



CONTEXTUALIZING SOCIAL WORK  
PRACTICE WITH YOUNG BLACK FEMALES  
IN SUGAR DADDY RELATIONSHIPS

Nolwazi Ngcobo

# STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

Introduction

Background of study

Literature Review

Methods

Findings (preliminary)

Implication for social work practice

# COMMON TERMS

Transactional sex

Sugar daddy

Inter-generational sex

Age disparate relationships

Blessor / Blessee Relationships

Passport girls

# SUGAR DADDIES DESTROY LIVES CAMPAIGN



# PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to UNAIDS (2016) HIV rates amongst young people aged 16-24 was the highest

Within this cohort, females were found to be worst affected

These inordinate infections were often attributed to young people's engagement in transactional sex relationships (Kaufman & Stavrou, 2004)

Despite the possibility of contracting sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies these sexual practices continue unabated

Young people are forced by circumstances to engage in sex for survival purposes (Dunkle, 2006)

# PROBLEM STATEMENT CONTD...

However, more research has demonstrated that motivation to engage in these relationships transcends beyond the desperate need for money

An appreciative stance is therefore necessary for any true understanding of a phenomenon from the perspective of the actors

Hence the premise of my study – which endeavored to contribute to existing knowledge by investigating meaning constructions of sugar daddy relationships among female university students at the University of KZN

# AFRICAN SEXUALITIES

Some scholars caution against oversimplifying and essentializing the practice and discourse of sexualities in Africa, urging a reading of their multiple and contextual meanings (Oinas & Arnfred, 2009; Mama, 2007; Helle-Valle, 2004).

Reference to sexuality in the plural does not simply point to the diverse forms of orientation, identity or status.

It is a political call to conceptualize sexuality outside the normative social orders and frameworks that view it through binary oppositions and labels.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## Social Constructionism

Within the postmodern paradigm, the basic premise of social constructionism is that reality is socially constructed (Berger, 1967), meaning that what is assumed as reality has been shaped and reshaped through a system of various interpersonal processes.

## Feminism

females and other oppressed groups are denied a voice by societal institutions, rendering them powerless and invisible (Fine, 1993)

# THEORETICAL GLOBETROTTING – TAMALE (2011)

There is a lot of sense in using existing theoretical bases as starting points and then correcting/revising them in light of the contextual evidence collected in current studies.

Existing theoretical frameworks, such as Foucault's conceptualization of sexuality in terms of power relations (Foucault, 1976) or

Judith Butler's implicit theory of heteronormativity and her views on the subversive potential in gender performativity (Butler, 1990)

Including Connells concepts of *Hegemonic Masculinities*, these be extremely useful in analyzing sexualities in Africa, as long as this is done with the continental specificities in mind and a view to improve upon them

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the scripts adopted by young black female students in sugar daddy relationships?

How do these female students construct and negotiate love, intimacy and desire in their sexual exchange 'relationships'?

How do they construct their control and agency in sexual exchanges within sugar daddy relationships?

What are the limitations of this "agency" within these relationships

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Transactional sex is a complicated, global issue shaped by love, globalisation, poverty (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Hunter, 2010)

Gender inequality exacerbates the poverty and vulnerability of women in sub-Saharan Africa, contributing to the spread of HIV (Stoenbau, 2016)

African women and young girls in particular, have sex for money in order to meet their basic needs (Epprecht, 1998; Hunter, 2010; Silberschmidt, 2015)

Poverty in Africa is gendered, with women worst affected than their male counterparts

Gift-giving has an insidious impact on the sexual behavior and negotiation ability of young females, and to a lesser degree, boys



Gift-giving is valued and expected in relationships in most society (Luke, 2001)

It fuels everyday sexual relations between men and women –

Gift-giving has become common and a symbol of a girls' worth

If not offered, may offend young women

Transactional sex may be used to redistribute wealth as ilobolo did in the past, and in the same vain afford men superior power

Transactional sex has at often times been synonymized with prostitution

In both cases, non marital sex, often with multiple partners is underscored by the reciprocation of gifts or cash

TS however differs in that participants are constructed as girlfriends/boyfriends

The giving of gifts is part of broader set of obligations, that don't necessarily involve a predetermined payment

Invasion of the West – erosion of culturally prescribed sexual constraints – permissiveness of sexual expression

Politics of differentiation – linguistic

# METHOD

Research was conducted at the University of KZN

Qualitative research with 16 participants

Purposive sampling

Respondents ranged from 19 to 27 years

Interviews conducted in English & IsiZulu

Venue for interviews: Office, restaurants, park, and residence

# THEMES

Discourse analyzed themes included:

Meanings ascribed to— politics of differentiation

Reasons for engaging in these relationships

Construction and negotiation of love, intimacy and desire in their sexual exchange 'relationships

Agency actioned vs agency idealized = limitations of agency

# MEANINGS OF SD RELATIONSHIPS– POLITICS OF DIFFERENTIATION

Rather than seeing themselves as desperate, and accorded a prostitute title, participants:

Saw themselves as educated, classy, tertiary students who were practicing a normalised sexual practice within their context:

*“I mean, everyone is doing it...its not like we are selling sex or something and we, actually, let me speak for myself, I know my worth and I won't just go to a man and hand myself over in a tray”*

*“Well, he gives whatever but it's mostly gifts cos I don't want to feel like he is buying me”*

*“ ...just for showing up and making him look good around his friends, I can go home with nothing less than R1000”*

# POLT OF DIFFERENTIATION – CONTD

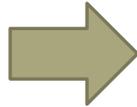
*“No not a lot, you see like I said, I don’t like taking money from people but it depends what I need. Maybe R500 and above. Not a lot. I think it makes a difference that I have a strong liking to him. Yah, I don’t want to be that girl”*

*“Its like any other relationship, I mean I don’t understand why people make a big deal just because he is old... trust me even if he was my age, I would still want to be appreciated”*

# DEVIANCY

Deviancy according to Becker (1963) is a conferred status

Labelling has negative consequences on the labelled (those in sugar daddy relationships)



How society views and manages them



How partners in these relationship treat them

# CONSTRUCTION AND NEGOTIATION OF LOVE, INTIMACY AND DESIRE IN SD RELATIONSHIPS

*“Well , we started off without the money, so I guess...but you know I feel that you know he is working, I’m studying. So it just makes sense that he provides me with money...I mean”*

*“Well, because he is a provider, I know that he won’t be asked too many questions. The wife is a teacher and the life they are living is way beyond a teacher’s salary, so the guy is the one who calls the shots in that house, without a doubt”*

*“Yazi, even though I know he is married but when I send a please call me and he doesn’t respond, that really gets to me...those are the times that I realize that, maybe I do love this guy”*

# REASONS FOR ENGAGING IN SD RELATIONSHIPS

Emotional support / mentoring

*“I think with this particular man, it’s ok because I know him from back home and it’s been someone like a friend. He has always been there for me, in terms of finding anything even though we were not in any relationship at that time. So when we got into the relationship it was much easier for me to ask him for stuff cos now we are together”*

*“I have always dated older guys, it’s in me nje, as you can see, I look much older than my age, plus ke my IQ level, older guys challenge me”*

## Lack of family support

*“My parents have no idea what degree I am pursuing, where I am currently staying, all they want is for me to bring home that graduation gown, that is their main concern”*

*However, there were many students who indicated presence of family support:*

*“With my dad, he can pop up at anytime and if I am not around, I often have to lie about my whereabouts or convince my friends to say that we are have a cross night study in preparation for a project”*

# THE URGE TO OWN GLOBAL PRODUCTS



# EXPLORATION, LOVE & SEXUAL FULFILMENT

*Like we work as a team and we understand each other at a different level. We are different, him being married and me being that single sidechick so we can connect and not bore each other. You see YOU (referring to me) go home and talk the same language with your husband, and we (referring to their relationship) like different things and explore*

*“I love him now and its working for me now”*

*“Well, yeah but if you want to know, the sex is good” -*

# AGENCY / POWER ACTIONED VS IDEALIZATION OF IT

Timing of the agency

*“Yes, and what I love about that is that phela mdala lobaba (you see, this man is very old) so when people see the 3 of us, they assume that he is our dad – laughs”*

*“Going to a public place is like so important, for your own safety, I mean he can’t do anything to me when we are in a public area, embarrassing as it is”*

*“Like he would tell me that he doesn’t mind if I have a boyfriend so I could like see him and still be with my boyfriend”*

Owing to their exposure to safer sex awareness, condom negotiation was something they all considered very important in the relationship:

*“(Pause)...ok, I think he pretty much controls that. I mean I have never really gotten to enjoy sex with him all that much. You know its sex. Laughs...as I mentioned before, the fact that I like him nje for him, sex is not soooooooooo important. But ke, he controls it, he always has all the protection, I don't even remember 1 day where I have had to buy condoms for him”*

*“Like cos he sends a driver for me, yah and on my way there I will ask the driver to go via the garage for me to get water or something, then I buy the condoms but ke when I get to the hotel I hide them so that he doesn't get ideas, then I just keep them in case he doesn't have them”*

# LIMITATIONS OF AGENCY

Although there were contradictions:

*“Well, you know mistakes happen. I have had unprotected sex with him twice. And trust me, he knows how I feel about that so he will not attempt it ever again. He knows how I feel about falling pregnant and diseases. After the second time, I honestly felt I was going to dump him cos it was like I was powerless to it. I couldn't say no to him. So, yahhh...but the sex with him is not too great either ....laughs”*

*“Haybo, I let him do that. Even though he sometimes forgets and I have to take the morning after pill”*

Surprisingly only 2 out of 16 participants indicated ever experiencing abuse

*“One time he came and I was so drunk that I started swearing at him in front of the security guards at res, he slapped me lapho in front of everyone, I was sober within seconds, uyayazi impama sisi.”*

However, non-consensual sex (alluded to by 3 participants) was not considered as a violent practice:

Justified by one of the participants as follows:

*“I mean, it had to happen eventually whether I resisted or not, the hints were there, like he would say ‘ngiyazibekela njalo’ and I ignored him knowing very well what that meant, oh well...”*

# ASPIRATIONS IDENTIFIED

Completion of degrees

*“Yes but right now I need to focus on completing this degree, I can’t disappoint my mother”*

Job security /connections

*“Nobody wants to be identified as umakoti womuntu – wife of somebody, I want a title”*

Marriage – some even considering marriage with their current partners

2 of the students interviewed were recipients of Golden Key awards

1 was pursuing her Masters (2016)

# REFLECTIONS

Recruitment of participants

Conflation of researcher/social worker role

My position at UKZN

Interrogation of my own biases

Subjective (self) identities

# IMPLICATION FOR SOWK PRACTICE

Social Work programmes that target the SD phenomenon may seem less urgent compared with those targeting sexual violations that constitute a threat to life,

However, the dynamics of its gendered practice is reflective of similar social conventions that accentuate dominant discourses on femininities and masculinities within patriarchal societies

Instead of only focusing on sexual health programmes, women (&men) should be provided with a space to discuss their sexual desires and hopes for emotional, economic and relational fulfilment

Skills building and tangible economic empowerment is NB



Consciousness raising on the dynamics of power

Enabling lecture discussions about gender inequalities that are exclusive of fixed binary delineations

Towards a theoretical culture of humility

Addressing the involvement of parents beyond just warning the youth but acknowledging that 'they are sexual beings'

More youth prevention and intervention programmes aimed at changing behaviour must be designed with careful attention to the specific realities of young people and intricate ways in which love works – within various spaces.

# IN CONCLUSION

“Show a people as one thing over and over again and that is what they will become”

Chimamanda Adiche Ngozi

# NGIYABONGA

Nolwazi Ngcobo

[ngcobon@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ngcobon@ukzn.ac.za)

0312602430