potential usefulness of other resources on MYMsta. In addition to inter-
member communication on the forums, the site might also offer the assistance of sexual health experts and trained counsellors. Participants might or might not utilise these resources but their inclusion might prove helpful to those seeking advice. Participants in the MXit content delivery pilot supported the idea of MXit chat rooms with counsellors to discuss HIV related issues (de Tolly and Alexander 2009: 6). Participants on MYMsta could benefit from similar forums where they could seek expert as well as peer-support.

The question of whether participants would remain as frank as they are at present if there were interventions by counsellors remains unanswered. The MYMsta forums may indicate that youth prefer to communicate with each other regarding their sexuality and HIV related issues, rather than with organisations or authority figures. They may find their peers easier to communicate with, less judgemental and more likely to understand than their parents or other adults. The forums are immensely valuable for the ease of contact and possibilities of sociability and social acceptance among young people. However, not monitoring the forums seems to neglect some of the issues that they bring to light.

Many of the participants tend to condemn unequal power relations in relationships (unwillingness to send naked pictures or stipulating the presence of respect in romantic relationships), but some still assume a power imbalance is inevitable (girls with sugar daddies, and men preferring rural girls because they have ‘respect’). Symbolic relations in society reflect images many women aspire to in popular media, driving them to seek men who can provide them with financial means of upholding a certain image. Participants acknowledge the desire for financial freedom, but many fail to see the dangers of sugar daddy relationships, or that these relationships do not provide them with independence.

There are no easy answers in evaluating an intervention that is probably the first of its kind. My study is the first documented study of MYMsta and is thus necessarily explorative. The only comparable studies I have found are the MXit content delivery pilot project, and the SexInfo service, neither of which is comparable in scale. However, both
these projects offer lessons in communicating with young people regarding HIV related issues via a mobile medium. Both projects indicate the need for compelling content rather than the repetition of stereotypical health related messages. Youth seem comfortable using a mobile media, and they will seek information and support via that medium if it is available to them. MYMsta thus provides valuable insight into the potential of mobile media for HIV communication among young people.

Further research might concentrate on testing the reception of MYMsta among participants. Engaging with participants on what they expect from the site and how they perceive it could be helpful when creating similar interventions or improving MYMsta. In MYMsta, an element of trial and error is necessary to test what is useful and what is not.
References


Goldstuck, A. 2005. So this is what girls are doing to get high. *The Independent on Saturday*, 21 March: 5.


Kaplan, W. A. 2006. Can the ubiquitous power of mobile phones be used to improve health outcomes in developing countries? *Globalization and Health*, 2(9).


Kunda, L. J.-E. 2008. 'They have ears but they cannot hear' Listening and talking as HIV prevention: a New Approach to HIV and AIDS campaigns at three of the Universities in KwaZulu Natal. University of KwaZulu Natal, Durban.


loveLife. 2000a. loveLife (brochure)


loveLife. 2002a. South Africa’s national HIV prevention programme for young people, loveLife, Johannesburg

loveLife. 2003. South Africa’s national HIV prevention programme for young people, loveLife, Johannesburg. (This is a revised version of 2002a)


Mitchell, C., Reid-Walsh, J. and Pithouse, K. 2004. 'And what are you reading, Miss? Oh, it is only a website': The New Media and the Pedagogical Possibilities of Digital Culture as a South African 'Teen Guide' to HIV and AIDS and STDs. *Convergence*, 10(1), 80-92.


**Online sources**


*Email Correspondence (CMC)*

Dlamini, Thabisile. 18 May 2009.
Eskin, Esther. 8 May 2011.
Hartling, Duncan. 10 June 2009.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Clearance Form