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Will love  
always win?

A CLOSE-UP ON THE  
FREEDOM TO LOVE  
2019

# FOREWORD

## By Dr. Holly Parker (Ph.D)

One of the most personal, meaningful decisions we can make is who we nurture love with; it's connected to how content we feel<sup>1</sup>. Sadly, even though we've made strides in embracing diversity and respecting people's freedom to follow their heart regardless of race, gender, religion, class, or identity, countless individuals still find themselves unable to make this fundamental choice.

As the Closeup whitepaper reveals, although most young people yearn for a world where everyone can be free to love the person they are attracted to, fewer than 3 in 5 believe they have the freedom of attraction. And it's not hard to see why; relationships can face prejudice as society passes judgement on couples whose pairing falls outside of what it defines as conventional and appropriate<sup>2</sup>. Such couples are more likely to face unfavourable attitudes, feel less accepted, and experience dismissive or demeaning treatment<sup>3</sup>. And acceptance matters.

According to this study by Closeup, support from family and friends is a vital source of reassurance and courage to foster a romantic relationship. Even among those in the study who took a risk and entered a relationship that fell outside conventional lines, half kept their love hidden, afraid of the consequences. This is in line with what relationship science says can happen when relationships face stigma. Pressure from society, family, and friends can limit who people date, lead them to hide their relationship, or show less affection in public<sup>4</sup>. Social disapproval is also linked with shame and stress<sup>5</sup> for the relationship and lower self-esteem<sup>6</sup>, making it harder for couples to create the connected bond they deserve.

**Dr. Holly Parker is a psychologist with a special interest in romantic relationships. In her work, she addresses the problem of social prejudice and discrimination toward diverse couples. She's the author of *When Reality Bites* (Hazelden, 2016), writes a blog for Psychology Today, and is a lecturer at Harvard University.**

Over time it can be hard to resist absorbing that attitude and directing it inward towards themselves, which is also associated with lower self-esteem and emotional well-being<sup>7</sup>. Although hiding may offer some protection against having to face others' disapproval, the expectation that people would react with contempt if they knew the hidden truth, is linked to lower physical and mental wellness<sup>8</sup>.

The freedom to love involves not only permission but social validation to love in harmony with someone's sincere feelings and attraction, as everyone wants to feel that who they are and what they truly long for is acceptable. So when people have support from family, friends, and society to date who they want to date, or to love who they want to love, they'll be able to listen to their heart, be with the partner of their choice, and enjoy life<sup>9</sup>.

Thankfully, each of us can play our part in striving towards an environment that embraces loving relationships in all their forms, where everyone is free to love without fear of stigma, judgement, or shame.

To get started, read this whitepaper to learn more about how you can play a role in the #freetolove movement. With every step we take toward dismantling prejudice and discrimination, and affirming the inherent worth and equality of all people and relationships, we elevate the world we live in, for others and for ourselves.

# HOW IT ALL BEGAN

**The thrill of falling in love is like nothing else. For 50 years Closeup has talked about getting people closer, built on the belief that the feeling of getting physically close to someone you love is irreplaceable. This conviction has never changed.**

Closeup has been challenging conventions since we started. Born in the sexual revolution of the 1960's, Closeup is the world's first gel toothpaste infused with mouthwash. We flipped oral care on its head – focusing instead on what really mattered most to people: the ability to move closer without doubt or hesitation, and enjoy the sheer excitement of moving closer. But we knew that the closer people got, the less confident they felt. So, we made it our mission to give young people confidence in those "up close and personal" moments, to help them to act on mutual attraction.

Today more than ever, we know how important it is to find love and to share it. We also know that love can happen regardless of race, gender, religion, affiliation or social class. However, we realised that in many parts of the world, barriers still stand in the way of closeness. Some young people are restricted by traditions or cultural mindsets. But they long

for a world where they are free to act on their attraction. Wanting to get close to someone we love is a universal instinct. But it is not yet a universal right. And we believe it should be.

As a brand that stands for closeness, we believe we need to play a bigger role in building a world where everyone is free to love, without fear of reprisal and judgement. One of the ways we can do that is by going beyond stereotypical portrayals of picture-perfect couples, and to advocate for the universal right to get close.

We began by first understanding the state of closeness amongst young people in seven of our key markets: Russia, Brazil, Nigeria, India, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines. We set up the Freedom of Attraction study to explore into the hearts and desires of youths.

**Our study revealed that while 8 IN 10 youths want to be free to love someone regardless of his/her background,**



**FEWER THAN 3 IN 5**

**feel they actually have that freedom.**

Barriers still hold people back from experiencing the most beautiful feeling in the world.

The results may not be rosy, but they give us a renewed sense of purpose for the next 50 years and beyond. Our mission is to help shatter these barriers. We want to represent all kinds of closeness so that all young adults feel free to be with the person they love, without self-doubt or fear of social stigma and judgement. We want to help give them a boost of courage and confidence, so they can turn attraction into action.



# THE CURRENT STATE OF ATTRACTION

To get started, we needed to discover what the state of attraction is today. We wanted to gain a deep, holistic understanding of the individual, familial and societal barriers to attraction faced by youths in our target markets. We sought to understand the consequences of these barriers on their physical and mental well-being.

We set out to study seven of our key markets: Russia, Brazil, Nigeria, India, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines to see how free our young people feel to act on their feelings of attraction.

**WE WANTED TO CAPTURE THE MULTI-FACETED ASPECTS OF PURSUING LOVE AND CLOSENESS, SO WE IDENTIFIED FOUR DIMENSIONS OF FREEDOM OF ATTRACTION:**



## FREEDOM TO SHARE AND EXPRESS

- discuss and seek support from family and friends
- share their relationships in public without fear of any judgement
- talk about their relationships on social media



## FREEDOM TO CHOOSE AND REJECT

- feel free to date anyone
- feel free to marry anyone
- feel free to reject a partner who has been chosen for them by someone in their family



## FREEDOM TO BE THEIR AUTHENTIC SELVES

- follow their personal beliefs or practices when in a committed relationship
- confident to be their true self in a committed relationship, without pretence or self-doubt



## FREEDOM AS PROTECTED BY LAW

- law protects the rights of youths to have a relationship of their choice without any constraints
- laws that prohibit acts of discrimination against couples in unconventional relationships are enforced



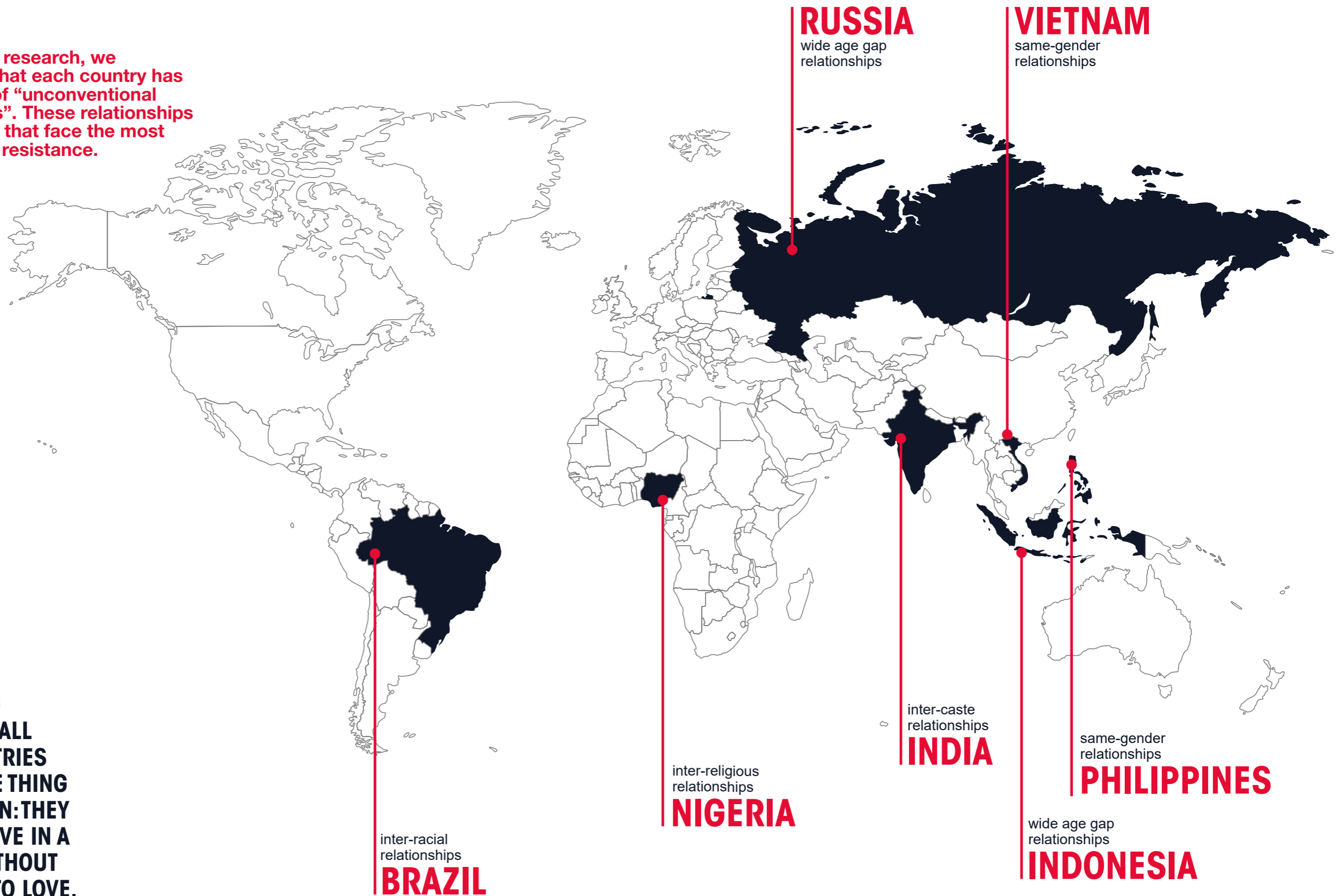
Love recognises no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope.”

Maya Angelou



Through our research, we discovered that each country has its own set of “unconventional relationships”. These relationships are the ones that face the most barriers and resistance.

**BUT YOUNG PEOPLE IN ALL THE COUNTRIES SHARE ONE THING IN COMMON: THEY WANT TO LIVE IN A WORLD WITHOUT BARRIERS TO LOVE.**





# THE SECRET LIVES OF YOUTHS

**Young people today – the focus of our study – are said to be the most empowered of all generations. They are more educated, informed, connected and open to new experiences than ever before. They have been born into a world which embraces diversity, with artists, brands and the media making what was once unconventional, mainstream. They are more self-aware, with a strong sense of their own identity.**

They want to take charge and chart their own destiny, especially when it comes to who to love. And whether that means sticking to age-old traditions, or breaking away from norms, what they really want is to be true to themselves.



**Love conquers everything as long as two people are in love. Culture shouldn't matter, language shouldn't matter. Nothing should matter, except the love and respect that the couple has for each other."**

Young adult in Nigeria

But despite all this, the results from the Freedom of Attraction study showed that our youths don't feel truly empowered to act on their feelings of attraction.

**46%**  are afraid of discrimination, judgement or public shame.


**39%** are afraid of being expelled from or disowned by their family or society.

These barriers to closeness aren't new. They are the same ones lovers have faced for centuries.

Despite those barriers, we found that

**4 IN 5** youths surveyed had pursued unconventional relationships before.

Yet

**1 IN 2**  of those youths kept their unconventional relationships a secret, due to the lack of support from family and friends.

But this is 2019, and we expect more. We expect more from society, and we expect more from people. The problem is the barriers to closeness are still intact. They might be a little less common, less visible, and less unacceptable than they used to be, but they are still there. In fact, some barriers are becoming stronger.



**I met a doctor once who was 20 years older than me and I just couldn't imagine introducing this man to my parents. In fact, one of our friends fell in love with a guy much older but she couldn't date him."**

Young adult in Russia



**"They feel rejected. From society, community, friends and family. They find it difficult to carry their normal way of life. They are kind of quarantined."**

Parents of a youth in an inter-religious relationship in India



We have various religions, ethnicities and cultures in Indonesia, so there is a big chance for us to meet and have relationship with someone who is different than us. We cannot judge people based on their ethnicity or religion, especially when two people share the same goals in a relationship."

Young adult in Indonesia



**"The rich cannot marry the poor. Although you can do it nowadays, you'd still feel discrimination."**

Young adult in the Philippines



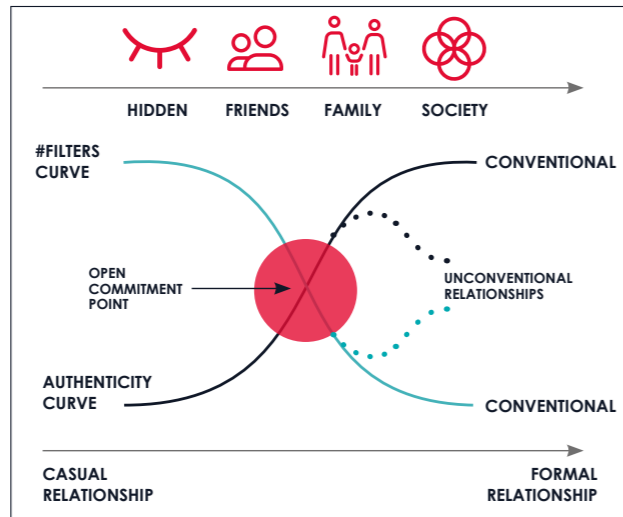


# THE AUTHENTICITY PARADOX

Along with a strong sense of self, another defining characteristic of our youths is their desire for authenticity. 81 per cent of them believe having the confidence to be your true self is important when you are in a committed relationship.

The ability to be your true self is connected to many aspects of our psychological well-being, including vitality, self-esteem, and coping skills. Acting in accordance with our core self is even considered by some experts to be a basic psychological need.

But even those who are strong, influential figures, such as Serena Williams and Prince Harry, are subject to scrutiny and judgement for choosing to date or marry someone from a different social class, nationality, ethnicity, age or status. How difficult must it be for youths?



In a “conventional” relationship (one without barriers), authenticity grows as the relationship grows. Authenticity refers to being comfortable and confident in your true self, without pretence or filters. However, during our research, we found that in “unconventional” relationships, the same does not occur. Once they formalise their relationship, social pressure on unconventional relationships to conform to the “status quo” or the traditions of the family increases. This means couples can find the freedom to be their authentic selves compromised, even though that freedom is a core need for a healthy relationship to truly flourish.

If you believe, as we do, that being your true self is essential to living a fulfilled life, then imagine what leading a double life – due to lack of freedom – can be as a barrier to personal happiness?

"My parents actually know, but they don't want to know and don't want to admit it. So I avoid that problem too. I leave it in the vague, to let my parents live their whole lives happily. That's how I show my filial piety, even though I know that living my true self is happier."

Young adult in Vietnam who is in an unconventional relationship





# DEAR PARENTS AND FRIENDS, YOU CAN MAKE OR BREAK A RELATIONSHIP

## PARENTS

The impact parents have on our lives is a topic deeply explored in literature, music and film. And when it comes to relationships, our research revealed the tension between what society calls the “Me” generation, who see themselves as solely responsible for their own freedom of attraction, and what they think their parents want. Because despite viewing themselves as key decision makers, youths today still want to please their parents. In fact, 82 per cent believe the opinion of their parents has the biggest impact on their decisions and actions when it comes to pursuing relationships and dating.

“The opinion of the family seems inherently essential in living our Indonesian lives, including and especially the forming of our own families.”

Youth in Indonesia

“While Vietnam is liberalising socially, the key difficulty LGBT people face is gaining acceptance from their parents. When Vietnamese learn that their children are gay or another sexual minority, it's common for them to impose counselling or other treatment, disown the children, force them to wear different clothes, or threaten their partners.”

Journalist from international broadcaster, VOA news

When youths sense a lack of approval from parents, 1 in 2 would rather compromise their freedom to be their authentic self, and keep their relationship a secret. But hiding has its implications on their emotional well-being:



In Russia, 23 per cent feel like they are living a double life.



In Vietnam, 30 per cent feel it is safer this way.



In Indonesia, 31 per cent feel guilty towards their family.



In the Philippines, 30 per cent feel guilty towards their family.



In Brazil, 22 per cent of youths feel like they are living a double life.



In India, 22 per cent of youths feel that it is safer this way.



In Nigeria, 30 per cent say they have no choice but to keep their relationship a secret.



“With Generation X, parents were out of the picture – it was really about young people and their lives. It is completely different with Millennials, whose parents are their peers and best friends.”

Stephen Friedman, former president of MTV

Perhaps more so than any other generation, today's youths are close to their parents.

“It is okay to have an inter-tribal marriage as long as the partners love each other, share the same beliefs and their parents give their consent. This third condition is the most important in my opinion because your partner is someone you want your parents to be happy with. Most times in life, it is not just your decision that counts. It is also how those decisions affect people who are dear to you.”

Youth in Nigeria



“They are not 100% free; youths still have their culture in mind and the family background or society they belong to.”

Youth in India

In fact, more than half of youths said that lack of support from family was a key barrier to pursuing relationships.

In Indonesia, **44%** would break off a relationship if their family or society disapproved.

Why then do parents, and society as a whole, tend to oppose unconventional relationships?

Our research showed that families are seen as an institution designed to carry on traditions and cultural values. Unconventional relationships are therefore seen as a threat to those values, beliefs and traditions they uphold, and some families will try to minimise any threat to the status quo.

**AS PARENTS, IT IS AN INTUITION TO WANT WHAT IS BEST FOR YOUR CHILDREN. CAN THIS INCLUDE LETTING THEM BE FREE TO LOVE?**





## FRIENDS

Relationships do not occur in a vacuum and as they are embedded within an individual's social life, to some extent how our family and friends feel about the relationship including perceptions of their approval or disapproval can influence how youths feel about the relationship itself.

In our research, after parents and family members, the influence of friends is almost as significant. One of the top coping mechanisms that emerged when facing a lack of freedom was seeking the support of friends.

### 36%

**will turn to close friends if they do not feel free to be with the person they are attracted to.**

While some might consider defying their parents for love, many may not want to face their friends' disapproval. The power of peer pressure should not be underestimated when it comes to young hearts.

**46%**  
**stated that having the support of close friends would give them the courage to pursue a relationship.**

Although personal attraction is what usually motivates someone to start a relationship, having the support of one's closest circle is important to sustain a relationship. And in an unconventional relationship, that support can give young people the strength and courage to pursue their happy ending against all odds. In fact, researchers have found that we are also more satisfied and committed to our relationships when we think our friends and family support and approve of our partner. This applies to both dating and marital relationships across different forms.

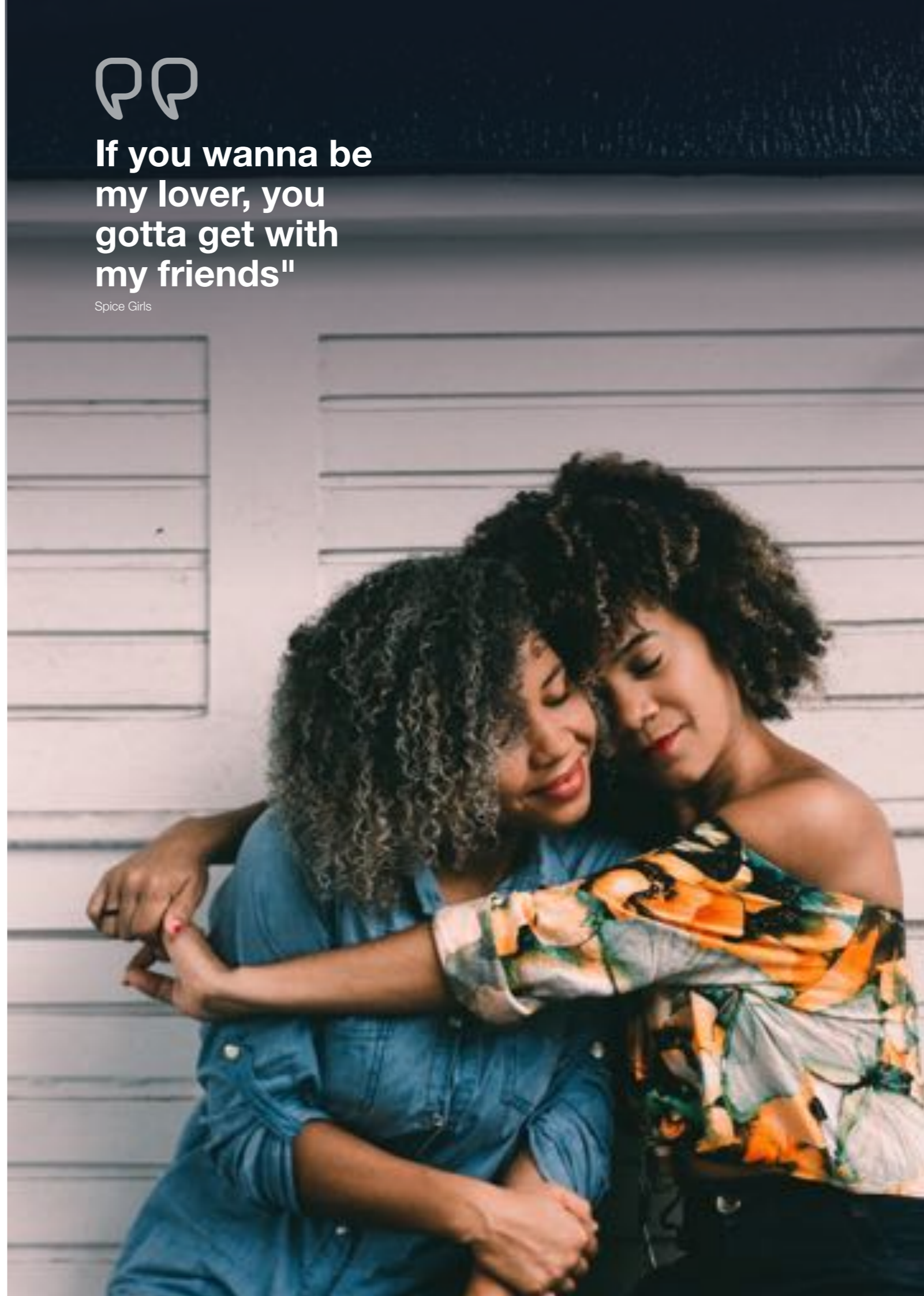
It is crucial that both parents and peers realise the significant role they play in enabling or disabling relationships. If it takes a village to raise a child, perhaps it takes a village to grow a relationship.

**EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY, AND IT STARTS WITH YOU.**



**If you wanna be my lover, you gotta get with my friends"**

Spice Girls





# HOW DO WE ENABLE SOCIAL CHANGE?

**When it comes to freedom of attraction, we discovered that parents and peers are not the only influencers.**

Pop culture and the media have always played a huge role in effecting change. Never has that been truer than in today's socially connected world. From Sheryl Sandberg's book *Lean In* (which changed the conversation about women in the workplace), to raising awareness and money for charity (it is estimated that well over \$110 million was donated to related charities thanks to the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge), all the way to the powerful rallying cry against the gender imbalance that still exists in society (#MeToo movement became a simple way to express solidarity with victims of sexual harassment and abuse) – the role of the media is undeniably powerful.

We believe the media can be an unofficial yet powerful force for breaking or perpetuating stereotypes. It can be an effective channel to broaden mindsets and build acceptance, as well as encourage and celebrate diversity. The recent box office successes of *Black Panther* and *Wonder Woman* prove there is a growing appetite for diversity when it comes to mainstream media.

Most notably, the Marvel movie - *Black Panther* triggered the #WhatBlackPantherMeansToMe on social media, with hundreds of people celebrating the representation of the black community in the movie and sharing its cultural resonance.

In Vietnam, we found that



**56%**

**of youths want media and advertising to feature couples of unconventional relationships more, to help change societal attitudes.**

Signs of changing attitudes have been slowly emerging towards accepting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, but homosexuality still bears a lingering stigma. However, with the rise of social media, there are now more ways for young queer Vietnamese to both see themselves represented and to represent themselves. [The YouTube sitcom My Best Gay Friends sparked a nationwide conversation about the status of Vietnam's gay community, garnering more than 2.4 million views on YouTube.](#)

It is a different story in Brazil. Despite a largely black or mixed-race population, and multiple anti-discrimination laws, Brazilian television predominantly features relationships between white couples. Joel Zito Araújo, an award-winning Brazilian film-maker, [also found that 75 per cent of the roles for black actors were in positions of subservience. In a country where 81 per cent of the population describes TV as their main source of leisure, there are repercussions.](#)

While most countries have laws to prevent discrimination and hate crime, these often go un-enforced due to cultural or societal pressure. This means that prejudices can become even more widespread. The disconnect between what is enforced by law or seen in day-to-day life, and what is shown in mainstream media, indicates a clear gap between what is real and what is perceived by society.

The way to effect change may be more accessible than we realised: social media. Recent history has shown the power it can wield. Campaigns such as #FridaysForFuture (an international movement of students calling for politicians to take serious action against climate change), AdCouncil's Love Has No Labels (a public

service advertising campaign that encourages people to examine and challenge their own unconscious bias), or youth-led movement Black Lives Matter (an initiative against racial oppression of the Black community) can spark debates, rally people around a common cause, and help promote acceptance of the under-represented. Online movements can bridge the gap between the unconventional and the commonplace, between what the law dictates and what society needs.

As [Erica Chenoweth's historical research reveals](#), for a mass movement to succeed, a minimum of 3.5 per cent of the population needs to be mobilised. When a committed and vocal 3.5 per cent unites behind the demand for a new society, the social avalanche that follows becomes irresistible.

**AT CLOSEUP, WE WANT TO LEAD THIS MOVEMENT AND ARE COMMITTED TO HELP BRIDGE THOSE GAPS WITH YOU.**






# HOW WE ENVISION THE FUTURE OF CLOSENESS


**For over 50 years, the role of Closeup has always been to give people the confidence to get physically close.**


As a brand built on attraction, we feel we need to do our part to help promote closeness and address the barriers that stop people from getting closer. We envision a world where the freedom to get close is commonplace, and where diversity is celebrated. Now, more than ever, we believe that when the attraction is mutual, the freedom to get close matters more than anything else. It transcends ethnicity, culture, religion, gender or social class.


Our research shows us that young people feel the same way. Above all, they want to be free to be who they are. They want to feel authentic. But for this to happen, they *must* feel free to love. So how can we help our youths achieve their vision of the world? We know that the support of parents, family members and friends is crucial. We know that the media plays a powerful role in breaking down barriers. But we also need direct action. We need positive steps to bring the world closer to where our youths believe it could, and should be.

**Through our research, we identified key areas where young people most seek the support when they are denied the freedom to love.**

 **In Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil and the Philippines, youths want counselling to help them cope emotionally**

 **In Russia, youths want programmes to help build or restore their self-confidence**

 **In Vietnam, youths want media and advertising to feature couples of unconventional relationships more, and help change societal attitudes**

 **In India, youths want safe shelters for couples who have been abused or out-casted by their families, friends and society**



Our mission from now on is clear:



**TO CELEBRATE:**  
FIRST MOVERS, BARRIER BREAKERS AND LOVE OF EVERY KIND.



**TO NORMALISE:**  
BE INCLUSIVE, UNSTEREOTYPICAL AND SHOW THE DIVERSITY OF LOVE.



**TO SUPPORT:**  
INITIATIVES THAT HELP BUILD A WORLD WHERE EVERYBODY IS FREE TO LOVE.



**TO ADVOCATE:**  
TO ACTIVELY DEFEND THE RIGHT AND FREEDOM TO LOVE.

Will love always win? We don't know. But we know for sure, it is always worth the fight.

**We won't stop until everyone is #freetolove. But we cannot do it alone. Everybody has a role to play. So will you let love in, or keep the door shut?**



# REFLECTIONS ON THE METHODOLOGY FOR THIS STUDY:

## AN EXTERNAL PEER REVIEW

**This study is a first-of-its-kind that examines key patterns on closeness and freedom to love amongst youths. To investigate relationship dynamics across diverse cultural landscapes in 7 markets (Russia, Brazil, Nigeria, India, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines), 5,594 young adult participants across these regions were recruited to complete an online survey. Insights regarding youths' attitudes towards unconventional relationships, as well as motivations and barriers to being involved in a relationship were identified.**

Most express a strong desire to celebrate individuality and self-acceptance, and live in a world where everyone can be free to be with the person they are attracted to. Nearly 3 in 5 agree that they experience freedom of attraction (FOA), in which they are free to be together, regardless of ethnicity, religion, class or other social benchmarks. With 88% of respondents agreeing they have FOA, Vietnam scores as the most progressive country when it comes to romance. Vietnamese parents are generally accepting towards unconventional relationships if it falls outside their family circle.

On the other hand, FOA is the lowest in Indonesia, where individuals are strongly dissuaded to engage in inter-religious marriages.

Across markets, the self plays the most crucial roles as anchors of responsibility and sources of influence on FOA. Specifically, respondents state that it is their own responsibility to ensure that they feel free to be with the person they are attracted to, and that their personal opinions also have the biggest impact on their relationship decisions.

FOA correlates with open-mindedness towards covert relationships. Secretly continuing in an unapproved relationship creates guilt towards family mostly for Indonesian respondents (31%), while Vietnamese are the most comfortable in engaging in a secret relationship (31%). Vietnamese youths also have the highest freedom to choose and reject their partners.

In all, intimate understandings of cross-cultural relationship dynamics can be used to develop communication programmes that manifest the what, whys and hows of enabling youths to freely engage in committed relationships and feel protected. In Russia and Nigeria, top forms of support youths are looking for include programmes that build or restore confidence and emotional wellness of youths. Indonesian youths look for availability of other safe communities to share emotional struggles, while Vietnamese ones hope to see more utilisation of media to change social attitudes towards unconventional relationships.

“This has been a brave and essential study, where through asking young adults questions about their most intimate relationships, aspirations and struggles, valuable insights are gained to construct campaigns that best empower them,” said Garick Kea, Head of Consumer Insights, Nielsen Singapore. “In all, let’s embrace diversity and equality, and extend acceptance and encouragement to young adults, to boost their self-esteem and quality of life.”

# APPENDIX

## BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

### 3 waves; 7 markets

This study on the Freedom of Attraction spanned across 3 waves, with the first wave conducted by idstats Research and Consultancy, and the subsequent waves conducted by Nielsen Singapore between March to May 2019.

The 7 markets involved were Brazil, India, the Philippines (Wave 1), Nigeria, Vietnam, Indonesia (Wave 2) and Russia (Wave 3). Quantitative online surveys were used, which hinged on insights gathered from qualitative insights and expert immersions conducted in earlier stages.

### Questionnaire design

Questionnaire design across the 7 markets were kept consistent, with the addition of responses for relevant questions that were applicable to specific markets. For example, defining inter-religious relationships for Nigeria would be different from Vietnam, and this would require appropriate examples to be used that were

familiar to local religious contexts. New relationship types were also measured in the quantitative surveys due to breakthroughs found from qualitative outputs.

### Data and quality assurance

To achieve said objectives of study, interviews were conducted wholly online through Toluna, one of the world’s leading online panel providers. A total of 5,594 respondents were interviewed across the 7 markets, and responses were weighted to ensure representation across gender, age, income and/or region. The overall margin of error for the study at a 95% confidence was 2% at an overall level, 3% and 4% at an individual market level for Wave 1 versus other waves. To ensure data integrity and quality, a round of checks would be conducted after completion of soft launch (i.e. 50 completes), which entails the removal of straightliners and low-quality open-ended responses.

### Validation through different analysis

Whilst Wave 1 crafted a “Freedom of Attraction” Index to determine over-performing or under-performing drivers towards Freedom of Attraction across Brazil, India and the Philippines, a different analysis tool was used for Wave 2 and 3. Using the same drivers in Wave 1, factor analysis was conducted to measure the weight of each driver that contributed towards Freedom of Attraction. By doing so, we were able to identify strongest drivers of Freedom of Attraction across the remaining 4 markets - the freedom to date and marry. This was congruent to the findings in Wave 1.

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