



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

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SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

**ETHICS AND THE EVERYDAY:  
RECONSIDERING APPROACHES TO  
RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN**

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CSSR Working Paper No. 103



Published by the Centre for Social Science Research  
University of Cape Town  
2005

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Price in Southern Africa (incl. VAT and postage): R 5.00

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ISBN 1-77011-037-2

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Social Surveys Unit

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December 2005

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#### Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the contributions made by our colleagues in the research team, namely Susan Moses, Riccardo Herdien, Thandolwethu Mbi, Karen Painter, Samantha Peacocke, Zahir Slarmie and Siyabulela White. We are grateful to Susan Levine, Fiona Ross and Jeremy Seekings for their comments on this paper.

# Ethics and the Everyday: Reconsidering Approaches to Research involving Children

## Abstract

*Guidelines on ethical practice in research with children tend to focus on ways to protect children from potential economic and emotional exploitation. While such concerns deserve attention, we argue that they represent only a portion of the moral framework in which researchers and participants operate. Through an analysis of children's engagement in a long term ethnographic study, where their participation involved both providing and gathering data, we show the interconnections between so-called 'research activities' and young people's everyday decision-making. Children's participation in research takes place within existing and emerging relationships. Decision-making based on values – on the part of both children and adults – is part and parcel of these relationships. This paper demonstrates the need to engage with children's moral worlds seriously while planning and conducting social research.*

While designing an ethnographic study of the everyday lives of young peoples in the Fish Hoek valley, we<sup>1</sup> took the decision to approach teenagers and ask if they were interested in joining the research team. Six grade 11 students, three male and three female, and two from each of three schools, volunteered<sup>2</sup>. At the time of writing, we have been working with this group for over a year.

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<sup>1</sup> The study, 'Growing Up in the New South Africa: Perspectives from children and young people in the Cape Town area' was conducted by Rachel Bray, Imke Gooskens and Susan Moses.

<sup>2</sup> Information about the research was distributed through a local NGO named OIL that promotes peer education in the three high schools participating in the study. Half those who volunteered heard about the project via OIL, and the remainder through school friendship networks. We did not offer payment for participation in weekly meetings or research trainings, but paid individuals a set amount per interview conducted and transcribed.

Our rationale for inviting teenagers to be research partners was partly political and partly with an eye to data quality. Conscious of the historical divisions within the research area, we aimed to ground the research process in interaction between young people attending schools in three formerly divided communities. In addition, we hoped to provide an opportunity not usually available to teenagers from these schools, namely to meet weekly and discuss personal, social, political and historical issues in depth. Another value-based decision on our part was to attempt more than a tokenistic participatory approach to working with young people. Our partnership with ‘Tri’<sup>3</sup> included talking to members about various conceptual and practical questions (for example the design of methods), and asking them to point us to people they considered influential in the lives of young people locally.

For approximately five months, our weekly meetings with ‘Tri’ members centred on exploring themes within the research and preparing them to conduct interviews. We practised interview techniques, and discussed a range of potential ethical issues that may arise when interviewing peers or adults who notionally have greater authority. The young researchers were provided with information sheets, consent forms, collectively authored guidelines for interviews and tape recorders. Once they had begun interviewing, time was set aside each week to discuss their research experiences. Our aim here was to treat the partnership as a learning process for all involved, to keep ethics an open subject and to encourage everyone to contribute their opinions around responding to difficult situations. All ‘Tri’ members said that one of the main reasons why they joined the research team was out of curiosity to learn about the lives of people living in the valley, and especially what is going on in the minds of young people. Their interests mirrored the broad aims of our ethnographic study, which were to explore the everyday experiences of children and young people in the home, neighbourhood and at school.

The overall study involved children and young people from the age of 9 to 23 years attending schools located in Fish Hoek, Masiphumelele and Ocean View, three historically divided but geographically proximal ‘communities’ on Cape Town’s South Peninsula. The study was situated in a relatively small area of the South Peninsula of Cape Town in which lines demarcating ‘different communities’ were firmly drawn during the apartheid era. Fish Hoek was zoned

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Pseudonyms have been used throughout the paper. For readers’ reference, those chosen by the six members of ‘Tri’ are Chloe, Gift, Brian, James, Leanne and Tayo.

<sup>3</sup> Keen to establish a group identity, the young researchers decided to call themselves ‘Tri’. This name was chosen because it reflects the joint interaction and work of people coming from three communities.

‘white’ and Ocean View was created to house ‘coloured’ families forcibly removed from Simons Town and Kommetjie (both of which were zoned ‘white’). Masiphumelele or ‘Site 5’ was designated a ‘black’ township and grew rapidly from the early 1990s onwards. It is important to note that in all cases, a proportion of young people attending school in a particular area do not live in that area and that schools in the research area differ markedly in quality<sup>4</sup>. While the vast majority of pupils at schools in Masiphumelele are local, a handful travel over the mountain from Westlake or from Red Hill, a semi-formal settlement near Simons Town. Approximately 10% of students attending Ocean View schools live outside the area, usually Masiphumelele. A slightly higher proportion of young people studying in Fish Hoek are non-resident, and pupils come from a variety of areas including Masiphumelele, Ocean View, Muizenberg and some of the wealthier suburbs in the South Peninsula.

Many of the blatant inequalities in infrastructure, service provision and quality of housing designed by the apartheid government remain. So too do elements of the morally-imbued attitudes that legitimised these social and economic hierarchies as recently as a generation ago. The local press, for example, tends to report in ways that reinforce the attitudes that the apartheid government sought to promulgate (for example, articles on Masiphumelele often feature community development projects, those on Ocean View crime, and those on Fish Hoek animal well-being and sporting achievements). In such a context, involving young people from three formerly divided communities in exploratory research could be seen as raising some additional ethical concerns to those associated with age-related power dynamics. We could not predict how the young researchers would respond to local manifestations of a change in official lines of authority, nor whether their reactions might consciously or unconsciously try to undermine or exclude their colleagues (or ourselves).

Following several weeks in the classrooms we established after-school art and discussion clubs, each comprising about 12 students<sup>5</sup>. Through weekly meetings we developed a close rapport with members of these groups and grew to know their homes, families and other social arenas important to them.

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<sup>4</sup> There is an extreme differences in fees charged by schools in the respective areas. Fees at Fish Hoek Senior High are just over R7,000 per year, at Ocean View Secondary R300 per year and at Masiphumelele High R200 per year. Decisions about where a child goes to school are more reflective of class than of community of residence. And, as we would expect, there is a direct relationship between fee levels and the quality of resources available to students attending schools in the area.

<sup>5</sup> Separate clubs were started for the three approximate age groups that were the focus of our research, namely grade 6, grade 8-9, and grade 11.

Conducting research amongst and alongside these teenagers has further shaped our understanding of ‘ethics’ in relation to research with young people. Much of the material presented in this paper reflects our experiences of ‘doing’ and talking about social relationships with young people. We reflect on the norms and contradictions that shape peer relationships, and consider young people’s decisions around whether and how to draw adults into their webs of social support. Our discussion is centred on analysis of children’s decision-making in everyday life, as well as in the research context. Such a contextual approach allows insight into young people’s everyday ethical practice and the values motivating their decisions. Moreover, it throws light on any nuances in these processes that relate to the research methods or setting.

Ethical guidelines in social research often specify that studies involving ‘minors’ require additional protective measures in the light of power relations between adults and children (for example Shenk and Williamson, 2005). It is only sensible to attend to the possibility that children may be exploited in the research process. Yet children are often thought to be inherently vulnerable, owing to cultural notions of authority and power in generational relations between children and adults (Alderson, 1995; Mayall, 2000; Alanen and Mayall, 2003). This assumption that has been reinforced by a particular reading of legal documents designed to uphold children’s rights. The South African government has ratified two internationally binding documents, namely the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Many of the state’s obligations are repeated in, and thereby reinforced by, South Africa’s Constitution (Section 28, the Bill of Rights). What is interesting is that although the rights specified in these documents are weighted equally, it is those detailing children’s rights to protection that are uppermost in people’s thinking around research ethics (see for example, Boyden and Ennew 1996: 41-43). As a result, rather less attention is paid to the implications for social researchers of rights that refer to children’s positive engagement in social relations, for example the right to express their views freely in matters concerning them, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds (Articles 12 and 13 in the UN CRC).

The steps we took towards appropriate ethical provision prior to and during our study are not unusual in the context of social research with children. The research proposal was scrutinised by the ethics committee of our university institution prior to its approval. Members of this committee include experienced researchers from a range of disciplines who were able to make practical suggestions, particularly towards improving the wording of information sheets and consent forms designed for children and adults. The purpose of the information sheet was to give a succinct, accessible overview of the study’s

aims, scope and activities. Written in each of the three dominant local languages (Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa), these documents also explained our actions towards assuring confidentiality and the right to decline participation. Importantly, they were designed to be used as resources within conversations about the study and the implications of being part of it, not as replacements for verbal explanation and discussion. Different designs were used in information sheets and consent forms intended for younger and older children, and for parents (see appendices).

The subject of 'informed consent' in research with children is one that dominates guides on ethical practice (see for example Schenk and Williamson, 2005). Attempts are being made to move beyond the view that true informed consent is impossible owing to children's unfamiliarity with research and its possible implications for their lives. This view begs questions around the particularities of 'research' within the experiences of young people, and contains the dubious assumption that adults are necessarily more familiar with research than children and more capable of making decisions around participation. Clearly, children's abilities to understand what their participation entails vary according to their developmental stage, their experience and exposure to similar activities, and their status within the context in which research activities take place (Boyden and Ennew, 1996: 42). Yet, as Christiansen (2004:165) argues, there is no reason to apply different principles to research involving children or to assume that a different set of ethical standards is needed. Our approach was to treat the securing of consent as a gradual and emerging process, and one in which young people are capable of making an informed decision on the basis of experience and particular information. Thus, at frequent intervals during the early months of the study we spoke about its aims and activities, made information sheets and consent forms available, and responded affirmingly to potential participants' queries or wishes to retract. Interestingly, individuals of similar age reacted differently to the opportunity to sign a consent form. Some seemed to consider it merely a formality; others explicitly valued it as a symbolic commitment to the research group.

A perhaps more reliable marker of consent was attendance at research sessions. Some came for the first few, and then did not continue. We did not attempt to persuade them to return, but found ways to communicate that they are welcome if they wanted to come back. Our thinking here was to emphasise the voluntary nature of the study in the context of school-related settings in which children anticipate certain types of adult authority.

Regardless of the form and timing of consent to participation, it is important to remember that the particularities of an individual's experience, and any implications for his or her well-being, are to a large extent unpredictable by both participant and researcher. We were aware that ethical provision is not just about preparing appropriately, but requires ongoing sensitivity towards the dynamic nature of power relations and lines of authority.

In the case of 'Tri', we provided considerable support and guidance through both weekly meetings and regular telephone conversations. Not only was it important to address young people's particular questions, but also to maintain open channels of communication. We also recognised that processes of cognitive development that continue during adolescence may affect young people's decision-making abilities. Moreover, members of 'Tri' viewed us as those with experience in the research field and welcomed our guidance in this light.

The body of this paper looks closely at young people's decision-making in their role as researchers and as research participants, within the context of everyday decision-making. Our purpose here is to reflect on the process through which we, as adult researchers, have deepened our understanding of young people's ethical frameworks, their negotiation of contradictions between ideals and realities, and of their approach to research activities and the relationships formed therein<sup>6</sup>. We conclude by commenting on the implications of our analysis for ethical practice in research involving children.

## **Consciousness of self, of others and of self in relation to others**

Members of 'Tri' used a variety of strategies to recruit potential interviewees. The particularities of their approaches reflect both their social arena and their sense of how best to connect the research aims and activities to that arena. James and Brian began by approaching classmates and members of their extended families, making appointments with those who agreed to being interviewed. It took Gift some time to identify an appropriate entry point. In the end, he started by chatting informally with a teammate after soccer matches and used the

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<sup>6</sup> In the light of this focus we discuss data that demonstrate the ethical dimensions of young people's thoughts and actions. Unsurprisingly our material also shows that they, like anyone, are occasionally manipulative or deceitful.

opportunity to set a time and place for a quiet conversation. Leanne selected good friends made at school and youth camps whom she thought would have something interesting to say. She also interviewed her older brother as she thought his perspective as a young adult (21 years) would be valuable. In a discussion with members of 'Tri' about their research experiences, Chloe explained the obstacles she faced in recruiting interviewees and her route to overcoming them as follows:

Chloe: For me it was difficult to start interviews. They were like 'Chloe, are you serious?' And I was like 'Ya, I'm doing this project with UCT, will you please do an interview with me' and they were like 'no I'm not interested'

RB: I remember at the beginning it was tough, so how did you manage get things going?

Chloe: It was that interview with Zanele, and they saw that its like this, and its easy, so they said 'sure you can interview me'. And I said 'I did tell you its like this' but I don't think they understood.

Zanele is a very popular girl in her year group. Chloe chose to interview her during break at school because she sensed that her classmates' reservations around interviewing were largely due to fear of the unknown.

Sensitivity to individuality and to social context was also evident in the young researchers' approach to recording. Most were keen to use a tape recorder so that they did not have to worry about noting quickly and thoroughly while trying to sustain a conversation. Yet they took their lead from their informants, and on several occasions relied purely on their notes because interviewees were not comfortable about being recorded, despite assurances of confidentiality. Whether their reservations stemmed from self-consciousness or fear of disclosure, 'Tri' members could relate to their peers' feelings and treated them seriously. Rather than following a blueprint of how research should be done, young researchers adjusted their actions to suit individual needs and preferences.

During the course of our research we were alerted to a strong awareness of self as an important subject and object of young people's decisions. We recorded many examples of teenagers, younger and older, deciding to initiate or terminate their membership of a church or youth group on the basis of what they

considered good for them as individuals. Some spoke of joining a different church because it “speaks to me” in a way that the former did not. The potential for fun and socialising offered by each institution contributed to their decision, but seemed less important than attendance to their spiritual or moral selves.

Alongside an awareness of the integrated self, young people’s actions reveal a sophisticated consciousness of others and of themselves in relation to others. On a number of occasions, teenagers spoke about others who have different values to themselves and of the importance of understanding such differences to the quality of social relationships. When interviewing a classmate, Chloe draws out her friend’s sense of her own values and needs, as well as the possibility that these may not align with those of her boyfriend:

Chloe: What are the things that you would say are the things one has to look for before getting into a relationship?

Nozuko: I personally looked at the way I wanted to be treated and the way I felt were my values and the things I wanted to contribute in the relationship. Also looking at his views and comparing them with mine. And deciding on what I wanted to change in terms of his views, and whether he agrees to change them or not.

Chloe: How would you say that this has helped your relationship?

Nozuko: It has helped the relationship in as much as it has helped me because I have a strong relationship with my boyfriend. It made me feel strong and able to advise my friends in what they need to do to make their relationship work. For the record, this year is my third year in the same relationship and it is growing stronger every day.

In a different interview Chloe and her respondent, a male friend, discuss the moral considerations involved in choosing friends. His views are interesting because one of the qualities he seeks in a friend is the ability to hold him accountable to certain principles:

Chloe: How would you say that you choose your friends, knowing about all the negative things that teenagers in Masi are involved in?

Themba: I would say that I choose certain qualities in people. They must at least have a purpose in what they want to do in life, and also have a certain lifestyle, and be able to tell me what I'm doing wrong and what I'm doing right.

His reply resonates with young researchers' responses to the questions we posed to them about their understanding of the term 'ethics' in everyday life. Two suggested that 'ethics' refers to "something you believe in, like values", and a third added "and the way you relate to other people". The group then raised the point that people have different values and that the basis of 'ethics' is to respect these differences and to treat others as you would like to be treated. Respect is considered a key element to relationships, and young people often alluded to a desire, or even a right, to be treated with respect, especially by adults. At the same time they emphasised the reciprocal nature of respect and their own responsibility in gaining it.

This mutuality of respect and 'being ethical' is made clear in young people's statements about their teachers. Most said that they respect teachers who fulfill their teaching role, or as one grade 11 student in Ocean View put it "give you the best of their abilities and share their knowledge with you". In terms of their own responsibilities, young people mentioned listening to teachers, abiding by their rules and respecting them as people. These actions were sometimes described in normative terms as duties, but their actual practice depended on teachers treating young people in ways they considered respectful.

A similar space for reciprocity can be seen in young people's relationships with parents, who, like teachers, occupy a position of authority. Their words often showed a keen awareness of parents' particular financial, social and emotional position and many made a conscious decision to try to support or protect them. Open communication with parents is highly valued, but on several occasions teenagers spoke about deliberately withholding certain information from a parent because they thought it would put additional pressure on them. Thus, Bongiwe wrote in her diary about a trip to Ocean View to see an old school friend and her response to her mother that evening as follows: "I didn't tell my mom that at first my friend was not excited to see me and asked me all sorts of hurtful questions, I just told her it was a nice visit". Bongiwe did not see this as deceitful, but considered this condensed version to be a sensible response to her mother who was tired and worried about household finances. Florence, a 19 year old grade 12 student in Fish Hoek, has chosen to work part-time since she was 16 because she knows that her parents are struggling to support her. Although somewhat ambivalent about her situation, she is determined to be

independent, and not worry her parents. She now lives by herself and pays her daily living expenses as well as a portion of her school fees.

Both Florence and Bongiwe's actions demonstrate a very deliberate nurturing of self-sufficiency resulting from economic circumstances. There may however be costs to such strategies, for example in cutting oneself off from possible sources of comfort and support. What is interesting is that in certain situations both girls speak to their parents in great detail, clearly wanting them to know the entire picture as they see it. The decision about whether to tell the whole story, or an edited version, seem to relate more to young people's judgements of the relative emotional costs to themselves or their parents, than to the nature of the situation.

Many young people participating in our study feel that parents underestimated their abilities to act responsibly. They are frustrated by last minute, heated arguments around, for example, times by which they should return home in the evening. Some had resolved this problem through a process of demonstrating and honouring trust in each other. Darren, a 17 year old boy attending Fish Hoek High School, reported that his parents respect his decisions about going out because he has proved to them through his actions that they can trust him. Darren and his parents value educational achievement and career development extremely highly, and as a result, an important 'proof' of his responsibility has been to prioritise his schoolwork over social and leisure interests.

## **The moral universe of 'peer pressure' and friendship**

As a background to understanding issues of trust and privacy pertinent to young people's everyday ethics, we will first look at a social arena uppermost in young people's conversations. Peers, friends and friendships, their various manifestations and contradictions, feature prominently in conversations about school, home life, the neighbourhood and dating.

Peer pressure is a subject that provokes animated discussion amongst both adults and children living in the research area. Defined by young people as "friends trying to get you to do things that you don't want to", concerns about peer pressure seem to arise from the potential of peer groups to offset the positive moral decisions individuals may make. The impression is that peer pressure is a

powerful social force, and is responsible for many so-called ‘youth problems’ that negatively impact individuals and society. However, young people’s descriptions of occasions when they were assertive towards their peers suggest that peer pressure is not always as powerful as the discourse implies, but that resistance to it requires determination and the ability to cope with some level of rejection. Bongiwe, a 17 year old girl from Masiphumelele, wrote about events surrounding a birthday party for one of her classmates, and her subsequent decision to disassociate herself temporarily from her friends:

“Earlier in the day we decided not to drink as its not nice to see a woman drunk. We (4 female friends) had all decided it - I came up with the idea as I know how people drink. My friends looked happy when I suggested it, but my brother was listening and laughing. Perhaps my friends thought they could hide it from me, and I wouldn’t see that they were drunk. But I could tell. I went home about 8.30. The music and dancing was just getting going but I decided to go home as I didn’t want to see them drunk as I don’t like alcohol. I didn’t even ask what happened the next day. My friends came here to tell me and I told them I didn’t want to hear and I’m not interested”.

Most of our participants show expertise in negotiating peer pressure, but at the same time feel its impact keenly. Older teens often reflect back on instances of giving in to peer pressure and subsequently deciding that they had made the wrong decision. Yet experiences labeled ‘peer pressure’ are but one element of what is clearly a central locus of young people’s interest and energies, namely their participation in interpersonal relationships and social networks with their friends and peers.

As our research progressed, it became evident to us that young people receive a high degree of support from their friends. Friends are spoken of as those who take an interest in your wellbeing and are involved in everyday domestic situations. Bongiwe wrote a diary entry about a ‘fight’ with her brother that began when he could not see the soap and “it was right in front of his nose”:

“I was upset because it was a silly thing to fight about. When I went to school I told all my friends that I had fought with my brother. They were worried about me in case my brother starts fighting with me again after school”.

Amongst girls in particular, friends are expected to keep a close watch on their peers and alert a friend if her boyfriend is found to be ‘cheating’, in other words dating another girl. A number of boys mentioned that sharing experiences with friends can help you avoid getting into trouble. When I asked Luzuko to show me his favourite photographs, he identified one of himself at his friend’s house. He is sitting on a bed with a CD in hand and a music system next to him. Luzuko explained:

“That’s what we do, we listen to music together, after school, while we do homework, and in the evenings, we sometimes pool our earnings and buy CDs between us. For us, listening to music is important, it keeps us away from all the stuff that happens outside here in Masi, like drinking too much, robbing people, that stuff”.

In many of our conversations, young people clearly distinguished between ‘friends’ and ‘good’ or ‘real friends’. This important qualitative difference reflects ideals associated with friendship, many of which are grounded in shared values. According to Gift, a member of ‘Tri’, a real friend “is someone you can trust, and you can be sure will not tell others about the problems and secrets you have talked about together”. Tayo added “being a good friend is about being ‘real’, accepting people for who they are and being your own person”. A good friend is someone who doesn’t only stick to their own world but is open to learning and knowing, and someone who likes you for who you are. She gave the example of ‘friends’ who come to her house and look around with some disdain because they have very little furniture whereas ‘real friends’ just make themselves at home. For Leanne, a good friend is “someone who is always there for you, you can phone at midnight if you need them: They are 24/7 not 7/11”.

Young people’s descriptions of events that triggered the ending of friendships reinforce the central ideals of shared moral values and reciprocity. Jessica, a 17 year old girl at Fish Hoek High, broke off a friendship with a girl who asked for her help in relation to her drug use, and repeatedly rejected her advice. Jessica said her decision was a painful one, but based on a wish to protect herself from people involved with drugs. She also spoke about the end of a friendship with a boy who turned out to be ‘racist’. She took him to her father’s house – who is white – and when he saw her stepmother – who is coloured – he walked straight out. She explained that as a result she could not remain friends with him. A sophisticated level of everyday decision-making and personal reflection around friendships is not only the preserve of older teenagers. When 12 year old Annie from Fish Hoek reflected on her friendships in the past year, she described herself as behaving “strangely”: She had chosen to stay away from her group of

friends as a result of an argument, and had opted to spend the year with other people whom she described as “just friends to spend time with”. She said with confidence that this year she would have her real friends back.

The different friendship-related values prioritised by young people remind us of contradictions between notions of the ideal, and the fact that individual personalities and histories influence the playing out of everyday ethics. Earlier, we quoted Tayo and Leanne on the definition of a ‘good friend’. They pointed to the ability to appreciate diversity in opinion and respect others point of view, but recognise that their Christian upbringing is often an issue in their choice of friends. For Darren, who has grown up in an environment where education and career are paramount, friends should think and act in the same way that he does:

“If my friends would drop out of school I wouldn’t be friends with them anymore because they are being stupid. I don’t know anyone who dropped out completely, I don’t associate with them! Like people who are ‘on’ something, you can tell. I don’t do drugs. It’s also that when you get seen with people like that you will get classified as the same. So my friends must realise what is important, they should be like me, be people that can see further, that want to do something with their lives”.

The fact that young people’s accounts of their actions around friendship are imbued with references to various norms and ideals suggests that they are familiar with making decisions based on a system of values. For most, the everyday experience of friendship includes frequent, detailed communication, and the knowledge that friendships are always vulnerable to change through either internal or external influence. As two male members of Tri put it, “best friends can quickly become worst enemies”. One recalled a former close friendship with a girl who suddenly changed when she became rich and ‘uppity’. Others described the fragility of friendships between two teenagers of the opposite sex, as the transition from friend to boyfriend or girlfriend can be very quick and is not easily reversible if the relationship does not flourish.

Our discussion this far clearly points to young people’s active engagement with the moral universe around them. In the sphere of peer relationships alone, they are constantly involved in highly nuanced decision-making and are both cognisant of, and comfortable with, their use of moral values as a reference point in this process. Adults have relatively little presence in day-to-day peer group interaction, meaning that young people have space in which to develop,

express and experiment with notions of morality. Thus, the peer group is “an important force” in the social and political processes in which young people engage, that in turn shape each individual’s personhood and moral framework.

## **Trust and privacy**

One of the main qualities expected of a ‘good friend’ noted earlier is that they are trustworthy. Trust is particularly important to young people when personal privacy is at stake. The potential for betrayal reveals an inherent fragility to friendships amongst peers, and in order to avoid risking a friendship, young people make interesting decisions regarding whether, and how, to draw adults into their relationships.

According to our participants, trust between peers is established through knowing someone for a long time, and through the experience of trusting and not being let down. Florence, a grade 12 student in Fish Hoek, has changed schools several times over the past few years and commented: “It takes some time to find where you ‘fit in’. You have to develop a trust relation with people, until then you just keep back a bit”. She said she has made good, solid friends for the first time in six years, when she discovered that her best friend at the time was talking about her behind her back. Since this incident she has not trusted her peers, and is still very cautious of telling her friends about personal matters.

The importance of time in forging trusting relationships was evident in the gradual change in the nature and level of information imparted to us by young participants. For example, during weekly art club meetings in Masiphumelele, a group of children aged 11-14 years worked individually or collectively on a drawing, map or collage. The researcher always discussed what was being created with children and recorded their explanations. During conversations over a period of nine months it became apparent that many had represented family life and personal experiences in a way that felt comfortable and ‘right’ to them at a particular point in time. For example, their early drawings contained household goods (such as bathtubs) and family members (often fathers), who were literally and figuratively not part of the picture in later research conversations. We did not interpret this as young people lying. Rather we explored the meaning of these items and people to each individual and grew to understand the significance of their symbolic and physical presence in young people’s lives.

Decisions by young people around privacy are not simply made on the basis of how long they have known a person, or the quality of their relationship with them. The context in which information is sought and made available is also an important consideration. For example, the majority of questions posed by young researchers when interviewing their peers remained at a fairly public level. We observe from the transcripts that they delved into private and potentially sensitive areas only when their interviewees indicated a readiness to speak on these topics. Remembering that most of these interviews were conducted with people well known to the young researchers, their dialogue suggested that the interview was experienced as a particular, formalised interaction (which is, after all, what it is). We encouraged young researchers to probe a little deeper in interview conversations. Yet our advice was tempered by our awareness that young people were applying a certain code of ethics to the subject and framing of questions. As such, the 'code' was based on a mutual understanding between interviewer and interviewee of what is appropriate for discussion in an interview. Their expertise in this area was greater than ours, and we therefore valued their judgments.

As we expected, the young researchers soon experienced the challenges associated with interviewing friends and family members. They spoke openly about these, and clearly understood the changes in social dynamics triggered by the exposure of new knowledge:

James: I've done interviews already but nothing like this; to me this is more difficult than interviewing a celebrity.

RB: Interesting that you've found it more difficult, why do you think this is so?

James: It's more difficult as you're interviewing those people in your place and they see you everyday. They don't know your point of view and you don't know theirs, and now you've brought this stuff together...

Chloe: When you interview your friends; you know them, but as you interview them you find new things that you didn't know about them before.

RB: From a friendship point of view, does interviewing someone cause problems in friendships or can it strengthen them or does it make no difference?

Chloe: It actually depends on the person you are interviewing, that they felt like they wanted to talk openly or whether they are scared that you are going to say whatever they said to other people.

RB: I see, so its about their confidence in you.

Chloe: Yes

RB: It's interesting that people are worried about having their information spread around. Have you been asked by people not to tell others? Has the confidentiality thing been a big deal?

Leanne: No, not for me

James: The one guy that I've just interviewed that I spoke to you (Sue) about, he's said that I mustn't tell his brother or his mommy about the information

Chloe: For me, the one Spikey, about school stuff, she was the one who asked me for something written on paper to say that I wasn't going to tell anyone around about what I said. So I showed her the consent form.

RB: Well done, was she OK with that?

Chloe: Yes, she was fine with it.

RB: Well that's good to know it works.

SM: How do you find this for yourselves in your friendships, are you able to keep this information to yourselves or is it hard?

Chloe: Its actually difficult as when you talk sometimes you have to like know what you are going to say, and be sure that you are not going to reveal what they said in the interview.

Two points concerning ethics in research by young people emerge from this excerpt. The first relates to the place of preparation and resources designed to support young people in the field of research ethics. The conversations we had during training around consent and confidentiality, as well as the information sheets and consent forms, seem to have contributed to young researchers' abilities to respond to participants' concerns. Yet these only served their purpose because the young researchers drew on their personal skills and experience and applied these to each specific situation. We question whether such measures to mitigate against ethical transgressions would have been effective if neither they, nor we, had valued their expertise in these areas.

The second point that emerges is that the methods chosen for this study place a large responsibility on the young researchers. Conversations like the above caused us to think carefully about whether we were fair in expecting them to cope. Our point of reference in this regard was the extent to which guardedness in a research context did, or did not, differ from guardedness in broader social interaction. We were struck by the care and sensitivity of young people's everyday responses to knowledge concerning friends' personal or family problems. The temptation to gossip amongst peers was clearly strong, yet many made a conscious decision to remain silent or to allow others to be silent. Care for a friend, for example, involves respecting his or her privacy. In a conversation around a diary entry, Bongiwe explained her and her friend's reaction to their knowledge that a mutual friend is being beaten by her boyfriend:

“Sometimes he beats her and we don't like it. She loves him so she doesn't even tell us why she was beaten. We overheard someone else saying that she was crying about her boyfriend, and when we asked her, she said it's true she is being beaten. But she didn't say why, she doesn't want to talk about it so we left her alone.”

In the same way, decisions not to act were made, even when the situation seemed to merit intervention: In a discussion about how one might react to rumours about serious conflict within a friend's family, Chloe said:

“I would first wait until like, even if I had heard the rumours, I would wait until the friend approaches me and tells me this is happening. I would not take action before she told me as it seems as if I’m barging myself into her problems.”

If we reflect upon young people’s decision-making in such situations, we begin to appreciate the value placed on silence and inaction. Such junctures of social interaction are often overlooked by researchers trying to understand the dynamics of social relationships (Henderson, 2005). In addition, we notice that young people frequently explain such decisions with reference to their friend’s and their own well-being. Members of ‘Tri’, for example, said that they choose to keep silent for fear of inadvertently making the situation worse for the friend, and of being accused of spreading rumours. In such cases, young people are experiencing a connection between self and other in the playing out of decisions and actions that they consider appropriate and ethical.

When speaking of their desire and need to trust in a close friend, young people often mentioned the risks inherent in doing so and their decision to withhold intimate information. Their analysis of such situations showed an awareness that this contradiction between ideal and practice can be a source of tension within friendships.

The following excerpt from Leanne’s interview with Clare, a fifteen year old friend at Fish Hoek Senior High, reveals another dimension of the nature and extent of disclosure between friends.

Leanne: Where do older teenagers get support from?

Clare: Most older teenagers get their support from friends, or maybe from a relationship with a girlfriend or a boyfriend. Friends, often you get support from friends, but they don’t really have the maturity. They have the same maturity as you, that’s why you are friends. They don’t know what’s happening inside or about the general overview, so they can’t give you a proper response.

Social workers, teachers and counselors working in the valley spoke of the frequency with which young people approach them on behalf of a friend. A school councilor in Fish Hoek said this happens particularly when girls have an eating disorder or are harming themselves. Typically a friend would approach

her saying “She doesn’t know that I have come to you but I can’t stand it anymore” and ask her to do something. In such instances, young people seek help from professionals whom they sense can offer something to a friend that they cannot.

The interesting issue here is the apparent conflict between two ideals of friendship. On the one hand, friends can be trusted to keep confidences. Yet in certain situations, young people consider it acceptable and even desirable for a friend to seek help from adults on their behalf. Various circumstances were described to us as needing adult input and often involved actual or potential harm to a young person. At the time of writing, none of the young researchers had been party to such information, but the conversation we had about what one might do should this occur was revealing:

RB: What would you see as your responsibility as researcher to the person who told you about such a situation?

Leanne: I’d keep it to myself as much as I can or I’d tell someone really close to me that can really make a difference to that situation, if I know I can’t make a difference.

Brian: For me, it depends what it is. If it’s something like very harsh then you should appoint them to someone as you can’t deal with it then, if it’s something really severe. The only thing I can do is listen to them and tell them I’m here, but after that I can’t go deeper so I’d point the person to someone higher up in some profession or whatever.

Common to all young people’s accounts, whether in the research context or otherwise, was a sense of the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved, and of their inability to respond effectively. And as a result, choices around the appropriate person (or people) to consult on a friend’s behalf were made carefully. Qualities sought in adult confidantes include the status or authority to either provide appropriate practical help or access others able to do so. Of equal importance were adult attitudes of respect towards young people and the information being imparted. It was expected that personal details remain confidential, except when needed to protect or assist the friend in question. In this sense, the boundaries of privacy were contingent on the needs of a particular situation.

The value of privacy, whether personal or that of a friend, is evident in young people's unwillingness to share information in contexts they deem inappropriate. A bible education teacher working in Fish Hoek described his strategy of dealing with personal issues in class as follows:

“We get them to share anonymously....surveys and things. They won't come and tell you, they don't trust you, because you are a teacher and they don't know what you are going to do with it. Personal stuff only comes out when it's anonymous and when they have to write it down and no-one sees it, it's between them and no-one really”.

It is not only in crisis situations that young people make careful decisions about who they talk to about personal matters. On the topics of romance and sex, many said that they would speak to friends or siblings rather than adults. For some, trust in this instance was more comfortably vested in someone of the same generation, and a number preferred a sibling over a friend. Others avoided family members altogether and trusted only a close friend. Given such variation, we are cautious of any generalisations of a highly nuanced picture. The common thread running through young people's accounts is one of decision and rationale for that decision. The conversation between members of 'Tri' illustrates these points:

Brian: I would talk to my friends about girlfriends for example, but not to my family. My brothers would make fun of me.

James: Me and my sister can talk about these things.

Chloe: Me too, I wouldn't tell my friends as they can tell others. In fact I don't feel comfortable talking to my friends about personal stuff, just whatever's going around. I tell my sister everything, but if it's something really personal then I'll keep it to myself as its safest there.

Interestingly, conversations with young people about trust in adults prompted statements such as; “ultimately, your mother is the only person you can really trust”. Yet for many, trust in adults was not vested exclusively in one person but in relationships that displayed certain qualities. Prominent in this regard was a certain degree of reciprocity – a quality usually associated with peer relationships. Adults who are respected by young people, and in whom they may

choose to confide, are usually those who are able to listen and who speak to them about their own private concerns. According to members of 'Tri', adult family members who do so demonstrate trust in the young person, a critical factor in enabling him or her to trust in return:

RB: As a teenager would you come to know if there are issues going on in your family or would it not really be talked about?

Chloe: In our place they inform us and tell us this and this is happening, especially my granny tells us when things are difficult, she asks us 'what do you think I must do?'

RB: Do you appreciate her doing so?

Chloe: Yes its nice to be relied on, it makes me feel good.

Brian: You see, you lose trust in your parents if they can't trust you.

## **Two case studies**

In the final section we look at two particular occasions of potential ethical compromise that arose in this study. We do so in order to illustrate the nature and implications of decisions made by both young researchers and ourselves. The case studies point to the integral place of time and process in understanding the possible outcomes of each incident. In the case studies below, researchers (both younger and older) and participants demonstrate an awareness of personal histories and show a willingness to engage in dialogue around a particular incident over a period of time.

One of the young researchers reported an 'ethical' incident while interviewing his brother as follows:

James: I think in the interview with my brother, he had a lot of ethics with my mommy there. He said that the reason he became a gangster was coz my mommy didn't give him enough attention, so he went out

of the house to seek for attention by robbing people and hurting people.

RB: Did your mommy hear that?

James: Yes, she was listening while I was doing the interview

RB: So who felt awkward?

James: I think she felt awkward as she never knew that, as he never speaks about how he used to be a gangster. So it was the first time now that she heard it, in that interview. He's not so keen to speak to anyone about that time you see.

In this instance, it is not the interviewee who found himself compromised but a family member who inadvertently heard the conversation. James explained that his brother was aware of his mother's presence, but chose to continue talking, almost as if he was glad of an opportunity to explain his perspective. James did not attempt to change the subject, nor did he raise the incident with either his brother or mother subsequently. In our conversation about his decisions, he was careful to point out that he acted in the knowledge of a recent change in his mother's relationship with his brother. In the past, she criticised him when he spoke about personal problems related to gang membership and effectively blocked any support he might have received at home. Recently she had begun to respond in a much more supportive fashion. In James' opinion, his mother's change of attitude and behaviour is the reason why his brother's statement did not cause any conflict between them. He knew how to act because he was familiar with the history of relationships in the family. This case suggests that additional protection is afforded to researchers and respondents when young researchers interview those well known to them.

Our approach to our relationships with young participants was to be available, interested and consistent in offering space for exploring their concerns. Such an approach seems to have contributed to our achieving a level of communication with young people that is both open and respectful of personal boundaries. Yet, even once a researcher and participant have achieved this understanding, the involvement of a third party – whether intentional or otherwise – can lead to unintended consequences. For example, when discussing in detail the diary made by Emma, a teenage girl attending Ocean View High school, her father

entered the room and went towards the fridge behind them (or so the researcher thought). The journal entry recording what followed reads thus:

Once we had finished talking, E walked me to my car and when we got there, said that her father had been reading my notes while standing behind us (and had not been by the fridge as I'd thought). Surprised at her lack of reaction at the time, I apologised profusely and asked E if she thought she would be OK. She said she would, adding 'I have survived this long haven't I?' I said I was worried about leaving her with him if he had indeed read that particular page. It contained details of the up-coming court hearing she has scheduled in her effort to put a restraining order on him, and he does not yet know about it. E reiterated that she would be fine, so I checked again that she had my telephone numbers and told her to call me if she needed anything. She said goodbye and walked towards her neighbours across the road to show them her photographs. After speaking to research colleagues, I have decided to monitor the situation by phoning her today and tomorrow, and take my cue from E regarding the need for any intervention on our part.

Our position in this case was to communicate regularly with the teenage girl who was potentially at risk, and to consider any further action only if she deemed it necessary. Our reason for taking this stance was that Emma had demonstrated her abilities to manage relationships within her family – it was part and parcel of everyday life. Furthermore, her openness with the researcher suggested that she would quickly communicate any anticipated problems. Indeed, during subsequent conversations, Emma told the researcher that she thought that her father already knew about the court summons and restraint order (owing to the arrival of a letter from the court).

The fact that Emma had approached the court directly shows that young people can find ways of side-stepping the authority of their parents. In Emma's case, it appears that her actions stem from personal strengths rather than reliance on external support structures such as social workers. Important to note however, is that Emma experiences her self-reliance in a very negative way. She spoke regretfully about the absence of supportive people around her, and of the unfulfilled promises by her best friend and a neighbour to accompany her to court. Careful thought around incidents such as this alert researchers to the fact that individuals who seem to be coping may in fact have particular vulnerabilities and that these can change in character over time. In this light,

close communication over a period of days and weeks is an important component of an ethical response.

## Discussion

Reflecting on the incidents described above reminds us that activities we choose to label ‘research’ are embedded within pre-existing social relationships that have their own ebbs and flows. A full understanding of the actual and potential risk or compromise to individuals triggered by each of these incidents is only made possible through close scrutiny of past and current relationships between all involved.

Relationships built through the research process are also constantly evolving. We noted earlier the careful decisions which children made to protect areas of their selves that they did not wish to be made available to the researchers, at least initially. In other words, what we witnessed was children acting as moral selves and setting their own ethical boundaries. The process through which they came to such decisions, we would argue, is not unlike the one we applied in the cases of James and Emma described above. The conventions held by young people around trust in both a research and everyday context speak of a ‘code of ethics’ around what you do and don’t share with different people. Tacit agreements about what is right and wrong are arrived at through constant conversation about the actions of others and their consequences.

Children, like adults, act on the basis of knowledge assimilated through both past and current experience. They regarded research as a particular activity within the broad spectrum of other forms of social interaction. It was seen to require some additional thought and planning, but not a reconsideration of the basic norms and values of everyday life. Our descriptions of ‘research activities’, including the details contained in the information sheet, played a part here. However our analysis suggests that their experiences of interacting with us, and with other participants, carried greater weight in their decisions than ‘head’ knowledge of how to conduct ethical research. As such, the research process was experienced as an on-going dialogue rooted in everyday social interactions and particular relationships that developed during the study (c.f. Christensen, 2004). What we learn is that young people have an acute sense of how to negotiate relationships, to frame experience, and to manage difficulties that arise in relationships. This does not mean that they do not need protection and guidance, but it does credit them with being active moral agents. An

appreciation of the grounded nature of children's responses to research activities allows us to re-consider our definition of ethical strategies. In the light of our analysis, we propose that an ongoing awareness of young people's decision-making regarding consent and confidentiality was a more effective protection than the signing of a consent form (see also Ross, 2005).

Results from an opinion poll involving 1200 children living in different parts of South Africa are interesting in this regard (Save the Children Sweden, 2002). Participating children were asked to rank the rights that were most often violated in their own lives. The rights to a safe environment and to protection from abuse were ranked first and second. Third in their ranking came the right to participation, and especially to be heard and taken seriously. Children spoke of being denied the right to make informed choices, and to the information they needed to make these choices. The fact that they ranked the denial of these rights above rights to education, parental care, health care, food and shelter suggests that in everyday life, adults do not credit children with the ability to gather information and make decisions.

If we are suggesting that children, like adults, make decisions that carry potential risks and compromises on the basis of relationship histories and of the specificities of current social interaction, what does this imply for the role of ethical guidelines or codes of conduct? Pre-designed codes are unable to encompass such variety and specificity, and therefore are unable to prescribe solutions appropriate to each case. Here we would agree with the postmodern critique on codes of ethics, and say that what is 'right' cannot be defined without context (van Meijl 2000: 70,74). The value of ethical guidelines perhaps lies in alerting researchers to a set of principles, and to the merit of thinking carefully about the extent to which they cohere with principles underlying participants' actions within the research process and broader social interaction.

Our argument is that most codes of ethics contain principles that only capture a portion of what should be considered in support of ethical interaction in research with children. Such guidelines tend to focus on protection, making suggestions around how to avoid exploiting children socially, emotionally or economically (see for example, Boyden and Ennew, 1996; Greig and Taylor, 1999; Shenk and Williamson, 2005). They fail to mention, or merely gloss over, principles that support children's positive engagement in social interaction (which includes research) and thereby acknowledge their competence to do so. Morrow and Richards (1996) argue further that overly protective guidelines may effectively exclude children from participating in research, therefore extending society's patronising view of children. Only one publication known to us on research with

young people refers directly to the right of children to seek and impart information as central to the question of ethical research (Kirby, 1999:112). Like ourselves, the author of the document cited above is writing with an eye to young people conducting research as well as participating in it. Perhaps such a shift in practice is the critical factor in prompting a more rounded perspective on the issue of ethics in research with children. This position links to the philosophical stance that restricting a child's ability to act on the basis of self-determination is in itself unethical (Matthews 1994: 70) and to theoretically deny the possibility of adults learning from children can be considered 'morally offensive' (ibid: 67).

The salient point about the way in which the right to seek and impart information is laid out in article 13 of the UN CRC is that it implicitly places responsibilities upon children to use the right appropriately. Unlike most articles it specifies that "restrictions may be placed on this right but only as provided by law and as necessary for the respect of the rights or reputation of others, or for the protection of national security or public order, or of public health or morals". In other words, children are expected to exercise this right with an appreciation and respect for the rights of others. The analysis we have presented in this paper would suggest that children have ample everyday experience of negotiating a moral universe and are able to bring these to bear in the research situation. The question is more about whether adults are prepared to think and act in ways that allow children to take on these responsibilities, actions that would involve questioning normative hierarchies based on age and assumptions around children's abilities.

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# Appendix 1: Information sheet for children aged 6 to 14 years

**GROWING UP IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA:  
Perspectives from children and adolescents in Cape Town**  
Research project run by: The Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town

**Who are you?** Hello, I am Rachel. I am from the University of Cape Town. We are doing a project about children in the South Peninsula, including their views on school, family life and the surrounding community.

**Why are you doing this project?** We plan to write a book about children growing up in Cape Town, and we hope that this book will help people understand how to improve children's lives. We cannot be certain that children's lives will definitely be improved as a result of our project, or when this might be.

**Who is taking part?** Children who live in Fish Hoek, Masiphumelele and Ocean View.

**What will you be doing in this study?** We will be running some group activities, including art sessions, projects and drama, some of which will take place in school time, and others after school. In these sessions we will talk about people and places that are important to you, what you think you need to do well at school, and some of your hopes for the future.

**How will you remember all this information?** Sometimes, we will make drawings together. Other times we will make a tape recording or video of us talking together.

**What will be done with our drawings and the recordings?** They will be kept in a locked room, and we will not show them to anyone else. We will use them to write about children in the South Peninsula, but when we do this we will not use anyone's real name or address. We use imaginary names.

**How might I be involved?** We would very much like you to join in some of these activities. Your parent / carer has given us permission to invite you to join the activities, but this does not mean you have to do it. It is not a problem if you don't want to - just let us know. Also, even if you agree, you can decide to leave the group whenever you want.

**What will happen at the end of the study?** Once we have finished, we will come back to this area and let you know what we found. We will also be talking to teachers, school principals, social workers, parents and health workers about things that are most important to children.

**What do I do now?** If you would like to join the group activities, please sign your name on the form. I will read it to you before you write your name. If you are not sure about something, please ask me - now, or at any other time. You can phone Rachel on 021 780 1928.

## Appendix 2:

### **Growing up in the new South Africa: Perspectives from children and adolescents in Cape Town**

#### **Introduction for young people**

Hello, I am Imke. I am working with the Centre for Social Science Research at the University of Cape Town. We are studying the everyday lives of children and young people in the South Peninsula, including their experiences of school, family life and the surrounding community. We are working in Fish Hoek, Masiphumelele and Ocean View.

When the study has been completed, we will make the results available to young people, their family members, schools and community leaders. We will also make recommendations about how community members, state services and NGOs could work together to provide young people with maximum opportunities.

As part of our study we want to speak to a group of young people from this community who are aged between 6 and 19 years. We want to involve them in group activities (such as art work, drama etc) in order to discuss issue affecting their everyday lives. For example, we will talk about what they need to do well at school, to get along with their friends and neighbours, and to achieve their aims for the future.

**Our research activities will last not more than 1.5 hours at a time. They will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you and your family.**

We will record some of our discussions using tape recorders and video. These recordings will be kept in a secure room and will not be shown to anyone outside the research team without your permission.

No sensitive personal questions will be asked in these group sessions. Any personal information that might emerge in the discussion group will remain confidential.

We are giving you this information to see whether you would like to take part in this study. You are free to make your own choice, and if at some point you do not want to continue, you can tell us that you do not want to carry on. You will not be punished for this.

We are also giving this information to your parent or guardian, to make sure that she/he agrees that you can take part.

If you have any questions, please contact me, Imke, one of the lead researchers on: \*\*\* \*\*\*\*

**Growing up in the new South Africa: Perspectives from children and adolescents in Cape Town**

**The Centre for Social Science Research, University of Cape Town**

**YOUNG PERSON’S CONSENT**

I agree to participate in the group activities for this research project. I understand that I am not being forced to do this, and that I can leave at any time if I don’t want to continue. I know I will not be punished for this.

I understand that I won’t get anything for myself if I do the interview or join the group discussion.

I understand that the researchers will not tell anyone about personal things that we talk about in the group.

**I understand that if at all possible, feedback will be given to my community on the results of the completed research.**

.....  
**Signature of participant**

**Date:.....**

# The Centre for Social Science Research

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# The Centre for Social Science Research

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The CSSR is an umbrella organisation comprising five units:

The **AIDS and Society Research Unit** (ASRU) supports innovative research into the social dimensions of AIDS in South Africa. Special emphasis is placed on exploring the interface between qualitative and quantitative research. By forging creative links between academic research and outreach activities, we hope to improve our understanding of the relationship between AIDS and society and to make a difference to those living with AIDS. Focus areas include: AIDS-stigma, sexual relationships in the age of AIDS, the social and economic factors influencing disclosure (of HIV-status to others), the interface between traditional medicine and biomedicine, and the impact of providing antiretroviral treatment on individuals and households.

The **Data First Resource Unit** ('Data First') provides training and resources for research. Its main functions are: 1) to provide access to digital data resources and specialised published material; 2) to facilitate the collection, exchange and use of data sets on a collaborative basis; 3) to provide basic and advanced training in data analysis; 4) the ongoing development of a web site to disseminate data and research output.

The **Democracy in Africa Research Unit** (DARU) supports students and scholars who conduct systematic research in the following three areas: 1) public opinion and political culture in Africa and its role in democratisation and consolidation; 2) elections and voting in Africa; and 3) the impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on democratisation in Southern Africa. DARU has developed close working relationships with projects such as the Afrobarometer (a cross national survey of public opinion in fifteen African countries), the Comparative National Elections Project, and the Health Economics and AIDS Research Unit at the University of Natal.

The **Social Surveys Unit** (SSU) promotes critical analysis of the methodology, ethics and results of South African social science research. Our core activities include the overlapping Cape Area Study and Cape Area Panel Study. The Cape Area Study comprises a series of surveys of social, economic and political aspects of life in Cape Town. The Cape Area Panel Study is an ongoing study of 4800 young adults in Cape Town as they move from school into the worlds of work, unemployment, adulthood and parenthood.

The **Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit** (SALDRU) was established in 1975 as part of the School of Economics and joined the CSSR in 2002. In line with its historical contribution, SALDRU's researchers continue to conduct research detailing changing patterns of well-being in South Africa and assessing the impact of government policy on the poor. Current research work falls into the following research themes: post-apartheid poverty; employment and migration dynamics; family support structures in an era of rapid social change; the financial strategies of the poor; public works and public infrastructure programmes; common property resources and the poor.

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