



Of Perfumed Lotions, Biscuits and Condoms: Youth, Femininity, Sexuality and HIV and AIDS Prevention in Rural Gwanda District, Zimbabwe

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Introduction

Globally, the AIDS epidemic as a largely sexually transmitted condition has put the spotlight on sex in unprecedented ways. Social scientists have called for a focus on sexuality (Pollak 1992) as a way of understanding the complex bundle of socially accepted beliefs, myths, attitudes, norms and behaviours about sexual acts, one's role in them and behaviour towards the same and opposite sex (Varga 1997, also Van Eeuwijk and Mlanga 1997). Sexuality is closely connected to gender socialisation, ideals of femininity and masculinity, or notions of 'proper' male and female behaviour but is also textured by the socio-economic environment in which the relations occur. Consequently, sexual acts and beliefs about what is appropriate do not occur in a social vacuum.

HIV and AIDS prevention discourses generally decry 'culture' or 'tradition' as hindrances to behaviour change, echoing ethnocentric debates about culture and tradition as a hindrance to 'modernisation' and social change (Goldthorpe 1983). Often commentators do not acknowledge the role of notions of modernity at the margin as a risk factor and that instead of referring of 'culture' and 'tradition' as frozen in time there is in fact hybridisation (Holton 1998) of local ways of life as people internalise or devise new ways of life in response to a variety of pressures. Current public health messages connected to HIV and AIDS prevention tend to be a one-size-fit-all and ready-to-use list of dos and don'ts¹ (Kaler 2003). At grassroots level they are reinterpreted and adjusted to the disparate local situations in which they are consumed (Barnett and Whiteside 2002). Awareness and use of these messages are supposedly linked. The awareness, sometimes referred as 'knowledge', is erroneously measured through Knowledge, Attitude,



Practice and Behaviour (KAPB) surveys which invariably find that there is a high awareness of what HIV is, how it is transmitted and is preventable because people are parroting the ABCDs (which have now stretched to G) of prevention. That is, KAPB surveys ask 'status quo questions' to which 'status quo answers' are given (Crewe 2004). The 'knowledge' thus gathered does not seem consistently to inform behaviour. Consequently, lived realities are floating somewhere out there unseen, neither dealt with by interventions nor captured by surveys. This incongruence between knowledge as seen in KAPB survey responses and behaviour on the ground may be seen as 'irrationality' on the part of affected populations (Dilger 2001). In reality, it challenges the assumptions on which public health models of HIV and AIDS prevention are based. That is, the assumption that once people have information and knowledge or are aware of disease causing factors, they are likely to use the information to respond to a threatening situation such as the risk of HIV and AIDS. Justifiably these concerns have increased the need to understand human sexuality. In other words, the ABCDs of prevention do not exist and cannot work in a social vacuum. An understanding of socio-cultural circumstances in which people have sex allow us to understand how the ABCDs are reworked to suit prevailing pressures at the local level.

This paper is based on a research project that sought an understanding of discourses of youth² sexuality in rural Zimbabwe from both youths' and parents or guardians' perspectives. The paper focuses only on female youths and argues that they deploy their sexuality and femininity to access modern goods such as biscuits, fizzy drinks, and perfumed lotions in a bid to be 'with the world' (Friedman 1996) in a context in which they are otherwise marginalised and where these commodities are not accessible. The paper argues that the means by which these youths access these commodities constitute a reworking of prevailing local norms of dating and understandings of proper male and female roles leading to social-sexual exchanges between men and women of different ages. On one hand, the obvious socioeconomic inequalities between the parties limit possibilities of the use of condoms in spite of knowledge about HIV and AIDS, how it spreads and how it can be prevented. On the other hand, the gendered needs of either party (for men, the quest for sex with young women symbolises virility, spending on them symbolises economic prowess, and the search for marriageable partners; for women: the need for goods and services accessible with money they do not have and also the search for marriageable partners) seem to make it impossible for safe sex to be practised.

Youths and Youth Sexuality: Implications of Competing Views, Expectations in Zimbabwe

It is widely accepted that most HIV infections in Southern Africa in general occur during the onset of adolescence and among young adults or from teens to the early twenties (see Simbayi et al., 2004; Langhaug et al., 2003), as seen in the considerable upsurge of infection rates from age 14/15 years up to 24 years. This points to unsafe sex. In most societies this is alarming as it threatens future generations. However how best to respond to the sexual needs and challenges of youths seems closely connected to normative notions of their sexuality pitted against scientific, western medical views on how to deal with the public health threats implied by such practice

In contemporary non-western societies youths are defined on the basis of relational considerations as opposed to the use of age which is prevalent in western definitions. Bledsoe and Cohen (1993) note that 'youth' denotes being junior and that there are gradations of being junior which change with one's life cycle. Thus anyone can be defined as a youth depending on the situation. Youths defer to elders and ideally follow their instructions. Youth sexuality is not distinct in this situation, but like all other sexualities is bound by the principle of legitimacy of social relations in which sex occurs. Marriage is ideally the forum within which people have sex, in which case concerns of age are not important as long as the relationship is approved of within the cultural setting (Bledsoe and Cohen 1993). This is not to say that there is no notion of age of sexual consent but that adolescence in some sense signals marriageability as far as it points to reproductive abilities. Otherwise unmarried youths should not have sex, as this is considered socially disruptive even though it is increasingly common.

Principles of premarital chastity do not apply similarly to male and female youths. Female adolescence is generally underlined by restricted mobility and tight surveillance in a bid to control female sexuality and fertility, while male youths live through their adolescence without much parental supervision and control (Baylies and Bujra 2000, Bledsoe and Cohen 1993, see also Dowsett et al., 1998). Yet male virility persists as proof of masculinity. Women who behave like men in this respect are likely to be described as 'loose' (Dowsett et al., 1998, Katapa 1998). This is because in non-western societies family honour continues to hinge on notions of female virtue and uprightness linked to so-called virginal chastity (Fuglesang 1994). In patrilineal bride wealth systems as practised in Zimbabwe, virgins theoretically fetch a higher bride wealth thereby affirming family honour. Practically, in contemporary Zimbabwe virginity is usually hard

to prove³ in the absence of ceremonies celebrating the consummation of marriage, as practised in the past, in which virginity tests were performed and virgin brides celebrated and non-virgins humiliated. Still, the values of virginal chastity persist, in the form of expectations of females shunning sex outside and before marriage. In reality young women do have sex with unmarried and married partners for a variety of reasons including the need for intimacy and socio-economic factors (see Baylies et al., 1999; Bond 1997; Schoepf 1995; Kaler 2003; Dover 2002; Nyanzi et al., 2000). Nonetheless, female youths cannot flaunt their premarital sex escapades without the social costs of labelling and ostracism (Van Eeuwijk and Mlanga 1997; Kutapa 1998; Dowsett et al. 1998).

In the past, expectations of sexual abstinence outside and before marriage were supported by a complex web of institutions endowed with monitoring systems and means of controlling people of all ages and statuses (see Ahlberg 1994; Halle-Valle 1999). In some societies non-penetrative sex was an accepted practice among youths – anecdotal reports show that some of these practices were prevalent in the past in the area of study. Colonial experiences and Christianity destroyed these institutions and left only values that seem hard to live by given changed circumstances and the absence of commensurate institutional and living arrangements. Now sex has been simplified to penile-vaginal sex and is ideally out of bounds for all people who are not married – hence the A of the ABCs (see Marindo et al., 2003). Still, in spite of these changes, notions of an ideal past persist and permeate policies and debates on youth sexuality. The idea that youths are ‘a window of hope’ in the fight against HIV and AIDS seems to have intensified the quest to use ‘traditional’ methods, such as virginity testing (see Scorgie 2002). Past norms and practices of non-penetrative sex have been forgotten.

Non-western views of youths and youth sexuality co-exist with western ones which are influenced by a variety of ideological and professional approaches, not least feminism, and medical and legal professions as seen in the work of multilateral organizations such as the UN. In the work of these organisations, youths are defined in terms of age, which is a proxy for physiological development (Simbayi et al., 2004). Concern with youth sexuality is connected to the well-being of the individual as well as concern with rights connected to reproductive health, namely the right to information about diseases of and transmitted through the reproductive tract and/or sex, how to prevent them and where to get treatment. In this case, youth sex, especially when it occurs in early teens, is seen as a threat to physiological development particularly if it leads to unplanned pregnancy, infection by a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) or HIV. Given HIV and AIDS, all individuals have to be informed to protect themselves and

contraceptives made available to prevent unwanted pregnancies and diseases. This remains a challenge in a context where youths are idealised as 'asexual' by their families and communities.

In Zimbabwe the western perspective has internal contradictions. For instance the age of sexual consent is sixteen, meaning that an individual below that age seeking contraception is engaging in illicit behaviour in which the older partner is likely to be tried for statutory rape (see Langhaug et al., 2003). Add to this the fact that feminist views on teenage sexuality (which influence the debate on the rights of women and girls to reproductive health) in Africa tend to see girls and (young) women as victims of predatory male sexuality and patriarchal constructions of femininity, it is clear that there is confusion as to how to manage female youth sexuality. In spite of talk of empowerment, female youth sexuality is not yet a matter for celebration.⁴ While one cannot deny that there is an element of abuse and exploitation in inter-generational sex, this view plays down the fact that girls and young women also actively explore their emerging sexuality and femininity (McRobbie 1991) and as such have social agency in their sexuality. However, this agency is experienced within social relations in which it is not acknowledged. Acknowledging it stigmatises women, who are ideally passive beings. In reality female youths are not and should not be seen as asexual, naïve beings whose participation in sexual relations is at all times as passive partners. That is, female youths actively deploy their sexuality albeit within understood local norms which they manipulate. As this paper will try to show female youths have internalised some notions of traditional expectations but have to contend with current realities and pressures. Thus given changing socioeconomic circumstances, 'traditional' expectations are hard to live up to and their realisation seems to be an obstacle course that has to be navigated with extreme caution, often without the wherewithal for a successful expedition.

Socio-economic Aspects of Sexuality

It has been noted that marriage remains the ideal institution in which people should have sex. It is (as was the case in the past) initiated and maintained through the exchange of material and non-material goods between partners and their families (Baylies et al., 1999; Dover 2002; Weiss 1993; Baylies and Bujra 2000; Halle-Valle 1999; Nelson 1987). In the past, the goods that were exchanged were symbolic and signified commitment and cemented new-found affinal relations. The role of gift exchange as the glue that holds relations together has been transformed by complex colonial histories and legacies combined with the prevailing circumstances of poverty and 'the logic of the market' (Ugarteche

2000). The latter is underlined by competitive relations between people, envy, and an understanding that one's needs are only met if one has access to cash (Ugarteche 2000). In view of poverty and desperation, people do not shy away from selling sex. Thus whereas in the past sex and sexuality were useful as part of forming alliances, sexual activity may now be for personal gratification (Foucault 1978) and personal power games and gains. Increasingly, transient sexual relations (as opposed to marital ones) are the basis of the exchange of goods. This has become the basis of economic security for individual women, and for individual men it brings power over women. This has created a situation where differences between and among wives, girlfriends, mistresses and commercial sex workers are not so clear (Dover 2002; Baylies and Bujra 2000). Women move easily between these statuses that mark different means by which they relate to and access resources from men (Halle-Valle 1999). For (young) men with no resources, marriage and parenthood are insurmountable expenses so they settle for other relations with women – girlfriends and commercial sex workers (Kutapa 1998; Mate 2005b; Bledsoe and Cohen 1993) while rich men can afford all four and the economic redistribution they entail. In turn, many women give birth out of wedlock and many while they are in their teens because the envisaged marriages fail to materialise. Elders in non-western societies are generally concerned about this type of sex (and the sexuality surrounding it). Confronted now by HIV and AIDS, they attribute the scourge to this sexual behaviour and the failure of young women to restrain themselves in accord with traditional expectations.

The Research Setting

This study took place in two wards⁵ (wards 12 and 17) of Gwanda district, which is situated in Matabeleland South province, on the south-western recess of Zimbabwe bordering Botswana. The population of the two wards is predominantly Sotho-speaking, although Ndebele is largely the lingua franca in commerce and public interaction (including in schools). Economically, Gwanda like the whole province is a low rainfall, chronically food deficit region. The successive 'below normal' rainy seasons since 1999 have compromised food stocks at household levels and unleashed what donor agencies have termed a 'humanitarian crisis', not only in the district but the whole of southern Africa. The district has insignificant manufacturing industries. It relies more on primary industry in the form of game and beef ranches, some of which have since closed in the wake of the 'fast track land reform' programme; and a few gold mines, some of which have either closed or scaled down operations in response to

declining world prices of gold. Due to proximity to South Africa and Botswana, short and long term migration have become livelihood strategies of choice in the district, and especially in these wards (see Zinyama 2000). Of late however migration has become difficult, although not impossible, as the Botswana and South African authorities have taken to mass deportations of Zimbabweans suspected of being illegal immigrants.

Those who cannot migrate make a living through alluvial gold panning and small-scale gold mining, albeit using simple technology. Gold panning is associated with higher disposable income that is often spent very rapidly on personal leisure. It is a favourite local odd job, ahead of cattle herding, domestic work and piecework such as fencing fields, harvesting and so on. Its popularity has seen men and women (including youths) leave their homes to set up temporary camps for months on end on river banks and at disused mine shafts. Some youths start gold panning as a means of raising money for school fees and end up quitting school altogether. There are people who come from other towns to sell provisions at inflated prices and others come to buy gold. Some gold panners and miners send remittances and goods to those left at home.

Generally, gold panning is said to be socially and ecologically disruptive. Relations between men and women have changed as income-earning women and children no longer accept traditional norms of subordination. The proliferation of this activity is associated with increased commercial sex work, crime, and more generally a greater unruliness among young men. Ecologically, the panners leave gaping holes in the ground which become death traps for livestock. They increase the likelihood of poisoning water with the cyanide they use to process gold. Due to remittances from small-scale gold mining, from migrants and cross-border traders, province-wide levels of household income are actually comparatively high (IDS-UNDP 2003). Thus despite poverty, emergent survival strategies such as mining and migration have also altered consumption patterns. There is a preference for imported goods (footwear, clothes, accessories, toiletries and so on) from Botswana, South Africa and Zambia to some extent. Most clothing appanels are from Chinese manufacturers imported through complex migrant networks.

Methodology and Research Methods

This study used several methods, both qualitative and quantitative, although this paper relies on the qualitative aspects of the study. Some people polled in the quantitative survey joined the focus group discussion (FGD). Issues in the quantitative survey were similar to the ones on the FGD checklist and to the

issues discussed with key informants. The quantitative survey is not incorporated in this study because in retrospect it was based on what Mary Crewe (2004) describes as 'status quo questions' to which 'status quo' answers were given. The survey sought to establish youths' knowledge and awareness of STIs, HIV and AIDS and their prevention, and youths' understandings of adolescence, preferred traits of ideal marriage partners, etc. Because of the one-to-one nature of the interviews, few female youths admitted to 'ever having sex', except for those with children. In FGDs a different picture emerged in which sex involving female youths with their male peers or older men is reportedly common. This was corroborated by older persons (parents and guardians in FGDs and as key informants. Thus qualitative methods are ideal for studies on sexuality because they allow researchers to understand the contextual aspects of sexuality (Varga 1997). In FGDs youths had an opportunity to explain the variance between 'knowledge' and 'awareness' of HIV and AIDS, and the difficulty of putting prevention messages to use. FGDs are especially suited for sexuality research because they enable social interaction and collective analysis of group concerns, information, knowledge and practices (Kitzinger 1994: 159-166; Dowsett et al., 1998). Researchers are able to probe group concerns and norms, shared experiences and attitudes which come out in the form of jokes, innuendoes, slips of the tongue, satire and non-verbal communication (exchanged looks, giggles etc.,) which can be withheld in a one-to-one interview. A limitation might be that some of this innuendo might be missed by researchers, who are invariably outsiders in the moral community of the people they are researching. In addition, although there were numerous occasions when we (participants and I) laughed as I listen to the recorded conversations, I wonder if we were laughing at the same thing. One is unfortunately not always able to capture, in writing, the atmosphere in the FGD in order to show the extent of perceived mutual understanding which prevailed during the discussion.

In each of the two wards there were three meeting places, but in the end only five sites were visited.⁶ A total of eleven single-sex youth and four mixed-sex adult FGDs took place. Discussions were facilitated by the principal researcher in local languages, namely SiNdebele laced with Sotho. The discussions were recorded on a micro-cassette recorder (nine and a half hours of discussion) and later transcribed verbatim by a colleague in the African Languages Department, leading to over 200 pages of transcriptions. Asking someone to transcribe the tapes allowed me some critical distance from the data for a while and made it easier for me to read through and translate the transcriptions into English. Data analysis was based on thematic concerns which arose in the discussion, in part prompted by the checklist of issues I had developed beforehand as indicated

above. Discussions were conducted in such a way that a natural flow of issues was allowed. The similarity of issues raised by youths in different locations meant that I had reached a 'point of saturation' – that is, a point at which the number of FGDs would no longer add any qualitative difference to the data gathered.

At the end of the FGDs youths were invited to ask questions on issues related to the discussion which were unclear to them. These questions were very interesting to reflect on later as an indication of prevailing understandings of safe sex vis-à-vis HIV and AIDS (see Chikovore et al., 2002). I tried to answer them as simply as I could. The questions focussed mostly on the safety of condoms. Some wanted to see a female condom and asked how women use it. Others wanted more information on signs and symptoms of STI infections for men and for women. Youths with children also asked about cervical cancer and the effect of using herbal suppositories and douches to heighten sexual pleasure. On the question of condom efficacy I could only explain theoretically since I had neither condoms on me nor dummies on which to demonstrate their use. This was a shortcoming that had not been foreseen. Generally, one gets the impression that youths are concerned with broad issues of reproductive health and have information gaps and misconceptions.

Findings of the Study

Generally, female youths are aware of HIV and AIDS and how they are spread, and yet they are also acutely aware of local social and personal circumstances of poverty, emerging livelihood strategies and socialisation which together push them towards behaviours that are not prudent in the context prevailing HIV/AIDS prevention messages.

Understandings of Adolescence, Dating and Sex

Although in the literature there is an erroneous belief that there is no notion of adolescence in Zimbabwe (see Langhaug et al., 2003), it is not the case in all Zimbabwean cultures. In the study area, respondents refer to the onset of adolescence as 'ukuthomba' which in siNdebele refers to the time when both girls and boys show signs of physiological change. Alternatively in everyday talk people may refer to it as 'ukukhula', literally meaning 'growing up'. Beyond the physiological changes respondents also reported that there are behavioural aspects such as dating or being more aware of the opposite sex. Females reportedly become more conscious of personal adornment and deportment. Female respondents in this study said that all other physiological signs of growing up

come without much fanfare except for menstruation, which must be communicated to older female members of the family such as the father's sister, older sisters, grandmothers but never one's mother as a sign of respect. The person to whom the matter is reported informs the girl's mother who tells the girl's paternal aunt (father's sister) who in turn formally tells the girl's father.⁷

The onset of menstruation is communicated to the family because the patrilineage has an interest in the reproductive abilities of its daughters. Besides menstruation has budgetary implications these days in the form of modern sanitary ware. Because most adolescents are generally without independent income, they cannot access sanitary ware without telling their parents or guardians.⁸ When asked how older female relatives impart information to the girls, responses were vague. For instance, the relatives reportedly say 'Do not play with small girls, as they are not discreet if you soil your clothes while menstruating'.

Although not playing with small girls is supposed to show that the girl is now a 'grown up' and different from little girls, adolescent girls do not necessarily have license to behave as they please. Relatives apparently emphasise the need to avoid male company. They say 'Do not let boys touch you... Do not play with boys ... Don't let boys touch your breasts; it gives the wrong sensations, which might lead you to doing wrong things. If a boy touches your breast you get feelings you cannot control.

Asked whether boys in fact do fondle girls' breasts, the girls generally confirm that unsolicited fondling does take place. As for the 'wrong' sensations leading to 'wrong things', it was explained that this is sex. In a television talk show⁹ which aired on 4 June 2005, a participant emphasised that girls must be told not to let boys touch them even on the shoulder because it leads to touching elsewhere and eventually leads to illicit sex. In the FGDs girls also said they are told 'to be respectful' ('ukuhlonipha' or 'ukuba lembeko') of older persons and males especially, presumably to avoid inter-generational sex. The 'respect' implied here includes respecting rules and norms of avoidance and the maintenance of social distance in order to be inaccessible to older members of the opposite sex. Thus from the onset of adolescence girls are socialised to shun male company and not to be keen on sex.

Despite these vague moral lectures about avoiding male company in general but also intimate male company, dating and premarital sex are reportedly very common, including relations with older males. Female youths dating is seen as an inevitable precursor to marriage and allows young men and women to choose and test the suitability of future marriage partners. Respondents explained that parents and guardians' lectures should not be taken literally because they (pa-

rents and guardians) also expect marriage from the girls. Until a marriage proposal is made boyfriends are for 'fun', 'recreation', ('ukuzilibazisa'), 'companionship and friendship' ('ubungani'), for managing loneliness ('ukuqeda isizungu') and also as a form of social security for girls from poor families in the form of gifts in cash and in kind that are exchanged in the relationship.

Female youths indicated that gifts are a sign of love and commitment in a relationship. The frequency of gift-giving and the value of gifts indicate a male partner's generosity and are a proxy for his ability to provide in marriage. Girls explained that their parents do not expect them to get married to men who cannot provide for them, hence these assumptions. Primarily the man has to have income to pay bride wealth, usually several head of cattle or the cash equivalent. In this vein, men with income such as gold panners, rural-based civil servants, including teachers, bus crews, returning migrants and others are attractive potential boyfriends. The girls indicated that even when a boyfriend is of limited economic means he has 'to make an effort' and find an odd job (such as fencing someone's fields, herding other people's cattle, gold panning etc.) or save his pocket money if he is a schoolboy in order to give his girlfriend.¹⁰

Gifts that are received from boyfriends are in the form of cash which is used for personal expenses such as buying snacks, but the money might be squirrelled away and allowed to accumulate so that the recipient is able to buy toiletries including sanitary ware or items of underwear. Greetings cards such as Valentines, Christmas, birthday and general cards with romantic messages were also mentioned as possible gifts that are given or expected. Sometimes couples exchange personal photos which in a rural setting are quite expensive.¹¹

Reciprocity whether balanced or generalised is essential to sustain gift exchange and cement the commitment in a relationship. Thus girls too are obliged to give gifts to acknowledge their appreciation of attention from and the 'commitment' of a male partner. They too give in cash and/or kind. Asked about sources of money, out of school youths indicated that they do odd jobs including gardening, doing housework for better off households or saving some of the money they get from boyfriends. Sex was also mentioned as a gift that is most available albeit one that should not be given easily as this might lead to the girl being seen as 'easy' or 'loose'.

Sex as a gift roused animated debate in all FGDs with male and female youths giving the impression it is an essential element of the social exchange in male-female relations, but debated the terms and circumstances surrounding girl's consent to sex. One female FGD participant said that relationships '... these days ... are about sex. Boys fall in love for sex'. This was countered by someone who said that '... If you let a boy lead you on, of course, sex is inevitable', and another

who said 'Most girls get into relationships knowing that eventually there will be sex' and that 'Boys cheat girls. If a girl comes from a poor family a guy can help her with money but only if there is sex'. These debates show that female youths do have sex despite elders' lectures not to and that the sex is had in the process of trying to secure relationships in order to ensure marriage. However sex is sometimes agreed to because receiving a gift invariably obliges one to reciprocate and failure to do so is seen a sign of deviance, greed and manipulateness. It is a sign of impropriety (see also Dover 2002); an unbalanced exchange and therefore not fair. In the local lingua franca, siNdebele, this is described 'ukudla umuntu', literally this means 'eating a person' but it suggests spending someone's money using uncouth means; spending money which one is not otherwise entitled to, taking advantage of someone or cheating. Only loose women and commercial sex workers are associated with this behaviour. Men and boys do not want to be 'eaten' in this way so they try to get their gifts' worth and more if the girls are not so astute. Thus in spite of its 'illicitness', youth sex also revolves around notions of propriety and fairness. Below is an excerpt on sex and gifts from two FGDs held in ward 17 (Bengo and Fumukwe on 28 and 27 April 2004 respectively).

RM: So once a guy gives a gift a girl has to agree to sex?

- If she wants to avoid a beating, yes. [Laughter from other participants]

RM: Are you sure that one risks a beating for saying no to sex after receiving gifts?

- Ye-es [in unison]

[One person speaks] – Actually, some girls are eager for sex not just to appease their boyfriends; but to pre-empt beatings.

- Some seem eager out of fear of beating.

- You get beaten because the guy is afraid that you have another boyfriend with whom you are having sex and hence you refuse to have it with him yet you are taking advantage of his money ('ukumudla').

RM: Do girls agree to sex as a sign of fidelity then?

- There is no other way, yes.

RM: No other way ... what do you mean?

- [Previous speaker] I mean you cannot say no, can you?

- You can.

- You can say no by saying that you cannot have sex with him but would rather wait.

RM: Do you then indicate a time limit?

- [Previous speaker] Not really. The point is if he cannot wait he can find another girl who is willing to have sex.

- You have not been beaten up that's all.

- If you've spent his money then he is entitled to a [cash] refund if you cannot have sex.

- Why accept his money or gifts if you want to say no to sex?

- But do we date so we can have sex? I do not think so? [She laughs and so do others]

- I think [sounding hesitant] ... the sex is for mutual enjoyment or fun ('ukukholisa'). – Bengo girls, 28 April 2004.

At another meeting place the previous day, following a discussion on the feasibility of abstinence, here is what youths said about why some youths have sex.

RM: Why the sex then? Why can't both of you wait?

- The sex keeps the relationship going (said with laughter with the rest of the participants also responding with laughter).

- If you are in a relationship, sex is par for the course. Otherwise why get in it in the first place?

- Sex is to enable us to get married.

- Sex is to get money for lunch while at school.

RM: Don't your parents give you money for lunch or can't you get a packed lunch from home?¹²

- They [parents] do not give us money.

- Parents give you a little bit [of money] sometimes, enough to buy a freezit,¹³ but maybe I want a small packet of biscuits or sweets.

RM: So do you get the money by having sex?

- Look, you cannot spend a guy's money for nothing. You have to have sex with him.

- No it is not true if he really loves you he will give you money for nothing in return.

- Without sex? Impossible!!

[Animated and inaudible debate among participants].

- Yes, that is rare. You cannot spend a man's money for nothing. If you spend the money it is obvious you will have sex with him – Fumukwe girls, 27 April 2004.

In other words just as girls said that boys cannot make excuses for not giving presents by saying that they are 'too poor' to get money for a gift, girls cannot make excuses about being 'unable' to reciprocate because sex is in a sense potentially available to all people at all times. As parents in ward 12 noted, some girls have several boyfriends to maximize gift receipts which leads to confusion in the event of a pregnancy. This increases the likelihood of single parenthood; a situation which puts pressure on their parents' already meagre resources. Thus possibilities of marriage are squashed by entrepreneurial dating.

On the girl's part, it seems once she has a boyfriend, saying no to sex after receiving gifts is an uphill struggle. If she is not willing to have sex, her consent can be wrung out of her through manipulation, peer pressure, threats of or real force. Girls' reluctance to have sex is connected to real concerns about falling pregnant. Gifts compromise girls' ability to say no to sex and yet they are a sign of love and an indicator of whether or not a man is marriageable, that is, will he be able to provide for a family. How females deal with gifts from men seems to define 'decency' and 'fairness'. Girls who accept gifts and cannot reciprocate with the 'ideal' gift of sex are seen as greedy and wayward. A beating from a boyfriend seems justified as indicated in the excerpt above. The only way to avoid this dilemma is to avoid being in a relationship in the first place, but this forecloses marriage which as will be shown below is desirable. Saying no to gifts is also another possibility to avoid this dilemma and yet it seems this would threaten the very basis of relationships which function through generalised exchange and reciprocity. Besides, as will be shown below, gifts have other key uses in young women's lives so that saying no to the gift means saying no to the relationship which does not look like a viable option.

The Use of Gifts: Challenges of 'Emerging Femininity' Enhanced by Market-Based Products

Cash gifts are invested in modern toiletries in the form of facial creams and perfumed lotions imported from South Africa, Botswana or up north from Zambia. In the case of products from Zambia, some of them trace their origins from as far as West Africa.¹⁴ Perfumed lotions double as skin care products and perfume to prevent body odour which was roundly said to be unpleasant, embarrassing and a turn-off for men. Facial lotions are usually vanishing creams which pro-

mise to remove blemishes, control oiliness and shininess and/or even out skin tone and texture. These attributes are much sought after. Some of the preferred facial creams are skin lighteners or bleaches which although banned are increasingly being smuggled into the country by cross-border traders. In FGDs I observed girls whose faces were much lighter than their necks and hands, suggesting the use of skin lighteners. Of course, such girls also had the much-coveted clear and smooth skin. The need for modern toiletries was indicated as one of the reasons why boys and men give money and girls and young women receive it. There is therefore considerable pressure placed on boys to deliver resources.¹⁵

Petroleum jelly, which is the cheapest form of skin care product on the market, unfortunately seems to create the opposite it leads to oiliness, encourages acne and blemishes thereof. Respondents complained that they could not use petroleum jelly referred to as 'vaseline' because of those undesirable effects. They prefer 'ponds'.¹⁶ Petroleum jelly is said to be suitable for little girls. In spite of this apparent rejection, petroleum jelly remains the most affordable skin care products on the market. Shininess and acne apparently turn-off potential male partners. They point to lack of sophistication. Girls who cannot afford commercially available products can use traditional alternatives such as lightly applying red ochre locally called 'isibhuda'¹⁷ while the face is still moist after washing. It gives a 'matte' look similar to using modern foundation or face powder. In addition, girls said that the use of facial creams is also because of peer pressure. When other girls have 'beautiful faces', one feels out of place if one's face looks shiny or blemished.

Traditional beauty products are seen as unsophisticated, laborious to make and store. They are scentless or lack modern chemical smells. In one FGD, girls discussed traditional skin care products like mfuma.¹⁸ They complained that mfuma smells badly. Some claimed it 'attracts flies' on account of the sour milk smell, others complained that 'it is for old women' or is 'old fashioned'. In FGDs with parents, women confirmed that most teenagers do not like mfuma although they also admitted that they too no longer make it. It is too much effort while others said they do not have access to adequate milk to make it. Most parents and guardians consider commercially available toiletries extra expenses and luxuries in a context where bread and butter issues are more pressing.

Some young women claimed not to use anything on their faces in order to minimise skin reactions. Others claimed to use the desired facial creams on and off depending on the availability of money. Some share creams with less fortunate girls. The latter use these creams on days and occasions when one must look different or beautiful to make an impression. Trips to the shops during weekends,

errands during which one is likely to meet peers, or holidays when male migrants are back from Botswana and South Africa, were mentioned as occasions when one looks one's best. There were animated debates about how to have a 'beautiful skin' at low cost, including which soaps to use and not to use. However with or without money it was pointed out that women have look beautiful, 'ukuceca', using whatever one has and that many young women try by all means to look their best.

Money is also needed for underwear; 'beautiful underwear'. Girls indicated that older female siblings, where available, provided underwear as did mothers. However, there were complaints that mothers, especially, buy utilitarian panties, nothing 'lacy', in see-through synthetic materials. Examples were given of cheap underwear one finds at flea markets in the provincial capital which might be hard-wearing but far from 'beautiful'. The girls appreciated that this is the best their mothers could do. Respondents with older sisters in wage work could expect other types of underwear. The best choice was always where one chose the underwear oneself but this implies having one's own income. Cash gifts from male partners came in handy in this instance. There were complaints that bras are particularly expensive and yet once one develops breasts 'clothes do not fit well without a bra'. The participant who made this contribution illustrated with her hands the movement of the breasts, to giggles of those present. The girls also complained that when one has a big bust it attracts attention if not well strapped up in a bra. In addition, girls need half-slips to wear with see-through clothes as part of female decency and propriety. However, girls noted that one cannot communicate such issues with fathers because of the norms of social distance between parents and children of the opposite sex. On the other hand, mothers might not have enough income to meet such needs. Some participants who are single mothers noted that once you have a child out of wedlock parents tend to say 'zibonele' – literally 'stand on you own feet' or 'be independent' – which implores youths to take care of themselves even when without tangible means of earning income. The same was observed in Tanzania by Kutapa (1998). This is because of a patrilineal ethos in which girls marry out and are expected to join their husband's families where all their material needs are met. Failure to get married forced young women to raise children in their families of birth often under conditions of resources austerity in which personal needs are not well met. This is part of the reason why some young women with children are pushed into transactional sex or sex for gifts as a means of meeting personal needs even when they get a roof and food from their parents. Parents feel that after a certain age they cannot continue to provide personal needs such as toiletries, sanitary ware and underwear, especially for daughters with children out of wedlock.

As mentioned above, 'growing up' for women signals the onset of menstruation which is an added expense because sanitary ware is now only really available through the market. There is very little known about traditional sanitary ware since women of different generations do not seem able to discuss these issues.¹⁹ There is reason to think that many families simply do not factor this aspect in the family budget. Among poor families this is not possible on account of resource austerity. Girls learn not to make demands due to poverty but nature does not care much for poverty and menstruation becomes a monthly nightmare to be managed somehow. In a Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network (ZWRN) study done several years ago, some girls from poor urban families missed school to stay at home until their period was over because they could not bear the thought of being at school without adequate sanitary ware. Girls in this study indicated that mothers and female siblings do buy sanitary ware when and if they have enough money. However, for economic reasons, female kin often decide the quantity of sanitaryware nevermind what the user's levels of comfort and needs might be. Otherwise, the girls are left to their own devices. Respondents indicated that cash gifts from boyfriends also go towards buying sanitaryware.

Another important item is soap. Toiletries and beauty routines mentioned above imply a certain amount of washing and cleansing of self and clothing. Generally, soap ('isepa') is considered a basic commodity. Many families strive to get it. Most would consider themselves deprived if they could not afford it. Basic soap comes in the form of a bar of up to 35 centimetres of multipurpose soap. Such bars tend to have a bland chemical smell. Although usable and effective as far as hygiene is concerned, these soaps are not liked. Girls talked about the need to buy their own soaps, usually perfumed bath soaps for personal use.

Gifts and their Implications for 'Safe Sex'

Gifts are equated with a steady relationship based on mutual trust. Gifts and sex seem to go together – which precludes the A (abstinence) of prevention messages. Abstinence was described as 'impossible' in the long term for any human being. Participants also indicated that there are women who are nymphomaniacs ('abelesagweba'). Such women are said to want to have sex daily and hence some of them are involved in commercial sex work. However, it was explained that avoiding sex (perceived as penetrative penile-vaginal sex) means finding alternative ways of managing sexual urges or feelings locally called 'imizwa'. Asked what these might be, there were no conclusions: whatever 'alternatives'

that were suggested such as touching and kissing were seen as somehow incomplete. In some groups they were simply laughed off.

Within relationships being faithful and 'sticking to one partner' with whom one can have sex is assumed to be acceptable. In most groups participants gave the impression that this was the meaning of the B (being faithful) and sticking to one partner. Youths said, in so many words, 'ukuba lomngane oyedwa othembikileyo' (that is, having one trustworthy partner). In reality female youths have several 'one partners' in a series and sometimes concurrently to maximize gifts. The gifts also tend to compromise the possibility of the use of condoms – the C of message. There were complaints too about some men not wanting to use condoms because 'condoms are dirty' ('ayidoti'). Asked to explain how this is so, respondents pointed to problems with the disposal of condoms, given that most youths have sex in unconventional places such as in the forests during the day or at night, in the fields or on streambeds which do not have appropriate facilities to dispose of condoms.²⁰ Some parents complained of used condoms strewn on streambeds. The condoms are eventually washed into dams. This contaminates the water with a high risk of livestock swallowing condoms. In two FGDs (one for girls and another for boys) there were questions about the female condom, what it looks like and where it is found. In the FGD with boys, one participant expressed anxiety about the danger of witchcraft if the condom is widely used. He raised this issue after asking for an explanation of how the condom works. He was concerned about a contraceptive which women control and one in which men literally leave their semen.²¹

In as much as gifts are a sign of commitment, condoms are thought to undermine it as they are associated with infidelity, transient relations and promiscuity. Condoms therefore threaten relationships, especially the possibility of marriage. Girls said that if a man spends a lot of money on a girl it seems 'unfair' or 'impossible' (stated as '... ungeke...', which means '...you cannot...') to demand condom use. It seems that to demand condom use under these circumstances points to a lack of gratitude. Girls pointed out that commitment itself is transitory as a male partner might find another 'better' female partner and shift his attention. They also noted that gifts as a sign of commitments are promissory but say nothing about men's readiness for long-term commitment and how men will respond to pregnancies which readily occur when sex is not condomised. Some girls said that having sex on men's terms is necessary to 'keep the relationship going' in anticipation of marriage. It also says that the woman is obedient and is herself marriageable (see Mate forthcoming on male youth masculinities and sexualities). Some also indicated that the promise of marriage is a ploy to get girls to agree to unsafe sex, but men and boys lose

interest once there is a pregnancy, leaving girls to face the music on their own (see also Kutapa 1998). Often notions of reciprocity are then construed as looseness in which the girls are blamed for failure to control themselves and their sexual urges, or stupidity and gullibility for failing to see through men's flimsy marriage promises.

The foregoing already presupposes that the need for safe sex is understood but its practice hinges on local notions of propriety and fairness. In keeping with discourses of awareness, respondents in this study are well aware of HIV and AIDS and how it is prevented. They could describe opportunistic symptoms associated with the latter stages of HIV infection. Many are aware that having multiple partners (concurrently) increases the possibility of being infected with HIV if one does not use condoms. On the other hand, 'sticking to one partner' was seen as a way of preventing HIV and AIDS. However when asked to think of multiple partners in a series, participants in different FGDs were doubtful or hesitant. They said that breaking up with one partner and moving on to another is normal and inevitable as one searches for the ideal life partner. They were keen to show that HIV and AIDS afflict those of 'loose morals' or those who are 'not well behaved', ('nxa ungaziphathi'), which when understood in the local language is a broad term referring to 'lack of propriety', being ill-mannered broadly defined. It was explained that impropriety such as paid sex leads to HIV infection. Women who engaged in paid sex were described as 'lazy' ('amavila'), or 'love money too much', and that is why they sell sex. However when asked to explain why 'local female youths' exchange for sex for cash to buy toiletries, lunch and sanitary ware, the debate took different paths. Some blamed poverty for pushing women to such levels of desperation while others still maintained the need for 'restraint' even in the face of desperation, because these early beginnings might lead to full-time commercial sex work. Adults on the other hand say that girls 'love sweet things' (stated as 'bathanda ezimnandi') such as sweets, fizzy drinks, biscuits and potato crisps. However that phrase also means 'nice' or 'delicious food'.

Compared to male participants, female respondents were less conversant with STIs. Focus group participants claimed that 'shyness' (inhloni), 'stupidity' ('ubuthutha') makes women unable to tell when partners are infected women with STIs. Some girls did mention smelly discharges and sores as some symptoms. Others said it is difficult to look at a man's genitals before sex. This was said amidst a lot of laughter and uncomfortable giggles. In Ward 12, 'failure to look' was explained as 'shyness'; this led to a debate about shyness, in which one participant suggested that those who are shy should not have sex in the first place. Some girls said the problem is that women 'pretend to be decent', or more

specifically 'to make oneself decent' (bayazichumisa) so that they do not ask their partners to use condoms even when they are aware that the men are promiscuous or have signs of STIs. In other words, even shyness is a strategy which is deployed to give the impression of decency and naiveté.

Thus even if girls knew signs of STIs, they have no way of seeing them in the dark. In other instances religious teaching prohibit the use of condoms. In both research sites, there is a sizable population of adherents of a religious sect which prohibits the use of hospitals and products associated with the including all forms of western medicine and contraceptives.

Marriage: the Ultimate Goal of Dating

All female participants, including those in difficult or failed marriages, roundly expressed aspirations for (re)marriage. They said that marriage is an ideal institution for women as it allows them to have their own homes or homesteads ('umuzi'), children, their own fields and to be 'complete', 'proper', and even 'respectable' women ('umfazi opheleleyo'). Marriage also prevents one from being promiscuous or being lured into commercial sex work. In so many ways marriage also offers girls a legitimate avenue to independence and social status (Kutapa 1998). Respondents said that men respect married women whereas single women have to contend with male attention tempting the women to get into casual sexual relationships. Some respondents countered that even married women are tempted to have casual sexual relations to revenge their husbands' promiscuity. FGD participants agree that for married women the penalty for extramarital affairs is heavy, including divorce, labeling and lack of sympathy from the public. However, as already indicated, the way they go about it is such that it minimizes the achievement of this goal. An unskilled woman may have several boyfriends and fall pregnant along the way, leaving her bereft of any support. Older persons expressed indignation about such girls, saying they would not want such a daughter-in-law, nor would they like their own daughters to behave in this manner. They also claimed that in fact because of entrepreneurial dating once a girl falls pregnant, it is a matter of time before 'illness' (implying HIV and AIDS) comes. One participant expressed the sequence of events as '... ungabona isisu umkhuhlane ususondele' (that is, 'once there is a pregnancy, then illness is about to strike as well'). It suggests that in the process of falling pregnant (a by-product of trying to secure a husband) some girls get infected. Once the woman is sick, she becomes a burden on her parents. After she dies the same parents bear the costs of the funeral and the expense of caring for children of the deceased. As a result, older persons think that marriage is ideal provided

it is contracted 'the proper way' and is not preceded by premarital sex. Although female respondents in this study agree, they have not been able to confront their parents on the pressures they face so that some middle ground can be found in order to reduce risk. They too seek to achieve the goal of marriage, but are derailed by hazards inherent in the process.

Discussion

The foregoing illustrates the contradictions of the transformation of sexuality in a context where the lineage retains a vested interest in the individual but has no effective means of controlling behaviour (see Ahlberg 1994: 233; Foucault 1978). This change is supposedly a product of modernisation. It is clear that parental concerns and aspirations speak more of ideals of the past which are no longer supported by today's living arrangements and pressures. When youths have personal needs for 'modern' toiletries and sanitary ware and parental resources fall short, there is an issue to be resourced. Besides parents say 'zibonele' (fend for yourself) although the youths have no skills to sell and there are no visible employment opportunities. Calls for youths to find for themselves' push youths to creativing and resourcefulness which includes transactional sex. This change can be described as a kind of false modernity in which consumption of the worldly goods, individual rights and privacy are key. In this context modernity is about one's ability to consume goods that are 'modern', 'new', 'foreign', as a way of embracing traits that are 'with the world' (Friedman 1996). For women specific forms of packaging oneself and presenting the body for the 'male gaze' (Fuglesang 1994). As a consequence, those girls that are still using 'isibhuda' and 'mfuma' can be laughed off as old fashioned and unsophisticated, as are girls who cannot manage their acne.

In rural areas such as in this research site, 'privacy' is conflated with silence, inaction, indifference and ignorance, which all feed off each other and create a situation where more youths remain vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Older people feel that they can no longer reprimand other people's children because of newfound notions of privacy, and because of the breakdown of the essence of the extended family and kinship. Uncles and aunts no longer have the ability, opportunity and maybe the interest to talk to their nieces and nephews. Within families parents are yet to learn how to talk about issues that are deeply personal and intimate with children. Thus sexualities that we observe on the ground are decidedly new and evolving. The talk about people failing to change their behaviour because of tradition or culture is therefore erroneous. The problem is that of modernity at the periphery, where people do not have similar resources to

those at 'the centre', although through the media and other channels they internalise 'modern' values and norms such as individuality, privacy, consumption and commensurate notions of beauty.

It is also clear that adolescence and teenage years are a time when girls want their emerging femininity and sexuality acknowledged and taken seriously (McRobbie 1991). They embrace it and seek to enhance it with or without parental guidance. In a context where parents have no resources, the needs of these youths in this endeavour are seen as a luxury. The youth devise other means of accessing these goods through sex. In the West, where perhaps people have better resources, teenagers and the early twenty age groups are powerful markets for clothes and toiletries because manufacturers take advantage of this experimentation, the quest for self discovery and re-invention. In the Third World people also try to create new images of self. But lacking resources, the struggle is multi-layered. One does not only struggle to remake oneself but also to obtain the necessary resources to remake oneself. In the FGDs during this study there were many participants who wore hats known as 'sportie', popularised by South African township hip hop (kwaito) artists. The hat has a narrow visor but is worn low so that the eyes are partially covered. This is fashion associated with South African gangsters (tsotsis). Boys and girls wore the hats and often I had to ask them to adjust the hats so I could see their faces. Some girls wore corduroy berets in bright colours (imported from South Africa and Botswana) which could have been borrowed from sisters and friends for the occasion. Fashion is therefore important in the youths' lives with or without the resources that it demands.

When it comes to sanitary ware, girls are told that menstruation is a deeply private matter. Even when male partners give cash gifts it is understood to be for the girlfriend's 'discretionary spending'. Because most of us have no idea what older generations used during menstruation, to talk of the ideal past seems out of place when sanitary ware is now commercialised, girls engage in sport and have to continue to maintain this secret, which when not well-managed ceases to be a secret. When the councillor of Ward 17 asked for feedback on what our preliminary findings were, he was surprised to hear of sanitary ware and toiletries as an issue. In a discussion with him in the presence of six or so other local males, there was general acknowledgement of the fact that fathers 'do not know about these things' because they are not formally informed and do factor them into their budget. Some men, though, said it is not true that fathers are not aware because some of them have teenage girlfriends that they give money for discretionary spending while denying their daughters the same facilities. Some men felt that today's youths are 'out of control' ('ungeke ubakwanise'), and that they do not fear²² sex or seeing the naked body of a person of the opposite sex as

older generations had. This was blamed on biology as a subject in the school curriculum which demystifies the human body and reproduction process.

Indications are that youths in the study are sexually experienced. It is a situation that makes adults unhappy and anxious. Among the youths, the fact that discussions were laced with laughter and giggles whose meanings one cannot convey on paper, points to the fact that issues under discussion are common to all, but are embarrassing to come to terms with. This discomfort might be a result of the dissonance between prevailing HIV and AIDS prevention discourses which privilege abstinence among youths and the reality of the needs and pressures with which these youths have to deal. Abstinence is still defined as 'no sex before marriage' (Marindo et al., 2003), yet in the past there was 'non-penetrative' sex or thigh sex which allowed youths to manage sexual urges (imizwa). This also trained them in sexual restraint (Alhberg 1994; see also Heald 1995). This 'no sex' rule which is connected to the modernising effects of Christian morality, is, as youths themselves admit, 'not feasible' or 'not sustainable' over a long time. Furthermore, these youths live in a social context where marriage and parenthood are expected of them. For many, premarital pregnancy is the best way to expedite marriage.

Although girls are told to avoid intimate contact with boys and men there is the reality that sex is seen as a rite of passage into adulthood (Eaton et al., 2002). Sex is equated with nature and normal interactions between consenting 'grown up' males and females in heterosexual relations (Sikwibele et al., 2000). In local parlance, sex is referred to as 'ukudla kwabadala', that is, 'elders' food'.²³ As such sex is also something that one does to show that one is old enough. Still, sexually active youth are described as youths who 'know too much', or 'have lost their innocence', and their sexual behaviour is seen as inappropriate. It is locally described as 'ukuganga' or 'ukuxwala', which means being 'deviant', 'wild', 'out of control' and/or 'wayward'. Youths see it as inevitable, arguing that no parents in their right mind would encourage children to have sex. So parental lectures are also accepted as 'normal' parental duties while the youths have to cope with personal pressures which remain unacknowledged by the parents.

Whatever the merits and demerits of youth sexuality, vulnerability to HIV infection is a real concern. This vulnerability has to be understood within this context of poverty (even relative poverty), new notions of beauty, and consumption patterns which pressure girls to receive presents from males but then compromise their ability to demand the use of condoms lest this negates their show of gratitude (see also Schoepf 1995 for DRC; Nyanzi et al, 2000 for Uganda). On the other hand, parents who in keeping with local norms cannot look for partners

for their daughters, aspire for sons-in-law with means. So young women are strategic in dating and target local professionals and enterprising persons capable of earning money through other means. Such dating frees parents of parental obligations to provide even though they pay dearly later when their daughters are sick. Men understand these economic expectations and make a point of displaying their relative wealth. Kutapa (1998) reports that the situation is the same in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. In a rural setting such as the study site, buying fizzy and alcoholic drinks at local shops and drinking clear beer when others are drinking traditional opaque brews is a sign of status and the availability of disposable income. Thus in the research site, reports by male respondents indicate that during the holidays when migrants working in South Africa and Botswana return home, the competition for girls stiffens. The migrants have more disposable income and can buy drinks, sweets and biscuits, outdoing local competition.

Exchange of gifts clearly puts girls in a bind where they are obliged to reciprocate. Failure to reciprocate is seen as immoral, selfish and justifies male violence (see also Varga 1997 for KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa). As observed by Dover (2002), 'propriety' of behaviour is often expressed in terms of appropriateness of gender roles. In other words, women who get gifts and are not keen on reciprocity are also saying that they are not marriageable since they do not maintain their side of the bargain. They take advantage of men and therefore send the wrong message to likely suitors. Thus although premarital sex is seen by many parents as inappropriate, it resonates well with existing marriage models which ideally revolve around the economically empowered male attached to an economically disempowered female raising children together. Their needs feed off each other, creating mutuality. Men usually want the 'comforts of home' (sex, domestic work done for them) while women want money to care for the children by meeting men's needs.

Due to the fact that male-female sexual relations are characterised by wit, shrewdness, deceit and lies, (Varga 1997; Eaton et al., 2003; Nnko and Pool 1997; Chikovore et.al, 2002; Mate 2005), the promise of marriage is used to get females to agree to sex on unfavourable terms. When a pregnancy occurs the women are left in the lurch. Some women, too, lie and double-cross to maximize returns, but still want marriage to ensure a good social standing in adult life. Thus, although premarital pregnancy is risky in that it does not guarantee that one gets married, it remains the commonest way of initiating marriage (see Chikovore et al., 2002). A pregnancy usually leads to an elopement after which marriage negotiations are initiated.²⁴ Once a young woman is pregnant, parents have no choice but to accept a marriage offer because otherwise children born out of wedlock to single women increase the economic burden on the woman's

family. A marriage offer is important to resolve the tension otherwise created by pregnancy out of wedlock. Besides, families fear that unmarried daughters with children out of wedlock will fetch lower bride price in subsequent marriages because they are seen as 'spoiled' or 'damaged'. In addition, most men do not like the economic burden of looking after 'other men's children'; so if the woman succeeds in getting married to another man, she is likely to leave children from previous relationships with her parents. It remains a paradox that young women risk unplanned pregnancies in the hope of marriage which is not guaranteed. On the other hand, use of contraceptives increases the likelihood of being seen as loose and denies one the means by which to expedite marriage. Thus risking marriage (through unplanned pregnancies) also increases the risk of contracting HIV. This is a tight moral rope for young women to walk.

The foregoing need not portray youths as passive victims of poverty and changing culture per se. Sikwibele et al., (2000) noted in Northern Zambia that young women realise that economic pressures increase their dependence on men and compromise their health as they risk infection with HIV. 'Intellectual empowerment' (Baylies and Bujra 2000) does not seem to lead to decisions that minimize risks. Parents too have enough of this 'intellectual empowerment' to know that pregnancies in this generalised epidemic seem to predate illness. But like their daughters, they seem unable to do anything about the situation. In this study, girls debated men well enough to show that they are aware that cheating is par for the course, they realise that 'commitment' is transitory, and that marriage may be promised but will not materialise. Some girls engage in multiple partner sex in order to maximize cash returns and to hedge against dead-end relationships that do not lead to marriage. However due to the tyranny of physiology, it is women who carry the burden of pregnancy and display the evidence of 'impropriety'. Confusion about who the father of the child is reduces chances of marriage. After the child is born, the father is not keen to assist in raising a child and so the girls are pushed more and more towards transactional sex as a livelihood strategy (Hunter 2002). However, none of the girls referred to this behaviour overtly as commercial sex work. They all decried their consumerist needs – for confectionery, toiletries and underwear – which parents and guardians think are luxurious extras, but which they themselves see as basics. In the process, the practice of safe sex is sabotaged.

Notwithstanding the amount of work done by HIV and AIDS prevention programmes, myths about condoms still abound. There is a belief that condoms have 'germs' because of local experiments performed with condoms (Caldwell 2000). Sikwibele et al., (2000) also report that in Northern Zambia youths claim that condoms apparently have pores which allow viral matter to flow into the

blood. Mate (2002) also reports that in parts of Zimbabwe people distrust free condoms and claim that they are laced with the HIV virus. In the FGDs, these myths took on a new meaning when some participants asked exactly how the condom prevents pregnancy and HIV infection. At issue here are the mechanics of condoms as a barrier method. To the best of my knowledge no one explains these things when teaching about condoms: what is it about a condom that prevents infection? Sometimes when people do not understand how something works, the nitty-gritty of its mechanics, they cannot use it. Another problem is condom disposal given prevalent views and attitudes towards secretions from human genitalia. Most rural youth have sex in secluded outdoor locations such as woods en route to or from school, on streambeds or in the fields or while running errands for their parents. This means that one must either carry the used condom home or to a pit latrine. Alternatively one leaves it there in the forest, thereby exposing one's intimate secretions. Indeed used condoms were reported in the woods and streambeds with some adults worrying that they are a menace to their livestock, especially goats and cows.

Condom use is also made impossible by very real inhibitions such as their expensive nature. At the time of doing fieldwork, condoms cost Z\$50,000 for a pack of three in the study area, although the same pack cost Z\$10,000 in major towns. Given poverty and other demands on people's income, condoms are likely to be ignored. Although there are free condoms at clinics, with distances of between 20 to 30 kilometres (Langhuag et al. 2003) to the nearest health centre, it is highly unlikely that youths will take the trouble to obtain the condoms. How would one explain the reason for the journey to one's parents or guardians? There are also observations that rural clinics in Africa as a whole are public spaces where the physical set-up does not allow for privacy (Bledsoe and Cohen 1993; Langhaug et al., 2003). In Zimbabwe clinics make a habit of putting condoms in open spaces at the reception so that whoever picks them up does so publicly. For school-going youths, going to the clinic requires authorisation from school and clinics are known either to report to schools what their students' complaints are or schools demand these records as part of monitoring children in their care. Since many adults consider that youths are not supposed to engage in sex unless married, youth access to condoms through such public facilities is fraught with problems (Betts et al., 2000; Meekers and Molathlegi 2001). Although there are Village Community Workers (VCWs) who among other things also distribute condoms, they are local villagers who apparently are judgmental of youths who want them. The VCWs are after all older persons who are likely to talk about the 'waywardness' of so-and-so's child. Youth felt that the likelihood

of the VCWs reporting them to their parents or the news reaching their parents through the village grapevine was very high.

Conclusion

By referring to 'perfumed lotions, biscuits and condoms', this paper has tried to show that the consumption needs and lifestyles of youths negate condom use or safe sex. The gifts which allow them access to lotions and biscuits oblige them to engage in unsafe sex. Thus the increased salience of transactional sex and the accompanying spread of HIV can easily lead to people thinking that 'African sexualities' are undisciplined, when in reality this change is in tandem with global trends of individuality, consumerism and the overall logic of the market (Hunter 2002; Ugarteche 2000). As noted above, the transactional sex observed in this study is bound up with notions of femininity, poverty and the need to get ahead in an environment where nothing else seems viable. Everywhere female youths have the 'intellectual empowerment' (Baylies and Bujra 2000) to understand issues about HIV and AIDS and male-female relations, but they lack viable alternatives for achieving their personal aspirations through means that are less risky. Thus HIV and AIDS prevention among the youth is not as easy as ABC. The reality is more complex. It is not enough to focus on sexual acts and omit the socio-cultural and economic contexts. Otherwise well intentioned HIV and AIDS strategies miss their targets.

Notes

1. ABCDEFG = Abstain, Be faithful to an uninfected partner, Correct and consistent use of Condoms, Delay early sex, Early treatment of sexually transmitted infections, Free and frank discussion, Get real and know your HIV status. (Corridors of Hope/USAID poster displayed in health facilities in Zimbabwe from 2004).
2. For the purposes of this study, youths are people aged between 15 and 24 years of age in keeping with the UN definition.
3. There are some chieftaincies that have tried to have virginity tests for girls and a certification process of sorts. This has accentuated the girls' vulnerability to men who believe that sex with a virgin has medicinal values or brings a man luck.
4. The critique of 'ladette culture' in the UK is a case in point here. 'Ladettes' are hedonistic young women who behave like 'the lads' through excessive alcohol consumption, drug use and multiple partner sex that supposedly belie the 'freedoms', 'choices', 'opportunities' and increased income which today's

- women enjoy. This development has left older generations of feminists asking whether indeed this is a manifestation of the feminist vision of gender equality they imagined.
5. A ward is an administrative unit comprising of between six and eight villages and is represented by an elected official called a councillor. The councillor represents the villages at the Rural District Council (RDC) which is the local authority in a rural area.
 6. Poor communication of dates and venues led to clashes in two sites in Ward 12, making us miss one of the meetings.
 7. In FGDs with adults, fathers complained that often they are not formally told that their daughters 'are grown up' or 'have become women' and only know that this is the case when the girl becomes pregnant. They complained that this is because traditional kinship ties have waned so that their sisters no longer play the key roles expected of them within the lineage.
 8. Sanitary ware for women is generally very expensive in Zimbabwe as most products are imported. Even the most basic product like cotton wool are not affordable for many women in households already reeling under the pressure of poverty. Investing in sanitary ware is an extra expense which most households consider a luxury rather than an essential.
 9. The 'Mai Chisamba Show' on whether or not neighbours and friends should report real or suspected misdemeanours of friends and relatives' spouses or children.
 10. Male respondents also indicated that they feel pressured to give gifts as a way of staking a claim to a girl, showing responsibility and obliging girls to acquiesce to sex.
 11. They are usually returned when a relationship ends.
 12. In rural areas, schoolchildren take packed lunches of watermelons when in season, boiled sweet potatoes, dry maize boiled together with dry pulses among others. During school functions like sports days there are usually a lot of other goodies on sale such as fizzy drinks, biscuits, sweets etc.
 13. A cheap sweetened and artificially coloured drink frozen in a tubular plastic. It is like an ice-lolly. Shop owners with freezers sell them to local people to quell the heat. They are a favourite of many children.
 14. They reach Zimbabwe through complex networks of cross-border trade of Nigerians, Congolese, Zambian and Zimbabwean traders.
 15. FGDs with male youths indicate that they feel pressured to give cash gifts to girlfriends to make them 'look beautiful'.
 16. Although this is a brand name of an international range of beauty products, it is used locally to refer to a variety of facial preparations.
 17. Also used by women to decorate mud huts. It is mixed with water to apply to walls.

18. This is made from evaporated dairy cream leaving only a fatty residue which is applied on the skin, especially in winter. It does prevent chafing, flaking of the skin associated with cold weather. Because mfuma is a by-product in the making of sour milk, it tends to have a distinct sour milk-like smell. My recollections of using it as a child (in my pre-teens) are not that pleasant. I preferred the bland modern petroleum jelly to mfuma.
19. Also, menstruation is considered a deeply private matter so that when a local women's NGO lobbied the government to reduce tariffs on sanitary ware, some women thought the NGO had crossed boundaries of propriety by discussing such aspects of women's lives publicly in parliament.
20. Implied here are fears of witchcraft, especially in connection with the disposal of intimate body fluids such as semen. Leaving a used condom in the forest means leaving one's body fluids lying around in a rubber pouch! It makes people feel very vulnerable. The alternative would be to carry the used condom all the way home and throw it in a pit latrine, assuming there is one. However, this also means one has to have appropriate packaging for the used condom.
21. Women apparently can use semen to make potent love potions; the kind that ensure that the man stays faithful or shuns other women.
22. The word fear is used rather literally to equate to the vernacular phrase 'kabayesabi'. However, in the context of their discussion it can be understood to describe 'eagerness that it imbued with recklessness'.
23. In the past, this included local delicacies such as types of game meat which children were not allowed to eat. Often there were myths about what would happen to children who broke the bounds of propriety with regard to this food. Over the years, people have learnt that these are empty myths. The taboos no longer hold.
24. Although not included in this study, most poor young men prefer this type of marriage initiation because if they use other means, namely to ask for a girl's hand in marriage when she is not pregnant, parents may well refuse on account of the man's poverty or low status.

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