

## THE EXPERIENCE OF SEXUAL SELF IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FIRST ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP

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### Abstract

**Purpose.** To reveal how mid-adolescent girls are experiencing their „*novice*“ sexual self in the space of first romantic relationship.

**Methodology.** The qualitative hermeneutic longitudinal research, with the Interpretative Phenomenological data Analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

**Purposive sample.** 9 female participants: 18 interviews’ transcripts.

**Findings.** 5 thematic categories emerged which describe different aspects of being sexual in the first romantic bond: *Individualistic Self, Open Self, Happy Self, Excited Self, Experimenting Self*

**Practical implications.** Data have value for health educators, clinical psychologists, parents and teenagers themselves.

**Research type:** Empirical research paper.

**Keywords:** qualitative longitudinal study, adolescent girl, sexual self, romantic relationships

### Introduction

The experience of being sexual is one of the essential aspects of the human being, which begins at birth and continues until the end of one’s life. For a long time adolescents’ sexuality was a research *niche* in which the subject matter was related to the analysis of sexual behavior statistics, initialization risks and health effects with little attention given to the intimate part of the experience (McClelland and Tolman, 2011). According to researchers, there is a need for additional studies related to sexual subjectivity (Crockett et al., 2003; McClelland and Tolman, 2011) that would focus on positive features of adolescent sexuality and address self-esteem, agency and personal strength that impact adult wellbeing.

Pubertal and cognitive development becomes the ontogenetic factors that stimulate the development of personality and sexuality of adolescents. During this period children are constantly seeking a balance between their desire to differentiate from family as well

as establish social and romantic relationships with their peers. During the period of middle adolescence girls begin to experience physical and psychological changes that reflect in them becoming noticed not only as young women but also as sexual beings. These new experience related to the sexual self begin in early teenage years and continue to develop in full force during the years of adolescence.

Sexuality and romantic relationships in adolescence are intricately intertwined (Rose, 2007). Importance of romantic relations for a young person's intimacy and identity development has been extensively studied (Kroger, 2000; Collins et al., 2009). However there are few studies that have been designed to analyzed 14-16 year old girls' experiences of sexual Self in the context of their first romantic relationship. Romantic relationships (RR) can be described as a voluntary dyadic relationship that both partners recognize as an exceptional emotional and physical bond (Collins, 2003). Studies of various countries show that RR is normative experience in adolescence, which is not yet sufficiently studied with particular emphasis on "*the ability to have agency and pleasure in relationships*" (Tolman, 1999, p.232).

## Methodology

This study is a part of the qualitative longitudinal study which was conducted over a time period of 32 months. It was based on hermeneutic phenomenological epistemological position and interpretive phenomenological analysis of the data. The model of qualitative analysis has as its basic assumption that each person creates his/her own truth, which is also characterized by a certain personal and human "commonality of truth". The hermeneutical approach presupposes that the human experience is not available directly - it can only be communicated through speech or motion. In other words, it can only be interpreted and reinterpreted. The finding of analysis here is a result of a systematic analysis of empirical, fixed in text or video/stereo recording, access to the experience. It should be noted that the "*empirical*" approach in this document does not meet the conventional social science concept of the term - that is, it is not related to the meaning of „measured“<sup>1</sup> but related to C. Gilligan's suggested meaning "*in the experience*". It is the „knowledge *what* we obtain through your senses, *and which* can therefore be considered as a reliable resource of knowledge about the human change“ (cit. in Tolman and Brydon-Miller, 2001, p. 321).

It should be emphasized that the researcher also is an important participant in the interview. She represents a unique personal and professional experience, which can only partly be "*bracketed*". Findings in hermeneutical social science tradition are always the mutual result of interaction between the researcher and the participant, so the researcher must constantly reflect on her relationship with the investigative phenomenon. Thus, this study was conducted by 45 years old, heterosexual woman, middle-class, moderately conservative with a 21 year psychoanalytic psychotherapist background and experiences with young people. The researcher had no relationship or

<sup>1</sup> widely accepted concept in the positivist paradigm of knowledge production and quantitative research.

contact with the sample used in the study. The fact that the principle investigator was of the same sex and an unknown researcher may have enhanced open communications and thereby increased the quality and validity of the findings.

### ***Research question***

In order to provide a deeper understanding of sexual development of adolescent girls' the researcher formulated the following explorative question: "*What are the experiences of girls as sexual subjects in mid- adolescence, and particularly, in the first romantic relationships?*"

### ***Method***

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as a data analysis method (Smith et al., 2009) consist of two levels of text analysis that includes phenomenological and interpretive procedures. In the first level of the procedure an attempt is made to go deeper into the text (step1). During this process the reseacher attempted to address the phenomenological (descriptive) level in reference to typical phrases, key events and recurring themes (step 2). The most important requirement for the second level was to follow as close as possible the participant's story. The second level was important in that the researcher listens to the language of the adolescent in the interview but at the same time attempts to formulate major reoccurring themes in the interview process. The third step was to take these themes and isolate the major themes as well as begin to apply psychological interpretation of the themes. Notes are linked thematically, and then abstraction and connection of themes into categories are completed during step four of the analysis. Categories are revisited once more and categories of all cases are combined into major hierarchical units of meta-themes (step 5). Thus, the search for findings takes place analysing each case individually, and then performing the comparison of cases commonalities related to differences of themes.

### ***Participants***

Since the IPA was targeted to a detail analysis of the human experience, so a small but homogeneous sample is required. The participants for the IPA sudy should represent the „*phenomenon on the study, not the population*“ (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49). All the girls claimed in their narratives that their fantasies and desires were heterosexual in nature.

The participants were selected from two Lithuanian cities. The participants volunteered for the study. Parental consent was acquired prior to conducting any interviews with the adolesnents. All the meetings were conducted with participants whose psychological wellbeing was determined as healthy via analysis of the Youth Self Report, or YSR (Achenbach, Rescorla, 2001). No one was rejected because of the YSR scores lower than required for normal range.

IPA mainly is focused on the experience descriptions fixted in the text. Data of a larger-scale study (still ongoing) was used in this article: 9 transcripts from the „first

wave“ (T1) of interviews (2011), 7 from the „second wave“ (T2, 2012, as 2 girls<sup>1</sup> dropped out from „the second wave“), and 2 transcripts from the „*third* wave of interviews“ (T3), which were held in February 2013. According the study protocol, 5 more interviews from the „*third wave*“ still should be done in June 2013. More comprehensive information about the stories of *First Romantic Relationship* (FRR) is represented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Description of participants‘ experience of the First Romantic Relationship**

	Name	City	Interviews in which FRR episodes arise	Duration FRR	Age FRR	Attempts to flirt
1.	Gertrūda	Not Vilnius	T1-T2-T3	2 months	13,5 y.	-
2.	Aistė	Vilnius	T1-T2	8 months	13,5 y.	-
3.	Delfina	Not Vilnius	T1-T2	10 days	13.5 y.	5
4.	Džeinė	Vilnius	T2	2 month	15 y.	2
5.	Indrė	Vilnius	T1	5 months	13,5 y.	1
6.	Izabela	Not Vilnius	T1-T2	4 months	13,5 y.	-
7.	Ingrida	Vilnius	T3	4 months	15,5 y.	1
8.	Viktorija	Vilnius	T1-T2	1,5 months	14,5 y.	11
9.	Elena	Vilnius	T1	-	-	-

### ***Ethics***

The study was approved by the MRU, Psychology Dep. Ethics Committee meeting (Protocol of 17th March, 2011). All the names were changed by pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

This article discusses a variety of sexual Self experiences revealed by adolescent females in a space of their First Romantic Relationships (FRR). As can be seen from the given figures (Tab.1), the only girl - Elena (14 yr.) have had no personal experience of the first RR yet. However, she as all other eight girls pointed out a clear desire to have a special, close relationship with the boys they begun to feel at the end of early adolescence.

In the first wave of interview (T1), 3 out of 9 girls (Elena, Džeinė and Ingrida) did not have FRR experience, and the two of them gained this experience after one year (Džeinė, 2012) or two (Ingrida, 2013 ). Both girls had gone through their inexperience in this area differently: Džeinė was very concerned<sup>2</sup>, as it turned out later, even questioned

<sup>1</sup> *Elena and Indrė*

<sup>2</sup>For me, it is not really *nice* that I did not have a boyfriend because I would like to have one [T1, 434]

her femininity<sup>1</sup>, and Elena distinguished for tentative thought "*maybe* I would like." Ingrida meanwhile was waiting and focused on the future planning<sup>2</sup>. Aistė's, Gertrūda's, Delfina's, and Victoria's FRR stories at T1 episode were broken, therefore their narratives were the most complete while Indrė and Izabela talked about their experiences in the relevant.

Further I will present five significant aspects of this FRR, - 5 major thematic categories which could be abstracted into the wide "*Sexual Self in the space of the first romantic relationship*" meta-theme. All categories mirrored the results of depth analysis of female adolescent participants' experience made by the investigator.

The abstract repeated themes related to the major 5 categories are presented in the table 2 and following discussions.

**Table 2. The structure of meta-theme „Sexual Self in the space of the First Romantic Relationship**

	<i>Meta theme</i>	<b>Thematic Categories</b>	<b>Participants*</b>
1.	<b>Sexual Self experience in FRR</b>	Individualistic Self	A, Iz., Df., Dž., V.,
2.		Open Self	Iz, Dž.,G, V., In.
3.		Happy Self	G., Dž., A., Ing., V, In.
4.		Excited Self	A., Ing ., Iz., D., V.
5.		Experimenting Self	Dž, Iz, G., In., Ing., V., Df., A.

\* The first letter of participants' name.

### 1. Individualistic Sexual Self

During the interviews our girls narated mainly individualistic way of experience<sup>3</sup> of FRR. First experiences of staying in the committed RR, the couple was presented not as the unit<sup>4</sup>, or togetherness, but as individualistic experience of the single sexual Self in "I-OTHER" relationship (Gertrūda<sup>5</sup>; Džeinė<sup>6</sup>). The mutuality of FRR value has not been

<sup>1</sup>When I did not have him, I just felt a little lack of confidence [T2, 206], I thought, either I completely did not know how to flirt or I am not of their type, I thought [T2 228] Hesitated. Perhaps only because of that, that I am unattractive? Or my temper others did not like? [T2, 214]

<sup>2</sup>understand that you are attracted to boys, then already watching them not as the ordinary friends. Getting there ... think about it ... looks like there? when he will be your husband? what we gonna do there? [T1, 823].

<sup>3</sup> {Without a boyfriend} there is no one to spend the time with... that remains when friends do not go out, there's nothing at home what to do [Aistė, T1,123]

<sup>4</sup>If you go somewhere-then with him. You have someone to spend time with [Izabela, T1, 125]

<sup>5</sup>I think that the communication has changed itself with the boyfriend a lot. It was like a turning point as I got rid of various fears <> What will {boyfriend} think of me, or whether he accepts me as I am [Gertrūda, T3, 317].

<sup>6</sup> Just gives {me} strength, more confidence for myself in myself [T2, 197].

diagnosed, the word "we" sounded few in the texts (Ingrida<sup>1</sup>). This finding reflects the idea of J. Rose that sexual organization in mid- adolescence gives for adolescents the opportunity to be with one another, rather than to be together (Rose, 2007, p. 42).

Describing the romantic relationships (RR), W.A. Collins emphasizes the perceived specificity of the relationship by the both partners and that both partners RR should describe as "*the presence in a pair*", which is good for both (2003). In fact, these conditions are rather difficult task for a young person 14-15 years old who is just starting to transfer relations with parents and experience of relationships with friends into the friendship with persons of the opposite sex (Collins et al., 2009; Giordano et al., 2010). According to the authors, RR emotionalism is higher because this relationship represents a qualitatively new, exceptional place, which is less comfortable and usual than friendship to close friends (Giordano et al., 2010), but this is also a space in which both partners consider themselves to be equal (Galliher et al, 1999).

## 2. Open Self

Being open in the RR with a boyfriend - participants emphasized this exceptional attribution of feeling sexual. Openness has not been pre-given phenomenon as FRR's feature, but emerged as a personal contribution. In my opinion, it is nicely confirmed by Ingrida's insights: "*{myself}* began to behave differently when being *with a boyfriend*: *more* freely, more openly" [Ingrida, T3, 118] or "*He* was the first person to whom I had never lied. Completely. If he asked then I answered *that* straight" (Ingrida, T3, 450). So, FRR relationship was marked by safety telling the truth, which by the researcher is treated as a part of openness dimension in relation. For example during the interview process Izabela indicated that she was able to communicate more closely from both: a physical and psychological perspective. A new experience of greater openness in relationship with a boyfriend was different from the depth of openness in relation to parents or peers. Izabela describes intersubjective feature of this space in her narrative as „*a place where you can talk about everything*“. Several others (Džeinė, Gertrūda, and Viktorija) supported her data<sup>2</sup>.

The results of this study demonstrated that being open in FRR increased the quality of the RR process. The courage to be open also gave a perception of the partner's ability to listen and accept the partner (Izabela)<sup>3</sup>, or an attractive personality characteristic of a partner: Indrė also emphasizes the sincerity<sup>4</sup> of the boyfriend who gave her the strength and reduced the fears of opening up. These findings confirmed several studies in the field

<sup>1</sup>We walked embracing one another. Then it was very good the nearness, warmth. That such safety. It was such a relief though. *When* next is a person whom I can trust, *with whom* I can feel also weaker. *That I can let myself not to be the strongest at that time.* [T3, 355].

<sup>2</sup> *Is the one to whom you can tell everything, to be. Who supports you, who comforting you and who understands you and you can tell {him} everything!* [T1, 951]

<sup>3</sup>Closer we can communicate, *can* talk about everything. [T1, 56] {important} was his communication: honesty, *openness* [T1, 268]

<sup>4</sup>*He is a sincere man. <> Such a person for whom you can trust most important secrets and really not be afraid that he tells it to someone. And so on. It was really a very sincere person* [T1, 245]

of communication which analyzed the openness dimension in adolescents' romantic and other relationship (Canary et al., 1993; Rawlins, 1983; De Goede et al., 2012). However, the striving to be open in FRR was at the same time accompanied by the threat of being rejected<sup>1</sup>.

As in the present study, Rawlins, who conducted the research with young adults emphasized the tension between the desire to open up to a friend and the fear of being humiliated or ostracized as an inherent feature in the first RR. Young people in this study aimed to assess the possibility to open up and to protect them from being hurt in advance. We did not note this tendency among the participants interviewed by me. Qualitative study with the students of different types of friendship strategies conducted by D.L. Canary and others revealed that openness (which includes opening up, discussing various relationships, advice, direct dealing with conflicts, and empathy) is one of many strategies of maintaining friendly relationship (Canary, 1993).

The nearest research to the age and nature of a study was a qualitative longitudinal study of 12 participants' romantic relationships and girls' self-esteem performed by N. Way (1995). Denying the dominant idea of some feminist studies which state that girls are devalued in relationship in early RR, not having their voice and passive (Martin, 1996; Thomson, 1990), N. Way found that participants were able to be proactive in relationships, telling their position and open, not fearing that their openness can break the fragile first RR. Repeated interviews revealed that girls' ability to tell what they feel or think, according to participants, deepened their relationships with the boys over time (Way, 1995; 2001). Our study not only emphasized the state of openness in the space of RR, but also the idea that openness in RR leads to more positive feelings than the relationships with relatives, classmates or family members (De Goede et al., 2012).

### 3. Happy Self

The third category, which designates the unique experience of girls in FRR space, was named as "happiness". The stories reveal that FRR induced a storm of positive feelings for our participants. It can be argued that this elated feeling transformed into experience of good in everyday life of participants (Aistė<sup>2</sup>, Džeinė, Ingrida) which manifested as elation<sup>3</sup>, impulse for new activity<sup>4</sup> or cheerfulness (Gertrūda<sup>5</sup>, Viktorija, Indrė). Viktorija, who shared some experience of short-term RR at a time of T1, the first FRR identified as a period of an absence of sadness (i.e. jocundity), which originates from

<sup>1</sup>*I very worried. I thought not to be liked and there's something else will be. I was afraid to be rejected [Izabela, T1, 111]*

<sup>2</sup>*Felt happy there. [Aistė, T1, 265] when you have a boyfriend, then you are happy there [Aistė, T1, 515].*

<sup>3</sup>*When I have a boyfriend <...> wake up in a good mood, everything is ok. And when you do not, no matter how long You sleep, You are always angry. Yeah and just everything is unwelcome. It seems that everything is going badly... and everything fails [Gertrūda, T2, 261]*

<sup>4</sup>*Such more energetic, more determined to experience something new [Džeinė, T2, 341],*

<sup>5</sup>*It was a lot of fun with him [T1, 145] and I liked it very much [T1, 154] and so – I have become perhaps even more cheerful [T1, 297]*

a care of a little older boyfriend<sup>1</sup>. Aistè<sup>2</sup> also talked about the happiness as sense of general good related to care. It is worth to note that a person who took care of a partner, but did not belong to the family circle, helped to feel the happiness. Thus, it was necessary to feel safe in order to feel happy in RR1. Thereby, FRR therefore was an important and significant because it helped to “transfer” a longing for a sense of security experience from home to peer environment, *“I felt happy. Just because there is a person who really cares, who does not turn away”*<sup>3</sup>.

The sense of happiness in the first RR of the mid-adolescent girls was not studied as profusely as family happiness (Hoppmann et al., 2011) or in the studies of adolescent friendship (Demir et al., 2007; van Workum et al., 2013) or Well-being (Diener and Seligman, 2002). Z. Magen (1996) conducted many qualitative studies on happiness and pro-social involvement of 14-16 years old adolescents. The results indicated that adolescents felt happiest when they were able to find themselves again, to experience the „illumination“ that changed their view of the world and other people, but only in interpersonal relationships, which were distinguished by trust (Magen, 1996). This resonates well with the findings of my study, when happiness was experienced with the involvement in the first RR. We know from some other studies (Demir et al., 2007), that the individuals involved in the long-term dyadic relationships are happier than those having more partners or no partners at all. In their view, the very fact of having a partner was associated with increased happiness, and a deeper involvement also guaranteed a stronger experience of happiness.

#### 4. Bodily Excited Self

The fourth category highlights FRR as a medium in which the girls' sexual Self is experienced most strongly and clearly differentiated - along with the embodied satisfaction of excitement<sup>4</sup>. This category vividly reveals the constituted body-psychic connection. The body *“talked”* stronger than the girls were accustomed to feel before; therefore it is easier to experience themselves as different compared to the everyday routine<sup>5</sup>. The first sexual excitement also denotes a new personal property which Ingrida names *“my wicked side”*<sup>6</sup>. At first girls recognized sexual excitement as the skin reactions (Ingrida<sup>7</sup>, Viktorija<sup>1</sup>, Izabela<sup>2</sup>) or strong heart palpitations (Ingrida)<sup>3</sup> (Izabela)<sup>4</sup>. It was

<sup>1</sup> *„It's sad to be alone {be RR} ! When you have it.. Not only do the parents take care of!“* [T1, 951].

<sup>2</sup> *Liked one another.* [T1, 177] *{you} are important [243] just because there is a person who really cares, who does not turn away* [T1, 266]

<sup>3</sup> [Aistè, T1, 265]

<sup>4</sup> *I wanted to go home but after [T1, 623] and you wanted to run away from that? Hmm , because attraction was already. Did you experience that before? Nothing of the sort!* [Izabela, T1, 639].

<sup>5</sup> *Well, let's say, when kissing... then is a bit different sensation [Aistè,T1,416] well, it's a bit of excitement, weel, maybe not a bit.. there [T1, 419]. Maybe when kissing more then there is an excitement.. There is a special feeling: a bit of pleasure [Aistè, T1, 425].*

<sup>6</sup> *Oh this was seriuos! And in communication with the boyfriend I saw that I have such a „ my wicked side“* [ T3, 109].

<sup>7</sup> *Maybe more such small quivers. From the touches. Well, he touches you and you straight experience something different. Not just like with a friend. More sensitive* [T1, 461].

difficult to name these embodied emotions using everyday language because of the novelty of the experience, therefore girls used metaphors for that purpose: „butterflies“<sup>5</sup>, "dragons" (Viktorija)<sup>6</sup> or „ice cream" (Ingrida)<sup>7</sup>.

An unexpected emotional intensity for the girls themselves denotes not only new experience but also changes of everyday life. Aistė expressively described this as a milestone beyond which a new experience of Self opened up. Experience of sexual excitement is so strong and overwhelming by "otherness" of experience (usually associated with adulthood) that this experience changes the girl's life, her social activity direction: "well, when you're younger, you *have not* experienced love yet. Then you pay attention to the studies, *extra school activity group* ... And when you experience that feeling *then* you are thinking just about it. And the studies already *do not matter*, *group activities* are already irrelevant. You start *studying poorly*"<sup>8</sup>.

An interesting phenomenon was observed, when girls took experienced sexual excitement as a measure of RR quality assessment. This is also used to evaluate the possibilities of relationships' prolongation. Gertrūda says that staying in yet another (third) RR she sought to understand by FRR body indications whether it is worthwhile to continue this relationship<sup>9</sup>. The same idea also occurred in Ingrida's speech at T3 time.

Unexpectedly, however, the analysis' findings revealed that girls bravely associate their own sexual Self with sensations of embodied sexual attraction in the context of first RR and the active experiencing process in the body. These findings do not meet the earliest scientific investigations of expression of female sexual desire which were very closely related to the historical and cultural context. The first works related to the analysis of adolescent girls' sexual desire came from the 9th decade of 20th century's feminist-leaning ideas that female sexuality finds itself in an unequal position of power, where the girls' wishes and desires are devalued and their experiences separated from their own body sensations (Fine, 1988, Holland et al., 1996, Martin, 1996; Tolman 1994). M. Fine in her historical publication "*A Missing Discourse of Desire*" (1988) drew attention to the fact that a women's sexual desire has to be equally valued, analyzed, and coming into existence in public discourse same as men's. The "*New Wave*" (Way, 2001) direction of empirical investigations (Martin, 1996; Tolman, 2002) inspired by these publications originated, focusing on analysis of adolescent girls' sexual subjectivity. D.

<sup>1</sup> *Small shivers went through the body. Just! <...>At seventh class.<...> Skin was a little bristled and, just, it was a pleasure!* [T1, 515].

<sup>2</sup> *Small shivers are going along the stomach* [Izabela, T1, 94].

<sup>3</sup> *As soon as I see him my heart starts to beat three times faster, it seems that I'll faint, while with the others is not.* [T2,84].

<sup>4</sup> *Already I felt while going..legs were leaning, hands hanging down, well, heart was beating* [T1, 623].

<sup>5</sup> *For the first time we met ...I do not know even, maybe then some „butterflies“ in the stomach start, as is said, to fly.*[T1, 507]

<sup>6</sup> *How do you feel that sexual your body? He was rather „hot“: „butterflies“in the stomach flied or „dragons“ as such.* [T1, 515].

<sup>7</sup> *as a cold ice cream in a hot day. The pleasant refreshment* [T1, 458].

<sup>8</sup> [Aistė, T1, 534]

<sup>9</sup> *further on, I noticed, nothing in that sense, any shivers absent and I don't want with him... to hurt, and better not to begin {deeper}*[T2, 551]

Tolman (2002; 2012) and K.Martin (1996) states that the denial of girls’ sexual desire and not expressing it has a greater negative significance for their development than its active disclosure (low self esteem and self love). Subsequent work in this area showed that about one third of girls can express their “erotic voice”, whereas M. Rasmussen has named girls who do not have it as girls with “*wounded identities*” (2004). According to Harris et al. (2000), girls (and women) are also their bodies and the satisfaction of their corporeality “becomes an integral part of the sense of happiness with one’s self” (Harris et al., 2000, p. 380). Sh. Lamb critically appraises these ideas highlighting the importance of sexual enhancemet *per se* trying to emphasize that sexual desires have real enabling meaning for young girls, if they are experienced in interpersonal relationships where both partners are important to each other (Lamb, 2010).

The findings presented in this publication reflect the importance of the girls' sexual excitement experience as it unfolds in the context of romantic relationships. Such experience, according to Sh. Lamb can be defined as experience of “*healthy sexuality*” (Lamb, 2010, p. 302).

## 5. Experimenting Self

Continuing the presentation of findings and their relationship with already existing scientific knowledge the fifth category is presented. It summarizes the active position of being sexual. The importance of research and investigations of adolescent identity and intimacy development is known from the classic works, but the findings of this study also provide additional contemoporary grounding.

During the first interview wave, besides the desire unifying girls to create a psychological picture of the future boyfriend (Elena)<sup>1</sup> or glancing at the appealing boy (Ingrida<sup>2</sup>, Džeinė<sup>3</sup>), 6 girls had already had a real relationship, and they agreed to elaborate on moments they feel sexual while being in actual meetings with a boyfriend. These girls went through a whole range of different situations, all of which were related to the practicing of sexual behaviour. According to participant Indrė (14 y.), “everything begins from a message, from a meeting, from a small kiss. I do not know, I'm still in a “messages phase”: *we meet, of course, some conversations, but there are not yet foreplay}. Of course, kissing<sup>4</sup>”. This course of “traditional” sexual practices was also presented Aistė<sup>5</sup> in T1 time. Experience of Izabela has shown that such a “*succession**

<sup>1</sup> *Maybe I'd like close man of the other sex {have}. To be able to spend {time}, to be. When watching films, novels <> there are good boys, so interesting. And I would like to get some for myself [T1, 562]*

<sup>2</sup> *Not so much to wait, but notice whether he will take any step or do I need this to do <> trying [laughs]. I try to show more and more attention, to look at him.. if he notices me if he sees me as a friend or he thinks that I am a friend to him, whether he treats me in any other way than all the surrounding girls. [T1, 401] I wish he answer my messages [422].*

<sup>3</sup> *{From 12y} was the desire to communicate with another gender, not like the girls, but with boys. Just communicate how to say as with the aliens from another planet. So it seemed, as a desire to get to know them in a different way than friends [T1, 455]*

<sup>4</sup> *Indrė [T1, 482].*

<sup>5</sup> *There were arm-in-arm when walking, there were a bit of petting, sitting on his knees and so [T1, 262]*

order” can’t be absolute, and that a different sequence of sexual practices is possible<sup>1</sup> when sexual feelings soon progress into the first sexual relationship. The same findings also were published by other researchers. Holland et al. pointed out that sexual practices of adolescent girls are neither consistent nor predictable, and depend entirely on the details of relationship’ context, therefore they can not be unified (Holland et al., 1994).

Almost all the girls told about the experiences of the first kiss practicing in FRR (Gertrūda<sup>2</sup>, Izabela, Džeinė, Aistė). Kisses, as the first sexual practices, have not always been successful<sup>3</sup>, and demanded proficiency. Girls have been learning to do this in FRR (Gertrūda<sup>4</sup>, Ingrida<sup>5</sup>). As emerged in the follow-up interview material, the first kisses were significant and memorable to all girls (Gertrūda<sup>6</sup>), but later became a common practice<sup>7</sup>.

As text analysis of experience shows these sexual practices were very important to the formation of more intense sensations of sexual Self, which together took part in the comprehension of the "new feature". Some of them felt senior (Izabela)<sup>8</sup>, more mature (Gertrūda), braver (Ingrida)<sup>9</sup>, of increased self-esteem (Delfina).

In conclusion we can say that girls are going through the expansion of Self limits, feature of Self “novelty” associated with being sexual in the middle adolescence. These exceptional experiences are characterized by intersubjectivity and they manifest in the expressive manner in the relationship with the romantic Other. Detailed peculiarities of sexual Self experience in the context of the first romantic relationship were presented in this publication.

## Conclusions

1. Sexuality in the first Romantic Relationship is lived more as one sided, individualistic experience.

<sup>1</sup>That {sexual relationship} there were almost immediately. Because so we were just kissing and holding arms..., there embracing... And then it happened so there [Izabela T1, 403]

<sup>2</sup>Can't forget this kiss and you remember it all the time that is was something wonderful and unique! <...>That I was standing still and did not know what to do. Weak, drooping hands and standing [T1, 249] Shivers go and numb hands [T1, 245]

<sup>3</sup>When I kissed for the first time – it wasn't any impressive. Because it was just – a simple kiss on the lips. And when kissing a second time with tongues, it is then... then I sat an hour astounded, because it was something wow! [T1, 237]

<sup>4</sup>When I told him „I do not know“, he said, everything will be fine, you just close your eyes and all went out by itself. I don't even know how. [T1, 249].

<sup>5</sup>I was uncomfortable because I could not imagine how to kiss. The first time I maybe did not feel anything special. It was just good, quiet, comfortable. [T3, 172]

<sup>6</sup>Somehow, just the only one feeling in life, you will never not experience such [T3, 184]

<sup>7</sup>Up there with those... kissing – behold, Jesus! A lot have been.. kissing – it's a very small simple thing! [Delfina, T1, 445].

<sup>8</sup>Become more a part of adult life. That I'm no longer that little girl I was. .. Anyway, experienced [T1, 363]

<sup>9</sup>I became braver, more self-confident. Started to appreciate myself differently. That I can be interesting in my nature, interests, and appearance. And both for myself and the other. [T3, 103].

2. Understanding oneself as being extremely happy and extremely open make the first Romantic Relationship the important place where the novice Sexual Self is amplified.

3. Positive experience of being open and happy in intersubjective space has been continuously frustrated by the fear of being rejected.

4. The first Romantic Relationships gave girls a real safe experimental space through which they had expanded their Self boundaries with the new trials of sexual excitement and sexual practices, providing physical and psychological satisfaction.

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