

## Chapter 12

# Adolescents and Online Dating Attitudes

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The introduction of Internet technology worldwide has brought out different behaviors in human beings; old and young. One of the vehicles for this is the online dating social network; a means by which people meet other people with whom they enact social relationships through the internet. This chapter considers the attitudes of adolescents with African background in relation to online dating. The findings show that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of both male and female adolescents in relation to online dating and also that the perception of parents in relation to adolescents getting involved in online dating activities is in tandem with the African belief that adolescents are too young to get tangled in any aspect of sexual activities, online dating inclusive. It also reveals that both male and female adolescents have coping strategies for dealing with online dating activities. Solutions and recommendations to resolve the emanated issues are also highlighted.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Adolescents' sexuality behavior worldwide is seriously undergoing a transformation from what it used to be in the past taking into the cognizance their social adventure in the area of computer technology. This new phase of development that could be described as a technology-based society entered into by virtually all the countries of

the world. Due to the need for development and global compliance, government in each society is positively and actively engaged in encouraging computer based services; computer ownership/ access and Internet use in order not to be left behind in the global development among the comity of the countries of the world. This move is virtually turning every society into Cyber societies. Consequently with these efforts, young adolescents are very much fascinated and attracted by new technologies and hence, computers and

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computer-based technologies have become the new craze for adolescents. It could be said that a very large percentage of adolescents have access to the Internet world wide. This might clearly confirm the fact that adolescents use the Internet generally more than any other age category, with e-mailing and chatting being the most popular of all the Internet activities.

Although the formal school system may not allow adolescents to use the Internet for anything other than academic activities, these adolescents still have access to its use whenever they need it because the services are readily available in their homes or at the cybercafés that are available in towns in their societies. It is during these access periods that many adolescents express their sexual behaviors on the Internet as they chat with different categories of friends and/or as they view pornographic sites.

A lot of concern has been expressed about the delinquent behavior of adolescents in connection with sexual matters and various analysis of adolescents' sexuality behavior in Africa have observed a transformation in their sexual activities. With rapid urbanization, technological development and breakdown of moral values, sexual permissiveness has increasingly become a characteristic of the social life of adolescents.

In African setting, adolescents are not permitted to be involved in any sexual activities. Discussing sexual related subjects is in fact a taboo and anyone caught is seriously punished by parents and elders. Although there are traditional structures that govern marriage and sexual behaviors as well as the family and community support networks that ease the transition to adulthood. During this period, an adolescent has little opportunity for full sexual expression until his late twenties (Bledsoe and Cohen, 1993). In Ghana, like other sub-Saharan African countries, Barbara et al, (1999) and Grindal, (1982) remarked that adolescents' sexual experience was not encouraged and that the elders were concerned that the very young participate in sexual activities. In the past, before

the advent of western education, young people were given informal education to prepare them for life (Fafunwa, 1974) The traditional system of education in Nigeria saw to it that young men and women were taught to acquire a healthy attitude towards sexual activities as part of their preparation for adult life. The belief in the African setting is that sexual activities' including dating is a prerogative of adults.

However, the disorganization of primary societies, the resort to urban life, the move away from traditional roots and loss of cultural values and the advent of technological development through the use of telephones, computer and the Internet, has paved the way for adolescents like other members of the society to acquire and display different kinds of attitudes and behaviors. The Internet has broken cultural barriers by providing information, communication and opportunities to all and sundry, an opportunity tapped into by adolescents to carry out their dating activities. Thus, it could be inferred that formal sanctioning of dating or other forms of sexual activities by adults is leading adolescents to pursue such relationships albeit in secret due to opportunities provided through the Internet (as no adolescent would inform an elder that he/she is involved in online dating).

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. However, some cultures may not recognize this term because there is no distinct period to identify what transpires between childhood and adulthood though teens all over the world display the similar characteristics. It is the period from the onset of puberty wherein several physical and emotional changes occur in both male and female children and occurs within the ascribed teenage age range of their growth and development. It significantly ends at the age of nineteen. During this period, there are noticeable changes in height and shape of their bodies and also, signs of pubescence. Significantly, adolescence period is not a period for only changes in physical and emotional growth and developments; it is a time when the adolescents adjust to several resultant

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