

## Summary

# Adolescents' Intimate Relationships

## A Theoretical and Empirical Study

This book deals with relationships of importance to adolescents which have so far not been analysed in as much detail as adult relationships. These intimate relationships are recognised as significant and sought-after by adolescents, and are considered by young people qualitatively distinct from other types of relationships, such as family or friendships. It is worth noting that adolescents' intimate relationships are much more than an area for exploring sexuality. At the same time, however, they are very often not recognised in the literature as 'full-fledged bonds' like those formed by adults. Belonging, closeness, passion and friendship seem to be particularly important aspects for most. They are subject to intense developmental changes, and although initially based on interest and fascination, they later develop into meaningful, deep relationships characterised by attachment and mutual care. The present work is interdisciplinary in nature, and includes discussions that constitute a multifaceted, pedagogical science narrative on human development in the life cycle, socialisation, upbringing, education and psychological and pedagogical support.

The book consists of fourteen chapters. The first six are devoted to theoretical and diagnostic analyses. The first chapter describes the intimate relationships of contemporary adolescents from the perspective of the available research findings. Although most adolescents expect to enter into an intimate relationship during adolescence and consider such relationships to be extremely important, there is still a lack of research on this key area of adolescent life. The reasons for the gaps in scientific knowledge described in the literature include stereotypes and myths about young people's intimate relationships, which deem such relationships to be superficial, transitory and frivolous, and therefore undeserving of scientific attention. Chapter Two describes selected sociological, pedagogical and psychological theories of understanding love and intimate relationships that can be applied to adolescent intimate relationships, for example, attachment theory and Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. It also sets the global teenager in a dialogue with popular culture, mass media and consumer society, all of which significantly shape teenagers' identity and approach to affectionate relationships. Chapter Three describes adolescence as a time of intense developmental changes in both the physical and psychosocial spheres. All these changes, on the one hand, have a colossal impact on shaping adolescents' capacities to enter intimate relationships; on the other hand, functioning in intimate relationships involves changes in other areas of adolescent development. Chapter Four

is devoted to adolescent intimacy and sexuality on the Internet, which has become a place for establishing close interpersonal relationships, including intimate ones. Young people use digital tools to interact and communicate with peers - offline friends, online friends and romantic partners - and also seek information about potential partners online. Chapter Five describes the risks associated with adolescents entering into intimate relationships, such as date violence, risky sexual behaviour and teenage parenting. Chapter Six deals with issues of sex education and prophylactic measures aimed at adolescent boys and girls.

Chapters Seven to Fourteen are devoted to describing the methodological assumptions (Chapter Seven) and the analysing and interpreting the research findings. This qualitative research was conducted using a collective case study. The main research question took the following form: *How do adolescents perceive their experiences of functioning in intimate relationships during adolescence?* The study participants were 12 girls and 10 boys, aged between 14 and 19, who had formed short relationships lasting approximately a month, as well as those who had been in relationships lasting several months or even more than a year. A positive opinion for scientific research on the project conducted with human participants was obtained from the Ethical Committee of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. The data collection method used was an individual in-depth interview. The data analysis method used in the study was conventional content analysis.

On the basis of the analysis of the study data, it was established that an intimate relationship during adolescence is a mutual, voluntary relationship of some duration in which adolescents feel sexual desire for their partner and engage in sexual behaviour based on partnership (not necessarily sexual intercourse). Intimate relationships vary in their level of commitment, assumptions about exclusivity (fidelity), openness of the relationship, depth of affection and the support shown to the partner/partner. Committed relationships are enduring, loving relationships that begin with a joint declaration of intent to form a relationship and end when at least one person in the dyad declares the wish to break up. These relationships are known to those in the environment. They are based on specific rules, according to which adolescents show affection to each other, support each other and engage in sexual behaviour. Uncommitted relationships are far less stable relationships (open relationships and short-term relationships) that are not based on mutual love, and do not necessarily begin with a declaration of intent to form a relationship, although this need not be ruled out. Such relationships are not always overt. They function according to less defined rules, for example, with regard to fidelity or showing support. They usually involve sexual behaviour based on partnership. 'Friends-with-benefits' relationships occur between a pair of friends who engage in sexual activity, but the sexual aspect of the relationship is usually not disclosed socially. Dating for sex is mainly based on engaging in sexual activity and is not overt. Two patterns of establishing an intimate relationship emerge from the adolescent respondents' statements: firstly, a pattern of face-to-face getting to know each other, in which adolescents initiate their acquaintance in direct contact, for example, at school, and secondly, a pattern of getting to know each other that is mediated by new technologies, in which adolescents initiate their acquaintance online. The following phases in the development of adolescents' intimate relationships can be distinguished: social (e.g. the social context of school), group (a narrower group of friends), individual mediated (texting), individual direct (initial meetings alone), couple (started by a declaration of wanting to be together), and committed relationship. According to young people, intimate relationships are important for their development in all domains.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*