

## CHAPTER THREE

### **INFECTIONS: THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF SEXUAL RELATIONS**

Whereas the previous chapter outlined historical transformations that shaped the social, economic and political context of the AIDS epidemic, the proceeding discussion seeks to explore the reasons for the rapid spread of HIV in Bushbuckridge through sexual relations. In the chapter I argue that transformations in the sexual economy have given rise to the prominence of multiple, concurrent sexual partnerships. These are relationships that overlap in time. The significance of this patterning of sexual relationships is the emergence of fairly robust, socially undifferentiated, and spatially dispersed sexual networks that act as highly efficient conduits for the transmission of HIV.

The role of multiple and concurrent sexual relationships in driving the spread of AIDS has been well developed in the recent literature (Epstein 2007; Halperin & Epstein 2004) although it has also been disputed (Tanser et al. 2011). Nonetheless, it is argued that concurrency has important implications for the speed, size and persistence of HIV in a population (Mah & Halperin 2009; Morris & Kretzschmar 1997). Because viral load or the amount of HIV present is at its peak in the initial or acute and final stages of infection, HIV is easily transmitted from one person to another during the initial asymptomatic phase. Concurrent sexual relationships contribute significantly to the formation of sexual networks that can involve a large number of people, spread over a broad geographical area. This means that in particularly dense sexual networks, everyone has the potential to be linked to an individual who was recently infected and is thus highly infectious.

Importantly, sexual network analysis allows us to go beyond epidemiological constructs of ‘risk groups’ and ‘risky behaviours’ toward understanding the social dimensions of the spread of HIV. Conventional epidemiological methodologies focus almost exclusively on risky individual behaviours rather than ‘risky situations’ (Obbo 1993). Epidemiological surveys measure sexual risk behaviours in relation to HIV prevalence or incidence. Early in the AIDS epidemic, studies focussed on the identification and targeting of ‘risk groups’ for example, gay men, sex workers, migrant men, and truck drivers. These populations were defined as ‘core transmitters’, that created pools of infection and ‘bridges of HIV infection’ into the general population (Jochelson et al. 1991). Yet, the ‘core transmitter’ model and ‘risk group’<sup>1</sup> has limited application in South Africa where the epidemic is of a generalised nature (Ilfie 2006). HIV infection also occurs amongst men and women who are not defined as sex workers or who are not especially promiscuous. The idea of specific and identifiable ‘risk groups’ as a Western cultural construct fits poorly with the African situation (Epstein 2007).

A good illustration of the concept of sexual networks is Kohler & Hellinginger (2006) documentation a vast sexual network comprising of more than 60% of the total population of Likoma district, in the northern region of Malawi. They found that the sexual network was not attributable to a group of highly active individuals (a ‘core group’), but the tendency to share sexual partners, resulting in direct and indirect linkages between individuals in a common network. Exposure to HIV in this situation depends not only on sexual conduct, but on an individual’s position within a sexual network. Moreover, the network is invisible to individual actors, only becoming partially visible in the event of illness and death.

While research into sexual networks provides fairly persuasive data to illustrate the concept, these are not always able to address the question why multiple, concurrent sexual relations are so widespread. In order to address this question, a better understanding of the social structure of sexual relations is required. This has been partly addressed in Chapter 2 that described the shifting sexual economies relating to transformations in the political economy.

The focus of this chapter is the current features of different forms of sexual relations. I begin by exploring forms of relationship beginning with childhood, late adolescence and early adulthood, and in adulthood. In their sexual biographies, my informants described an array of sexual relationships: the sexual games of children; the casual sexual encounters and long-term romantic partnerships of youth; marital and extra marital affairs; and sexual relationships involving the exchange of cash, favours and gifts. Their narratives reflected on sexual desire, procreation, meeting material needs, sexual experimentation, masculine domination, romantic love, and companionship and affection. Unlike the prevailing views of a chaotic, unrestrained sexuality, men and women, young and old, entered into different forms of short and long term associations that were clearly defined. Different types of sexual relations were conceptualised as distinct; or conversely, individual actors interpreted their sexual relations in terms of a broad range of pre-existing forms that addressed a range of material and emotional needs (cf. Setel 1999, 141).

Beginning in childhood and early adolescence, sex is considered to be ‘not real’, it is a game played by immature boys and girls. Yet as biographical accounts revealed, youngsters often had penetrative sex at a young age. Youth talked of romantic long-term

relationships, defined as abstinent and monogamous, yet had casual sexual relationships. Sex within marriage is regarded as procreative, while extra marital affairs are erotic. However, the definition of marriage itself is often elusive and highly ambiguous. Extra marital relationships are often constructed as marriage and carry the expectation of procreation and long-term material support. However, these expectations may not be shared equally by men and women. Most significantly, different forms of sexual relationship were not necessarily exclusive. Extra-marital relationships did not contradict marriage; sex in exchange for material support did not negate the need for emotional and romantic relationships; casual sexual encounters did not nullify long-term romantic relationships. This meant that multiple partnerships were not mutually exclusive.

### **PLAY, ROMANCE AND SUGAR DADDIES: FROM CHILDHOOD TO YOUNG ADULTHOOD**

Play sex or what youth referred to as *matanyula* is not considered ‘real sex’. Until a boy starts to experience nocturnal emissions or wet dreams, he does not have the capacity for ‘real’ sex as he does not produce seminal fluid. Seminal fluid is referred to as blood (*ngati*) that has turned white through the heat of sex (cf. Niehaus 2002a). Wet dreams are sometimes referred to as ‘boys’ menstruation’ and signal the onset of sexual maturity. However, at a young age, semen is not regarded to be potent enough for conception.

In their biographical accounts, young men spoke about spending their days in the company of their peers, herding cattle or goats, or foraging for food (termites, mice, small buck) in the bush<sup>2</sup>. Their earliest sexual experiences took place in these settings. My male informants talked about stimulating themselves while swimming in the river, spying on

girls bathing naked and couples having sex in the bushes. There were also rumours of boys who had sex with domestic animals. For example, a young boy allegedly ‘raped’ his neighbour’s dog. However, my informants dismissed this as a sign of insanity brought on by abnormally high levels of sexual desire.

Narratives of sex placed a strong emphasis on penile – vaginal sexual intercourse. Many regarded masturbation as abhorrent. They sniggered at a loveLife publication that advocated masturbation as an alternative to penetrative sex. One young man said he feared being arrested if caught masturbating. Sibusiso, an 18-year old school goer talked about wet dreams and masturbation:

We talk about this [wet dreams], but we don’t know where it comes from. I know that if you do not have sex for a long time the older sperms have to leave to make room for the new ones. Some guys are embarrassed and too shy to talk about it – they relate this to masturbation, so they are embarrassed. They call masturbation *ku ba deyisa* [to play dice]. This is because of *chavisa* [taboo, fear, respect]. No one would admit that they have masturbated. I have a friend who admitted it; he was a very open guy, but other guys will say that it is a very bad thing to do. Wet dreams show that you are ready to start to have a child.

In their sexual biographies, young men pointed to the role of older peers in discovering sex. Aubrey told me that when he was a child ‘still wearing short pants’, his older brothers teased him because he lacked sexual awareness. Aubrey recalled how his brothers would tease him about his inexperience:

They said ‘yesterday I got sex’. I asked them ‘What’s that?’ They said ‘You don’t know? You are a *xiphukuphuku* [fool]!’ They said ‘Look at us. We played and we had sex last night with a girl next door’. If you didn’t get anything everybody was laughing at you that you are a fool and you are afraid of girls.

Mandla, a young man in his mid-20s, said he would boast about his sexual potency when he was younger:

I used to speak to girls about sex. I always bragged about how strong I am, and how far I can go – I would say that I *ku ba ma bi delo* [I beat the furrows in the ground – to have vigorous sex]. I lied to them because I am just playing. They didn't believe me. They knew I am just joking around. They said that I am too young to have sex.

Although first sexual contacts with girls were usually non-penetrative (cf. Niehaus 2006a)<sup>3</sup>, my informants expressed some confusion over what sex really entailed. Mandla, talked about his first time; 'I started having sex at the age of 11. We did not have proper sex. I thought I was having proper sex, but later I realised I was not'. Sexual contact occurred while playing games such as 'hide and seek' (*kuku*) or 'little house' (*swiyindwana*). Boys grabbed girls and rubbed themselves against them, simulating sex. Yet, early sexual encounters also involved penile penetration. Collins remembers playing 'hide and seek' (*kuku*) as a shy twelve-year old with a girl five years his senior:

When we went to go and hide, she said 'let's not go out let's stay here'. She was 17 and she taught me [sex]. Her problem was that she did not have the courage to tell a boy that she needs it so she was able to do it with those younger kids.

Early sexual experiences mimicked marital relations in the popular game of 'little house' (*swiyindwana*). Children constructed play houses in the bush and played at mothers and fathers. The 'mothers' cooked meals of mice and fish acquired by their 'husbands' in tin cans over small fires. Later they pretended to have sex by lying on top of each other, fully clothed. Simon Hlatswayo remembers being 13; his 'wife' was 14: 'She took my clothes off and she pulled me on top of her. She put my penis in her vagina.

After many, many experiences I ended up enjoying it'. Siphso, a young man in his early twenties claimed he had his first sexual experience at the age of seven. He and a friend were sitting in a shelter they had constructed from cardboard next to the railway line, taking a break from herding cattle, when they were approached by an older girl. 'For us she was a lady. We were still seven or eight. She asked me *maswi kota ku endla leswi xana* [do you know how to do this?]. Siphso initially refused, but was soon convinced and 'did sex' with her.

Boys also initiated sex, sometimes coercing young girls by offering gifts of money and food. An eleven year old girl was said to offer sex in exchange for biscuits and cakes. Negros remembers paying her to have sex when he was 13 after having heard about sex from his older brothers:

When they [his older brothers] had sex they would tell me it is nice so I felt like doing it. It is not really nice – it is just something you enjoy. I just made it come out [ejaculate], just from taking it [penis] out. She was 12. It was just money. I gave her money and she gave me what I needed. It was two rand. That was too much in those times. I remember that I broke her. She was a virgin. I just showed her money she took it and we went to the bushes and then we went to her home and then I had sex with her for ten minutes and then I left her.

### **Jolling and casual encounters**

The emphasis on play sex associated with childhood continues into adolescence. Amongst older youth, sexual relations are collapsed under the term *ku jola*<sup>4</sup> literally meaning 'to party'. The emphasis is on transgressive sex that lies outside of formal, traditional proposals, bridewealth (*ndzovolo*) and marriage, away from the scrutiny of elders, in youthful social spaces such as taverns and clubs. In these settings sexual relations are coincidental, uninhibited and without regard for rules of respect (*hlonipha*).

School fieldtrips are opportunities for sexual relations. Teachers usually turn a blind eye to sex between the students; fairly often they were involved in relationships of their own. When Comfort went to the Echo Caves on a school trip he had sex for the first time in the back seat of the bus. ‘She was so beautiful. I went to her and I told her that I love her. She said ‘no problem’ so I was very happy. That was my first time to get sex’.

Alcohol plays an important role in jolling and getting drunk is frequently an important condition for sexual relations during youth. For example, Joshua, a student in his late teens, had sex for the first time with a woman he met in a tavern:

As I mentioned I am a drunkard! So I decided to go to Thomisane Tavern. I got a prostitute and I fell in love with her. It was not love but I just wanted to have sex with her because I was over-drinking.

Collins lost his virginity on Christmas day at the age of 18. ‘Everyone was drunk and so was I. I found her sitting there. I talked to her and proposed to her. I took her home and made sex with her’. Another young man stated: ‘If I am sober, of course, I mean I don’t even think of women. But I mean, of course you have to drink beer and if you are drunk you will need a woman’.

Casual relationships were also spontaneous encounters unencumbered by proposals of love and romance. Bonginkosi was 15 years old and had a steady girlfriend. However, when they were apart he had sex with other girls. Once he arrived at a friend’s house to find him having sex. Bonginkosi and his friend took turns to have sex with the same girl. ‘She told us that she was tired, but we said “let me finish, I will only take five minutes”’. Similarly, although Jerry (18) had a romantic long term partner, he had casual sexual relations whenever the opportunity arose. One evening a girl he knew called him



to come over to her house. She was watching soft pornography on television. Jerry said ‘It started affecting me, so I started kissing her and she never said no’.

Casual sex with many different girls is regarded as vital for young men’s experience, to learn about women, or as someone said ‘to taste the fat ones, the short ones and the tall ones’. My informants sometimes made unbelievable claims about the number of sexual partners. Mandla (17) said he had 25 girlfriends until the age of fifteen although he admitted not all were sexual relationships. At one point he had eight girlfriends each from a different village:

It is expected that I have a girlfriend in each village so that when I visit [relatives] I can spend time with each. I am in love with all these girls and I have sex with all of them.

Similar to Hunter’s (2005) analysis of the contemporary *isoka* (playboy), young men in KwaBomba sought to express their frustrations at being unable to become men by marriage, through the conquest of women. This also manifested as competition between male youth over girls sometimes resulting in violent clashes between young men over girls.

### **Romantic relations**

In contrast to jolling young people also had relationships that emphasized long-term commitment and mutual understanding between partners. Setel describes a similar distinction in northern Kenya between ‘recreation’ and ‘partying’ (*starehe*) relations and more serious girlfriends (Setel 1999, 110). Accounts of these relationships stressed the importance of moral character and the establishment of trust. These attributes are critical components in the development of the relationship. For example, Humphrey, aged 22,

had a girlfriend from Cottondale village. They met at a Nazarene Mission Church conference and then became good friends. Initially, Humphrey did not ‘propose love’ to her:

I wanted to find out about her behaviour. When I knew that she was a good person, I started to propose. I told her I think we must fall in love because I have learnt about her. She said I must wait.

Humphrey said that he felt that she ‘is the right one for me; she is assertive, she is talkative. You know she doesn’t go with many boys’. Because these were expected to be long term relationships which may result in marriage, HIV was an immediate concern. Elvis, an unemployed man of 25 talked about his steady girlfriend, and expressed his concerns about HIV:

She is 20 and lives here so I met her on the street. I spent some time looking at her. I was looking at what kind of person she is. I realized that there was HIV so I wanted to see how many boyfriends she had. I found that she was in love with another boy but not anymore. I asked her friends and they told me that she is good and that she doesn’t love boys too much. I kept an eye on her. I was worried about HIV - that is why I wanted find out. If she had got two boyfriends I would not have gone for her because that would have meant that she had that disease. I even wanted to see what her behavior was - does she like to go out, does she like men, at month end does she go to [tavern] lounges or something, is she that kind of person. I found that she was not that kind. She is a good girl. She lives at home – she shows she loves me. We have talked about AIDS with each other – I asked her if she knew about HIV, but she said that there is no HIV in Bushbuckridge. It is only Gauteng people who have HIV only in Gauteng Province.

Longer term relationships were constructed as romantic. Youngsters used endearing terms such as: ‘my one and only’, ‘sweetie’ (in English) and ‘my love’ (*murhandziwa*); ‘together until death’ (*mafasilahlana*); ‘my flower’ (*xiluva xanga*); ‘my peppermint sweet cough syrup’ (my peppermint *sweeta ra mkhuhlwana*), and expressed

in narratives such as ‘I chose the one of my heart and then I gave her my heart’. Romantic love was regarded as the basis of marital relationships, marking a shift from the importance of fertility in the agricultural era. Importantly, this does not mean that notions of romantic love have only recently begun to emerge (Hunter 2010). Rather, it indicates that romantic love has recently started to dominate narratives about marriage (Smith 2001).

Akin to the formulaic proposal (*ku gangisa*), romantic relationships begin with a proposal of love (youth used the word ‘prop’), communicated in a letter or verbally, often through a friend acting as an interlocutor. Some suitors persisted for months or even years, despite constant rejections. Promise was 17 when Nyiko proposed to her. It took him five months of courtship before she accepted his proposal. During this time he bought her small gifts, school lunches and cold drinks. Promise’s current boyfriend is 21. They met at school while she was still dating Nyiko, but it took two years before she accepted his proposals. Ntshembo (22) waited long for a response from his girlfriend after he proposed to her but was extremely persistent:

I told her my feelings for her. She didn’t tell me the truth from the beginning. It took weeks before she told me. It was hard waiting, but I thought, if she really belongs to me, I can wait. I believe if something belongs to you, it belongs to you

Girls also proposed to boys. Matimba (21) had proposals from five different girls, delivered in letters hidden in books. ‘They say “I am waiting for a reply” or “please hurry” and “give me your answer immediately”’. Matimba refused to accept these proposals, because as he put it ‘It is better for me to listen to the church and my parents, because maybe I will succeed in my life’.

Unlike *jolling*, sex in romantic relationships was delayed. At 17, Collins proposed to a girl named Noreen, the daughter of the school principal. Noreen bought him lunch at school breaks and gave him gifts of jewellery. Collins and Noreen never had sex and there was limited physical contact. ‘She talked to me and as she was talking she was brushing my leg with her hand and so I found my hand on top of her thigh’. The two remained sweethearts for many years, writing each other letters. Delaying sex was important to 17 year-old Doctor in his relationship with Ntombi, a girl in his school. Doctor wanted to have sex but only did this with casual girlfriends. As he put it, he did not want to ‘pressurize her. She’s a serious girlfriend. If you love them, it’s not all about sex. Now I’m waiting to see what is happening’.

Born-again Christians (*bazalwane*) are expected to remain abstinent until marriage. Church sermons focus on delaying sexual intercourse and stress the sanctity of marriage. The Nazarene Revival Crusade Church (NRCC) (an offshoot of the Nazarene Christian Mission) assists young men and women by providing financial sponsorship for their weddings if they remain virgins until marriage. The International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) performs match-makings at special services for the youth. These relationships are supervised by the church elders. Pre-marital and extra-marital sex is strictly forbidden<sup>5</sup>.

Patrick was 23 and in a two-year old relationship with Petunia, a born-again Christian. Patrick respected Petunia’s decision to delay sex until marriage, as he put it ‘to play the waiting game’. Patrick said that he did not want to rush into sex, but preferred to ‘sit down and talk, to balance everything’. He was prepared to wait until Petunia returned from university and would then discuss having sex.

Marks, a young technical college student, fell in love with Memory, a young girl who attended the Nazarene Revival Crusade Church. He struggled to get Memory to agree to his proposals of love. Marks resorted to joining the church to convince her:

It was difficult to propose to her. She was very afraid. But we went to church together – she believed me that I didn't have AIDS because we were going to church together and I was pretending to pray. It was not very easy. But she couldn't refuse me when I told her that I loved her. But it was not that easy because she believed in God and I took her away from her way of being a born again. She cannot belong to the church anymore. 'Born Agains' are not allowed to have sex before marriage.

Church membership, particularly Pentecostal churches were believed to provide a form of protection against AIDS. This view is substantiated by research elsewhere that suggests that Pentecostal church communities will have lower rates of HIV infection. This is because the church creates a discourse that makes premarital and extramarital sex morally opprobrious (cf. Garner 2000).

The International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) claimed to protect and heal its members of AIDS by exerting influence on decisions about behaviour. In the words of a devout IPHC member:

If you stay here then God will protect you – even if you have AIDS then God can forgive you and maybe you can live. God cannot protect you from AIDS, but if I am going to church and I propose a girl there is something that is going to happen in my heart that is going to make me not to go to her to talk to her because God is with me – I can't prop [propose to] her – I can go to the wedding but I can't propose very easily because God is with me. But if God is not with you I can propose anyone you see on the street. So it is there you are going to find AIDS.

Yet, young people experienced tension between maintaining a 'true love' relationship and sexual passion and desire. Male youth invoked a hydraulic theory of

sexual energy, arguing that repressing sexual desire caused unfavourable health consequences such as facial acne, mental confusion and irritability (cf. Collins & Stadler 2000). Boys and men are regarded as having far stronger sexual desires that they are unable to control unlike women. The youthful, Happy struggled to control his sexual desire and so played soccer to make him too tired to want to have sex:

It is difficult to live without a girlfriend because we all have feelings but we shouldn't allow our feelings to control us. You can get into trouble – you can rape if your feelings control you. I restrict my feelings. If I feel like having sex I stay away from girls.

Others were not able to control their desire. Seventeen-year-old Clements repeatedly slapped his girlfriend across the face when she refused to have sex with him. She promptly broke up with him. He reflected: 'I don't think I was right. I thought that she wanted to have sex. That is what made me angry. I really wanted to take her home. In future I will ask her for her reasons for refusing sex'. Clements' statement also draws attention to a contradiction between sex and love. Aubrey was seventeen when he tried to convince his girlfriend to sleep with him. He narrated the debate between him and his girlfriend:

I said to her 'I am here to take you with me'. She asked me 'what for'. So I said 'it's obvious you know why. You said that you love me'. She said 'because I was loving you, your words that you said made me say that I love you and it is true that I was loving you and I did not have a chance to come to you and tell you I love you. Do you think that I am a prostitute?' Then she asked me what we were going to do. So I said 'let's just go now, don't ask me a lot of questions'. She said 'OK I am coming'. On the way, she asked me again 'what are we going to do?' I said 'wait you are disturbing me. I am thinking' When we reached my home she said 'OK we are here what do you want?' I said 'I want you. I want to [have] intercourse [with] you'. She said 'Ha! You are mad. I am not into that. Love is not for intercourse.

However, not only girls reacted in this way. Tlangelani was 12 when he met Munene in 1996. Munene proposed to Tlangelani at a sports event. ‘She asked me if I was in love with someone. I said no, I wasn’t. She said can you fall in love with me. I said no problem, I can do it’. Munene gave Tlangelani generous gifts of air time, a wrist watch and a ‘sweetheart card’ and the couple dated for four years. But Munene broke up with Tlangelani after he refused to have sex with her. ‘She said I was stupid not wanting to have sex with her’.

Anxieties about contracting HIV and falling sick with AIDS have become important in decisions about sexual relations. Victor, a 19-year-old boy, had a steady girlfriend and wanted to wait until he turned 21 before he tried sex; ‘other boys don’t know anything – that is why they have sex at a young age. But I am afraid of AIDS and I need to take care of my body’. Victor’s statement reflects an emerging discourse of the educated and responsible ‘AIDS aware youth’ (cf. Hunter 2005) in contrast to ‘uneducated’ and ‘ignorant’ youth who had casual sex. Youth who participated in the activities of HIV prevention programs such as loveLife (Chapter 1) were also strong proponents of this perspective.

Young peoples’ material circumstances also influenced sexual decision making. For example, by the time he was 25 years, Riot had not yet had sex. His neighbours agreed that he was a boy ‘who knew how to behave’ (*mufana wa ku ti koma*). Riot came from a very poor family and was aware that an unwanted pregnancy would cause huge problems for his mother. Riot’s friends often teased him because he did not have a girlfriend:

They say I am old enough and I must have a *cheri* [girlfriend] so that I can be the same as them. I don't agree with them because I know where I come from. I do not want to create more problems for my mother. I don't want a baby because I am still young. I want to prepare myself for a better future. That's all I can say.

Two years after he made this speech, Riot impregnated Juliet whom he intended to marry. He reckoned that since he had found employment as a roofer he could now afford to begin a family.

Importantly, casual sexual relations defined as jolling and romantic relationships with potential wives were not exclusive. In his account of his sexual relationships, Vusi (a young student) reveals the different meanings associated with different forms of relationship. Vusi has a steady relationship with Portia, a young Christian woman with whom he has a child and he provides limited support:

It took me six months – one year to propose to her. I made as if I was playing with her. I said 'I love you – I love you' but she just ignored me. But I was very serious until she told me this is not good; let us go for studies and when you find a job then you can come – we are not working we cannot maintain our family. So I tried to rob her until she agreed to do what I wanted. She said she loved me but it took a long time. She was a virgin. I even lied to her and said I was a virgin and that I wanted to start with her. I didn't use a condom because she was a virgin, but I made her pregnant last year. I visit her every two or three weeks. I just see her and give her money and then leave and something for the kid, for the nappies.

At the same time as his relationship with Portia, Vusi has several other girlfriends:

Aish! Now I have too many girlfriends especially this year; well just six or seven. Some they promise me that they love me. I have only had sex with four of them. One is in Ngodweni, the other is in Tzaneen; the other is in Dwaarsloop. Some of them I met at school. My friend the taxi driver takes me places and I meet them when they are shopping, we swop [phone] numbers and then we arrange to meet but sometimes they don't give me what I need. I just buy food to make them happy.



Vusi only has sex with some of them if and when he can. He plays a small role in their lives and he acknowledges that they too have other boyfriends. Vusi recognizes that these relationships could expose himself and Portia to AIDS:

It is simple for them to get boyfriends. I know that they can have AIDS but I use condoms. I think now if I am the victim of AIDS, my child will be alright. She is fine so I want to protect her. My girlfriend [Portia] doesn't know about the others. If she found out she would fight with me and she would leave me because she loves me too much.

After this fairly rational account of his sexual relations Vusi confessed that he also has sex with girls he meets in taverns. He is aware that these one night stands could have disastrous results:

I am worried about what I did yesterday – I was drunk and I did it with that girl. I could even die today because these girls do abortions. Then they go to taverns to get boys to wash themselves clean.

Interestingly, Vusi does not mention AIDS as a potential threat. Instead, he expresses the fear that girls have sex with men to cleanse their wombs. Ideally, a woman should wait for three menstrual cycles following an abortion to properly expel the polluted blood (Niehaus 2002a). Yet, young women, impatient to start having sex again, seek out men to have sex to cleanse their wombs. During sex, the man absorbs her polluted fluids and falls extremely ill with a fatal affliction known as *ku wela* (fall down).

Another example is Moses who provided details of 18 relationships from the time he was eleven until he was 22 years old. Moses regarded the first seven relationships as childhood 'play' because he did not have 'proper sex' or ejaculate. The girls he had sex with were about the same age and were all sexually inexperienced. Once he turned 16

Moses started to experience ‘proper sex’ and met girls who were sexually experienced. He had sexual relationships with two partners. At the age of seventeen Moses moved back to his mother’s home and abstained from sex for an entire year out of respect for her. When he turned 18 Moses moved back to KwaBomba and resumed sexual relationships. That year he had another two sexual partners. Moses’ relationships tended to be of shorter duration. When he was 19 and 20 he had two relationships that only lasted one month each. Between the age of 20 and 21 Moses accumulated five coterminous partners. One of these he defined as his ‘wife’. Although he had not paid bridewealth she is pregnant with his second child. His first pregnancy was with a woman with whom he had a casual affair. He still sees her but does not envisage a long future to the relationship. In addition he has another relationship with a woman who he considers to be marriageable material. The other two women are girlfriends who Moses sees on an irregular basis who also have steady partners.

**Table 5: Moses' sexual biography**

<i>First meeting</i>	<i>Partner types</i>	<i>His age</i>	<i>Her age</i>	<i>Duration of relationship</i>
Playing hide and seek with girls in the street	Playing	11	11	Still sees her
At the local shop	Playing	12	11	6 months
Sports Stadium, Thulamahanshe	Playing	12	11	2 months
Sports Stadium, Thulamahanshe	Playing	12	12	1 month
At school	Girlfriend	13	12	1 year
At a school soccer match	Girlfriend	14	NK	4 months
At school	Girlfriend	15	14	5 months
During school break	Girlfriend	16	15	10 months
Mother's younger sister organised the relationship	Girlfriend	16	15	1.5 years
No relationships	--	17	--	--
At school	Jolling	18	16	7 months
During a school trip to Kruger National Park	Jolling	18	17	5 months
Thulamahanshe school soccer game	Jolling	19	17	1 month
Thulamahanshe –mother's next door neighbour	Jolling	20	18	1 week
Hluvukani Village at a church conference	Jolling	21	20	Current
Hluvukani Village Development Summit party	Jolling	22	19	Current
Hluvukani village during a night vigil	Wife	22	19	Current
Locally in KwaBomba	Jolling	22	NK	Current
Locally in KwaBomba	Jolling	22	NK	Current

The significance of the relationship categories such as sex as 'play', 'real', 'recreational' and 'romantic' have implications for what young people consider as risky in terms of the transmission of HIV. The anonymity of recreational sexual relations and the lack of trust highlighted the importance of using condoms in these relationships. In contrast, sex in true love relationships stressed partner compatibility and trust between partners, and the desire for fertility (cf. Sobo 1995).

## **Sugar daddies and young girls**

Older men who had affairs with younger girls were called ‘Big Daddies’ (*ngamula*). These were usually relatively wealthy men, or men who had access to an income. They were also men such as teachers who could wield power over younger girls. ‘Big Daddies’ involved in sexual relationships with younger women were often criticised for exploiting younger women, taking advantage of their relative power and influence. Neighbourhood gossip described girls who ‘moved with the Big Daddies’. Yet, at the same time the material contributions men made toward women and their households was viewed in a favourable light and enhanced their respectability.

Young women also responded in different ways to older men’s attempts to have relationships. When Masingita was sixteen, her mathematics teacher made several sexual advances towards her that she successfully fended off: ‘He would tell me to visit his office after school saying that I needed extra lessons’. However, other girls she knew had sex with this same teacher, hoping that this would improve their chances of passing their exams. Patience Hlatswayo had a relationship with her teacher when she 16-years-old. The relationship was mediated through small gifts of luxury food he gave to her. When Msizi was 16 her teacher constantly harassed her until she gave in and agreed to have sex with him:

The teacher I had an affair with was staying at Thulamahanshe. His name was Siphamandla. He just came to work at KwaBomba High. He was a math teacher. It started in the class; if it was his period he would start asking me questions. When he was teaching he would always be rude to me. One day he called me to the staff room. He said ‘you know what I love you – that is why I am horrible to you in the class’ I told him to stop. He didn’t stop! He carried on doing the same thing. So I thought if I want to stop him I must fall in love with him. Just to shut his mouth.

A preference for older men who had access to incomes was expressed by some girls, especially in comparison to the cashless and unsophisticated village youth. Tinyiko, an 18-year-old, compared her current boyfriend, an older man from Johannesburg with younger boys who ‘just want to have sex’. She regarded young, ‘local’ boys with some disdain. ‘I had a boyfriend a year ago, and all he was interested in was sex. When I told him I wasn’t ready he told me that he would leave me. The boys here are always drunk (...) every girl is the same to them’. Access to cash to pay for gifts was fundamental to these relationships with older men. Xolani (22) and Dyondzeka (24) commented:

Xolani:

The reason is because the sugar daddies will buy me to sleep with them. They will give me money. The young boys don’t have money – they are still at school. It will end when me and the young guy break up, and I will continue with my sugar daddy.

Dyondzeka:

Other thing is that sugar daddies think that young girls are still young and their bodies look better than their wives. You will find that their wives at home are tired to have sex – sometimes they don’t want it. Young girls have more energy than their wives. I think sugar daddies are great because if you want something they will do it quicker than young guys. They will buy you *Chicken Licken* [fried chicken fast food] and clothes – whatever you want. Boyfriends don’t have money to do that kind of stuff.

Although older men who had sex with younger girls attracted considerable neighbourhood gossip, the circumstances of many families meant that the support that these men provided was welcomed and the relationships were tolerated.

## TRANSACTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Transactional sex or what Hunter (2002) fittingly describes broadly as the ‘materiality of everyday sex’ is prominent in the literature on AIDS (Dunkle et al. 2004; Kaufman & Stavrou 2002; Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Meekers & Calvès 1997; Wojcicki 2002a, 2002b). The literature offers a diversity of forms of transactional sex: as gift-giving between adolescent sweethearts (Kaufman & Stavrou 2002); ‘survival sex’ or ‘commodity sex’ (Hunter 2002; Wojcicki 2002a, 2002b); ‘formal’ commercial sex work (Wojcicki & Malala 2001). This indicates the inappropriateness of the Western concept of ‘sex worker’ and its adjunct assumptions that fail to capture the subtleties of these various forms of transactional sex (Standing 1992; White 1980). For example, Wojcicki (2002b) describes exchanges of sex for beer in shebeens. Hunter (2002) draws a distinction between ‘sex for survival’ and ‘sex for commodities’, noting how these distinctions are rooted in divergent historical transformations. Sexual affairs are often the only means by which women gain access to men’s earnings (Kotzè 1992).

Yet, sex is used to transact more than financial reward, and is not always related to poverty. Nor is the only reason for sex work, economic. Instead women seek ‘symbols of modern life’ (Leclerc-Madlala 2003, 214). Transactional sexual relationships can also be a way for young women to gain some form of power and to build their identities as women (See for example, Cole 2004). For instance, Huli women begin sex work not for economic reasons alone, but because of a kinship system that has failed them, and a combination of sexual violence, the indifference of male kinsmen, and bridewealth problems (Wardlow 2006).

In the discussion that follows I explore these themes and show how transactional sex was constructed in sometimes opposing ways by men and women, young and old.

### ***Ku piretsa and ku phanda***

A woman could have sex in exchange for beer or cash with a man she had just met at a tavern. This was called *ku piretsa* or *ku hluwa*. The term *piretsa* is derived from the English cognate ‘pirate’, implying that the woman ‘stole’ or ‘crooked’ the man by tricking him into thinking that she loved him. In some cases the woman would accept drinks from a man in a tavern without the intention of having sex with him.

Some forms of transactional relationships are spread over a longer period of time. For example, a young woman visited an old man once a month on pension days leaving him once she had taken his money. She would return after a month had passed to again stay with him so as to gain his pension money. Another young woman was labelled ‘moneylender’ (*machonyisa*); like a loan shark she took possession of her lover’s bankcard and withdrew his salary each pay day. These types of relationship were also referred to as ‘plucking a chicken’ (*ku hluwa*). Informants described how a single woman could have several different sexual partners, each of which provided for a different need. For example, men were referred to as having a variety of portfolios: the ‘minister of housing’ paid rental or bought building supplies; the ‘minister of communication’ paid for cell phone air time and so on.

In these narratives, men were regarded as sources of cash to be used and exploited, thereby stressing women’s agency and the vulnerability of men. Yet, women were subjected to moral critique for having an obscene ‘love for money’. This sometimes resulted in violent retributions.

Contra to these moralising discourses, women often framed their relationships in terms of economic survival. They defined the exchange of sex for material reward as doing *phanda*, a term borrowed from the IsiZulu *ukuphanda* meaning ‘to dig up or dig by scratching’ (Fassin et al. 2008; Wojcicki 2002a). The term became popular in the early 1990s and eclipsed the equivalent XiTsonga phrase ‘*ku hanza*’ ‘to scratch the ground, to be in search of food’ (Cuenod 1967). Women who did *ku phanda* were likened to chickens that indiscriminately peck in the yard and beyond, looking for morsels of food. *Ku phanda* was regarded as a form of labour (cf. Rebhun 1999a) through which one could survive and even accumulate wealth. It was a legitimate pursuit, the only option that impoverished women had for self-improvement and personal development.

Gladness, 28, offered her definition of *ku phanda*, based on her personal experiences:

*Ku phanda* is if someone goes out and tries to get money – even me I used to do the same thing, because of shortage of food at home, soap and clothes. At home sometimes my parents won’t give me everything I want, so I think it is better to go out and do the *ku phanda* thing. I am doing it because I can’t afford to buy clothes for myself and I just go around where there are many men and I knew one of them will start talking to me and then I will fall in love with him. In 1995 I realized that most girls are not demanding things from their parents - so why I do I want my parents to do everything for me. I start doing this *ku phanda* – I thought I was just trying it – it really works. It doesn’t make too much money...just to survive and if I want something for myself I can buy it.

### **Love, sex, money: Xolani and her many lovers**

The background to Xolani’s story is of growing up in a small and impoverished family. Xolani’s homestead is located in a neighbourhood where I conducted much of my fieldwork. The household head, MakwaXolani worked as seasonal labourer for a local farmer and former member of the Gazankulu Homeland administration who owned a



mango plantation. She received a weekly wage of R100 with which to support her five children. MakwaXolani's was a contract labourer for provincial road construction projects. After the birth of their fifth child he simply disappeared. News from one of his co-workers was that he met a woman while working in Witbank and now lived with her in Thembisa, a township on the East Rand.

Without a reliable source of income the household was often without food. MakwaXolani occasionally relied on neighbours for their support and an irregular food parcel from the Department of Health and Welfare. In 1999 the mud brick house in which the family lived was destroyed by torrential flooding. MakwaXolani and her children moved into a neighbour's one-roomed thatch hut. One adult, two adolescent children and three smaller children slept and lived together in the most unpleasant circumstances. The youngest children stayed home during the day because they could not afford the fees for crèche and school uniforms.

In 2005, MakwaXolani was a recipient of a two bedroom brick house, from the department of housing. Yet, the family continued to suffer. MakwaXolani and her husband originally moved to KwaBomba to create a better life for themselves, away from their relatives. Yet, several years on her face was pinched and thin from worry, constantly reminded of her situation by her hungry children who sometimes foraged in a neighbour's garbage dump for stale bread and food scraps. These events had a significant effect on Xolani, the eldest daughter.

In 2000, when Xolani was 22-years-old she started to have affairs with men in exchange for cash, food and commodities:

I just woke up one morning thinking ‘who is going to help me?’ I wanted money to buy food and clothes. Then I thought I would go out and ask them [men] for money. I thought no. I cannot go and ask for money without having an affair with that person. If he has got something he can give it to me like a gift. If I hear my mother complaining about something like there is no meat or tea bags, I will go out and ask from my boyfriends to buy what I need

Xolani’s boyfriends were numerous and varied. Each offered a different form of support. A man she met in Randfontein bought her groceries and made cash deposits varying between R100 and R200 into her bank account. Another man from KwaBomba, a teacher, purchased clothes for Xolani and her siblings at Christmas. Xolani was fairly cynical about these relationships. Of one of her lovers she said:

I didn’t love him – I just wanted his money. Because if you go out for *ku phanda* it is not that you love the person – you just want to crook the person. I just told myself I must just go out there and start crooking people.

Xolani had a fair degree of control over the nature of her relationships with men. She often broke off a relationship if a man became too oppressive and controlling. Her strategy was to create the conditions for support but to avoid the relationship becoming too much like a marriage. For example, Xolani moved in with Desmond, a young man who inherited his father’s business. He supported Xolani and gave her cash to start her own business selling clothing at pension days. However, Xolani deserted Desmond when it became apparent that he expected her to perform the role of the daughter-in-law (*makothi*), cooking, cleaning and doing the washing and ironing. On another occasion Xolani moved in with a man who worked as a petrol pump attendant. His long working hours meant that the two hardly ever saw each other although he expected Xolani to remain at home waiting for him. He also forbade her from meeting other men. Bored and frustrated, Xolani went into Acornhoek and Hoedspruit to meet men in the tavern

lounges. This angered Desmond and when he threatened to kill Xolani she left him for good.

Despite the nature of these relationships, Xolani also sought out lovers who would provide romance, sexual satisfaction as well as financial support. She gave a candid description of a former boyfriend.

First we will be touching each other and kissing, and then I will be on top of my boyfriend and touching his – you know what I mean – after that it will be the same thing as what I have done to him – licking me going down there. That is why I love him. Because the way he romances me makes me feel good. Sometimes I become crazy if I think about him. I have had many boyfriends – but this one is the best. Even just to look at him I just become tingly – even if I just think about the way he does those *dinges* [Afrikaans: things] to me<sup>6</sup>

Material support did not necessarily mean that there was a lack of affection. Support was a way of displaying love. Of a lover who lived in Randfontein she said: ‘My other boyfriend loves me very much. He is prepared to look after me and I am prepared to look after him’. Another boyfriend, a member of the South African Defence Force Xolani called ‘Mr BM’ (he drove an early model BMW) supported her well and was also romantic ‘he buys me things such as roses and groceries’. Mr BM took Xolani to hotels and guest lodges for dinners and overnight stays. Xolani admitted that she did not often have sex with Mr BM as he was only interested in her company.

Xolani’s description of her relationships with men shows a wide range of concerns: sexual satisfaction, romance, support, and access to luxury goods. Clearly it would be a mistake to collapse the rich variety of sentiments she expresses into ‘survival sex’ or ‘commodity sex’. The use of sex and promises of love to gain money and commodities are not merely rational exchanges. Rather, money within these relationships

was frequently invested with ‘emotional meanings’, and was used to express a wide range of sentiments: care, respect, love, authority, and trust (cf. Kaler 2006, 337)

## THE MARRIAGE PROCESS

Marriage in South Africa has steadily declined since the 1960s (Hunter 2007), and generally takes place later in life (Garenne et al. 2001). However, assessing what actually constitutes customary marriage is extremely problematic (cf. Budlender et al. 2004)

Marriage may better be described as a process rather than an event (Krige & Comaroff 1981). The process of paying bridewealth can take several years, effectively deferring marriage indeterminately (Hunter 2005; Stadler 1993). This can be ascribed to the financial barriers that men face in paying bridewealth. Bridewealth costs are high and sometimes undetermined, resulting in men’s indebtedness to their in-laws.

In KwaBomba, a marriage is regarded as complete following the ‘traditional’ (*mthimba*) or ‘white’ (*umshado*) church wedding ceremony, performed after bridewealth has been fully paid up. In the past, the *mthimba* was celebrated with traditional dancing (*muchongolo*). By the 1950s, few weddings were being performed. The *muchongolo* was effectively banned due to the often violent clashes during dances (Niehaus & Stadler 2004).

In the current setting the public performance of marriage has virtually disappeared. Only two weddings took place in KwaBomba during my fieldwork. A woman of 35 and her husband of the same age held a ‘white wedding’ (*umshado*) in a church and followed this with a feast at the bride and the groom’s homestead. The other, a traditional wedding (*mthimba*) was for a 46-year-old woman and her 58-year-old

husband who have lived together for over 20 years and have several children. The ceremony took place over a period of one year.

Nonetheless, many young adult villagers described themselves as ‘married’. Their relationships were based on co-residence and colloquially known as ‘take and sit’ (Afrikaans *vat en sit*). A co-residential relationship entails the payment of a fine known as *lavelani haleni* (‘search over here’ [for your daughter]) by the ‘husband’ to the ‘wife’s’ parents. This entitles the woman to stay for a short while with the prospective husband. She is awarded the status of a visitor, although she is expected to take responsibility for washing her own clothes (especially undergarments) and contributing towards cooking, fetching water and other household chores. This is an impermanent set up and the woman may leave at any time. Kotzé, writing about Dixie Village, to the south of KwaBomba, captures the vagaries of these relationships:

a marriage is taken to exist when a woman agrees to live with a man and takes up all the domestic duties of a wife at the man's home, with the intention of doing so on an enduring basis (irrespective of the fact that the bond may not last for long), and the man assumes the responsibility of providing the woman with cash, food, clothing, household utensils and basic furniture (irrespective of the extent to which he succeeds/fails to do so), even though *ndzovolo* (bridewealth) has not been delivered to the woman's parents (Kotzé 1992, 146)

Nokthula’s (25 years old and employed as a butcher’s assistant) story illustrates the whimsical nature of marital relationships:

I had three boyfriends and after that I told two of them I do not love them anymore. So I continued with the other one who was left...until he made me pregnant with a baby boy. We really felt blessed. We stayed for a long time visiting each other until he had finished university. After that I started working at the butchery [in Bloemfontein]. I must say it was not nice for us to be staying far away from each other. He started having affairs and I also started to have boyfriends in Bloemfontein. So he heard about my new boyfriends he became

angry with me. He started coming home to KwaBomba with his new girlfriend. So it is where I decided he doesn't love me anymore so that is when I started going out with my new boyfriend really seriously.

Co-residential arrangements may be based on the promise to pay bridewealth to the wife's parents using a payment called 'to show' (*ku ti komba*). At the *ku ti komba* ceremony the prospective wife is asked if she accepts the money. Her assent legitimises the residential arrangement and she can move to her 'husband's' homestead. Yet, the in-laws usually refuse to accept the full value of the *ku ti komba* as a payment toward bridewealth and impose cash fines for transgressions. For example, if pregnancy preceded payment, a cleansing ceremony (*ku xuva*)<sup>7</sup> first needs to be performed before *ku ti komba*. The *ku xuva* entails the slaughter of a goat (supplied by the man) and the sprinkling of the contents of its gall bladder (the chyme) around the homestead. Failure to perform this ritual will result in the prospective husband being fined.

Bridewealth negotiations may begin after paying *ku ti komba*. After the first child is born, the woman will earn the prefix 'mother of' (*makwa*) and the man will be called 'father of' (*bava*) followed by the first born child's name. At the second bridewealth payment ceremony a small ceremony (*ku mhamba*) is performed to request ancestral sanction of the union. A ritual libation of sorghum beer is made and the ancestors (*swikwembu*) are asked to protect the new wife from harm.

Each part of the marriage process requires financial investments and participation on kin. Moreover, final bridewealth payments can be in excess of twenty to thirty thousand Rand. Many couples live for years without having finalised bridewealth payments. Even after bridewealth has been paid, the wife's parents can claim additional funds from the husband. This means that marriage is always in a somewhat ambiguous

and fluid state. This can serve women's interests. For example, young women may leave their husbands claiming that bridewealth had not been paid in full (Stadler 1993).

Although bridewealth is inflated, payments are made in a series of instalments. This means that a woman or her parents can consider refunding bridewealth if necessary.

Given Mayinga was a drunken and abusive man, often forcing his wife Ntombi to have sex with him even though she refused. Things had steadily worsened since he had paid *ku ti komba* of R5000. He claimed that since bridewealth had been paid he had rights over her body. Eventually Ntombi threatened to leave him. When they argued said that she could easily return the money he paid in bridewealth. Ntombi also resisted Given's requests to have a civil marriage because this would bind her to a relationship that may be difficult to get out of. She pointed out that traditional marriages were more flexible and did not require courts and lawyers.

The flexibility and ambiguity of 'traditional' marriage also favoured men's aspirations. Prince was 23 and still at school, yet he described himself as married to two women, Nini and Oreal. He first met Nini at a bottle store where he proposed his love for her. After several weeks of pursuing Nini she eventually agreed. After Nini gave birth to Prince's child the three started to live together although Prince only paid *ku ti komba*. Prince then met Oreal. 'She is the most beautiful woman, white and fat, with curves. All the teachers and school students were looking at her'. One day during school Prince found himself alone with Oreal in class. 'When I talked to her, I felt as if she's mine. And I was pitching a tent [getting an erection], but she didn't see it'. Later, Prince and Oreal walked home from school and they agreed that they were in love with each other. They had sex at Oreal's home when her brother was at work and soon Oreal fell pregnant giving

birth to a son. Prince paid Orel's brother R50 to accept the damages (*ku hlawula*) and promised to start paying bridewealth. Although Oreal and Nini are aware of each other, Prince has not let on that he is still seeing Nini. Prince did not think that having two women at the same time was in anyway problematic, and regarded this as a strategy to assess which of the two would make a better wife. 'I am waiting for the one who is making the mistake. Like if one of them goes with another man'.

A consequence of the ambiguous state of many marriages is a high turnover of partners. Although many people regard themselves as married, these are extremely fluid situations. The following two cases illustrate these dynamics.

### **Ntokoto and Nyeleti**

Ntokoto was 18 when he impregnated his girlfriend, Nyeleti. After accepting the pregnancy, and performing *ku xuva*, Ntokoto paid *ku ti komba* and Nyeleti joined Ntokoto at his parent's homestead with their baby. He was unemployed and depended on his father's earnings as a school night watchman. Nyeleti wanted to complete her schooling but Ntokoto's mother expected her to care for her baby and assist her with household chores. Ntokoto then discovered that Nyeleti had had an affair with a school teacher and refuted paternity. The couple divorced. Ntokoto then met Thandiwe, a young woman who worked for a local NGO. Yet, Thandiwe constantly cheated on Ntokoto and refused to settle down with him. Ntokoto decided to propose to Mercy, a young trainee nurse. They lived together and Ntokoto paid *ku ti komba*. Yet, Ntokoto was still very in love with Thandiwe. Although he liked Mercy he did not love her. For two years Mercy and Ntokoto lived together as husband and wife, while Ntokoto carried on a secret affair with Thandiwe, sharing her with her other partners.



## Michael and Eunice

Michael paid *ku ti komba* and settled down with Eunice and their first born son. As a trainee policeman Michael resided in police barracks away from home. Eunice complained that Michael came home late at night and sometimes spent three or four days away from home. Michael refused to account for his movements. After one year Michael visited Eunice's mother and explained that he intended to break off the relationship with Eunice. Michael had been having an affair with Brenda, a work colleague. A few months later Michael married Brenda in a civil wedding ceremony and purchased a house in a Johannesburg township. This relationship lasted six months. At the time she was marrying Michael, Brenda was having an affair with a senior colleague. When Michael discovered this he requested a divorce, losing the house to Brenda in the process. After a few months Michael paid *ku ti komba* and established a new household with a much younger woman. Within the space of two years, Michael had three 'wives'.

As these cases suggest, the flexibility of marriage led to a rapid turnover in marital partnerships. The brittleness of conjugal unions is underscored by data from research conducted elsewhere in Bushbuckridge. In an earlier study, I estimated that 42% of marriages ended in separation or divorce (Stadler 1995). Niehaus' research in Impalahoek recorded that 27% of 227 marriages were dissolved (2001, 100). Kotzè (1992) found that in Dixie Village (southern Bushbuckridge), only one man was single and unmarried, while 41 men had married 70 times (some up to five times each) and 69 women had married 71 times. The ambivalence and instability of marriage leads to a rapid turnover of partners which potentially exposes both men and women to HIV infection (cf: Nabaitu et al. 1994). Most significantly, sexual relationships within

marriage are defined as procreative, signifying that condoms are not used during sexual intercourse.

### **GOING OUTSIDE THE HOMESTEAD: EXTRA-MARITAL RELATIONS**

Extra-marital relationships were talked about as ‘going outside’, or ‘eating outside’ the homestead, referring to having sexual relations that were not recognised by the payment of bridewealth. Men legitimised extra-marital relationships by referring to the practice of polygamy (cf. Spiegel 1991) and reasoned that they kept their mistresses secret because their wives would not support the idea of a second wife. In the current setting polygamous relationships were very unusual. During the early 1970s most households were resettled into residential stands. This curtailed men’s ability to maintain large households and to create separate living quarters for different wives. I knew of one man, a healer, who had three wives in one homestead. Older male migrants continued to maintain urban and rural wives, although the costs associated with running multiple households made this unattractive.

Married women usually rejected the idea of sharing their husband with another wife. For example, Jerry was a married man who also had a long term relationship with a woman from another village. Jerry wanted his mistress to live together with his wife under one roof. However his wife objected. Secretly, he consulted a healer (*n’anga*) who gave him magical medicine (*muthi*) to cause his wife to become fond of his mistress. Another married man attempted to trick his wife into accepting his mistress as the second wife. While she was out shopping he invited his mistress to move into the house. Upon

her return his wife was told that if she did not agree to the new wife she would have to leave.

Wives were not powerless against mistresses. In a case heard by the KwaBomba Civic Association<sup>8</sup>, Jacobs Sibuyi, a 38-year-old married man was charged by his 35-year-old wife and mother of his four children, with neglecting his conjugal duties. She alleged that Jacobs, who worked as a night watchman (*amaxingalane*), came home from work every morning at eight o'clock. Shortly thereafter he would leave the house to visit his mistress to have sex with her. Jacobs would eat lunch and return home before six o'clock each night to collect his supper and go to work. At the hearing, Jacobs denied having an affair claiming that he suffered from 'painful kidneys' that made it difficult for him to ejaculate<sup>9</sup>. Yet, Jacob's mistress was present at the meeting and confirmed that Jacobs made love to her 'several times a day'. At the insistence of the committee members, Jacobs apologised to his wife and agreed that he would try to have sex with her on a more regular basis. Two weeks later Jacobs' wife returned to inform the civic members that little had changed. The civic recalled Jacobs to a second hearing and pronounced him guilty of failing to meet his responsibilities to his wife and sentenced to a public whipping. He was lashed several times on his back with a whip (*sjambok*. Afrikaans: a whip made of animal hide or hardened rubber), by a member of the executive committee of the Civic Association. A witness recalled that Jacobs screamed from the pain while onlookers laughed. Later Jacobs' wife reported that her husband had started to have sex with her on a regular basis. Jacobs was praised by the civic for amending his ways. He was permitted to continue to have a relationship with his paramour, but was warned not to neglect his wife.

Mistresses are regarded like wives, but not all men want their mistresses to become second wives. Some men maintained several secret mistresses. Mistresses were referred to as a 'secret wife' (*xigangu*) or 'under the armpit' (*makwapheni*) or 'roll-on' (like the deodoriser). They maintained secret wives financially, sometimes to the detriment of their wives and families. For example, men purchased building materials, paid for school uniforms and helped out with funeral expenses. Some men maintained a large network of mistresses. A well-known money lender (*machonyisa*) had mistresses in each of the six villages where he transacted business. He provided building supplies, furniture, and paid for their children's school fees. A retired school headmaster purchased an extremely expensive bed, tiled the floor, purchased a used Toyota, and regularly purchased groceries for his mistress. These expenditures created competition between wives and mistresses, particularly once the man died. After the money lender died his son's took back the furniture and even the corrugated tin that roofed his mistresses' houses.

Men also pointed out that a mistress is different to a wife. Unlike a wife, a mistress is sexually adventurous and provides sexual satisfaction. Rothmans, a 40-year old store manager recalled that his mistress once surprised him by exposing her breasts to him in the dining room. He found this highly erotic. In contrast he described his wife as dull and unadventurous in bed. Men felt free with their mistresses to experiment with different 'styles' such as 'dog style (from behind)', 'woman on top' and 'sheep style' (standing up). Sex with extra-marital lovers also expressed secretive sexual desires. He remarked

Even though we Blacks live together with our wives at home, the men have something they are hiding that is secret. They are afraid to do something especially in bed. So the mistress is free to do everything she likes to do. She will do different styles. Your wife will do it [sex] normally.

As my informants appeared to say, sex outside of the domestic sphere with mistresses and sex workers is exciting and hugely erotic in comparison to the ‘utilitarian sexuality of the domestic sphere’ (Fordham 1995, 172). ‘(W)hen compared with the world of normal life it seems to function, in a sense as an alternative model of the sexual universe, where anything is possible’ (Parker 1992, 231). In contrast, sex within marital relationships was regarded as solely procreative. A wife who suggested alternative sexual positions or styles ran the risk of being accused of having affairs. Likewise a man who expected anything other than normal sex showed disrespect towards his wife.

This account of Dorcas, a 42 year old woman, was recounted to me by her friend and neighbour. Dorcas had an affair with a soldier from Phalaborwa. This man bought everything for her including a car. She had everything in the house. They stayed together for many years but were not married. After her husband met another woman he began to change. If she cooked at home he would say that her food was shit, whereas before he loved her food. He would not eat at home. Sometimes when he was off he would go to his new *cherri* [girlfriend]. They would fight often. He stopped supporting her and buying food for her. She went to the management at the army base and asked them to help. They offered her a job working in the kitchen. She was then sent for training and then she was given a job cleaning guns. One day her ex came into the place where she was working, broke the window and started beating her, whipped her on her back with a pistol. She fainted. When she came to she went to the police and reported him. He was arrested. She then told the army that she was returning home to look after her mother and she wanted to

return to school. Things were really bad; she had no money and no one to support her. She left school and she met another man from Giyani. This man really loved her but the *mamazala* [mother-in-law] really hated her because people from Giyani really do not like people from Bushbuckridge. They call them *dya ghana* (eat while you are looking up at the sky). Bushbuckridge people call the Giyani people *nwa didana* (whether it is hot or cold they always wear the traditional Shangaan dress). At night she would sleep and feel a very cold wind going through the house, even during summer. She suspected that the *mamazala* was sending this cold wind into the house. If the husband was away and working at night it was even worse. Other people could not see or feel the wind that she was complaining of. She decided to go home because she was afraid that the *mamazala* would end up killing her. Her husband said that she must not go home, but she returned to live with her mother again. Currently she has no permanent lover but has boyfriends. She does not have children.

For women, the status of the mistress was in many respects regarded as superior to that of a wife. The following case draws attention to the apparent benefits that unmarried mistresses enjoyed in contrast to married women.

### **Shirley's Dr Love**

Shirley (a 25-year old unemployed woman) gave an account of her relationship with a man she called Dr Love, a 34-year old, married, taxi driver. One day after giving Shirley a lift and spending the day with her, Dr Love parked his taxi under a tree in an open field and chatted with her. Shirley reconstructed the discussion between herself and Dr Love:

He asked ‘do you realize what is going on here?’ I said ‘No’. [He said] ‘I am doing this because I love you’. I said ‘Eh-eh [no]. I don’t love you’. He asked me why. I said ‘I don’t know what kind of love you have’. He said ‘the love I have I want to marry you but I want to learn about you first’. I agreed that I would like to learn about him as well and we both agreed to wait two years before making a decision to marry.

Shirley refused to have sex with Dr Love for over eight months. ‘I didn’t trust him. There are others who say I love you but they just want to taste you and then they go. They are liars’. Because Shirley lived with her parents, Dr Love would take her to guest houses and motels when they wanted to have sex. Although Shirley’s position as the secret ‘second wife’ was precarious, she enjoyed a life-style that compared well with that of the wife. She remarked

It is better to be a mistress than a wife. Although some husbands take their wives out it is not very usual. If you are a wife you are the wife of the house so you must stay at home. Even if you want to go out with him he will stop you and say ‘stay at home!’

### **CASUAL SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS**

In contrast to the long-term relationships between men and their mistresses, married men also had short-term relationships. These were more like the youthful sexual recreational relationships described earlier in the chapter. They were fleeting sexual engagements based on chance meetings with young women who hitched rides in cars on the main road, or while drinking in the taverns and shebeens.

In their narratives, men stressed their need for sex but not for companionship or love. A casual affair with a tavern woman was distinct from an affair with a mistress. Israel, a young man who sold electricity at the local post office lived with his wife and child. Each night Israel drank at a local tavern. He would buy a girl a drink and then have

sex in the bushes with her on the road side. He remarked: ‘after fucking<sup>10</sup> her I always go home and wake up my wife and do it [have sex] with her.’ He did not feel that he was cheating on his wife because he did not pursue a relationship with these casual partners.

Abel Magagule, a young teacher, described the conduct of a former colleague, Lifebuoy Gumede. He was a ‘drunkard’ who would ‘fuck anyone who was available. He didn’t want an affair – he just wanted to fuck’. Lifebuoy drank in shebeens until ten o’clock every night and would usually find a young girl to have sex with. A former pupil described Lifebuoy’s behaviour:

He was going up and down. Even now if you wanted to visit him you would not find him. Even if you went at five o’ clock you wouldn’t get him. Even if you went at eight o clock you wouldn’t get him. He was still going up and down and searching for the ladies or the girls

The social spaces in which men drank shaped the dynamics of the relationships formed in these circumstances<sup>11</sup>. Places where people drink are distinctively masculine (van Jaarsveld 2005). Drinking and womanising form part of the repertoire of ‘male privileges’ (Rebhun 1999a). Alcohol consumption and casual sex are intertwined activities that are seen to ‘go together’ (Fordham 1995). Public drinking is ‘the male ritual par excellence, in as much as it is one in which in men constitute and reconstitute their potency and masculine identity in a theatre of self-construction’ (Fordham 1995, 163). Public drinking was one of the ways in which young males asserted their claim to masculinity.

Young women who drank at shebeens and taverns were regarded as ‘loose’ (*ngwavava*) and as prostitutes (*ngwadla*) and were considered to be overly sexually aggressive. As one of my informants put it, ‘they are too cheeky’: they spoke in loud

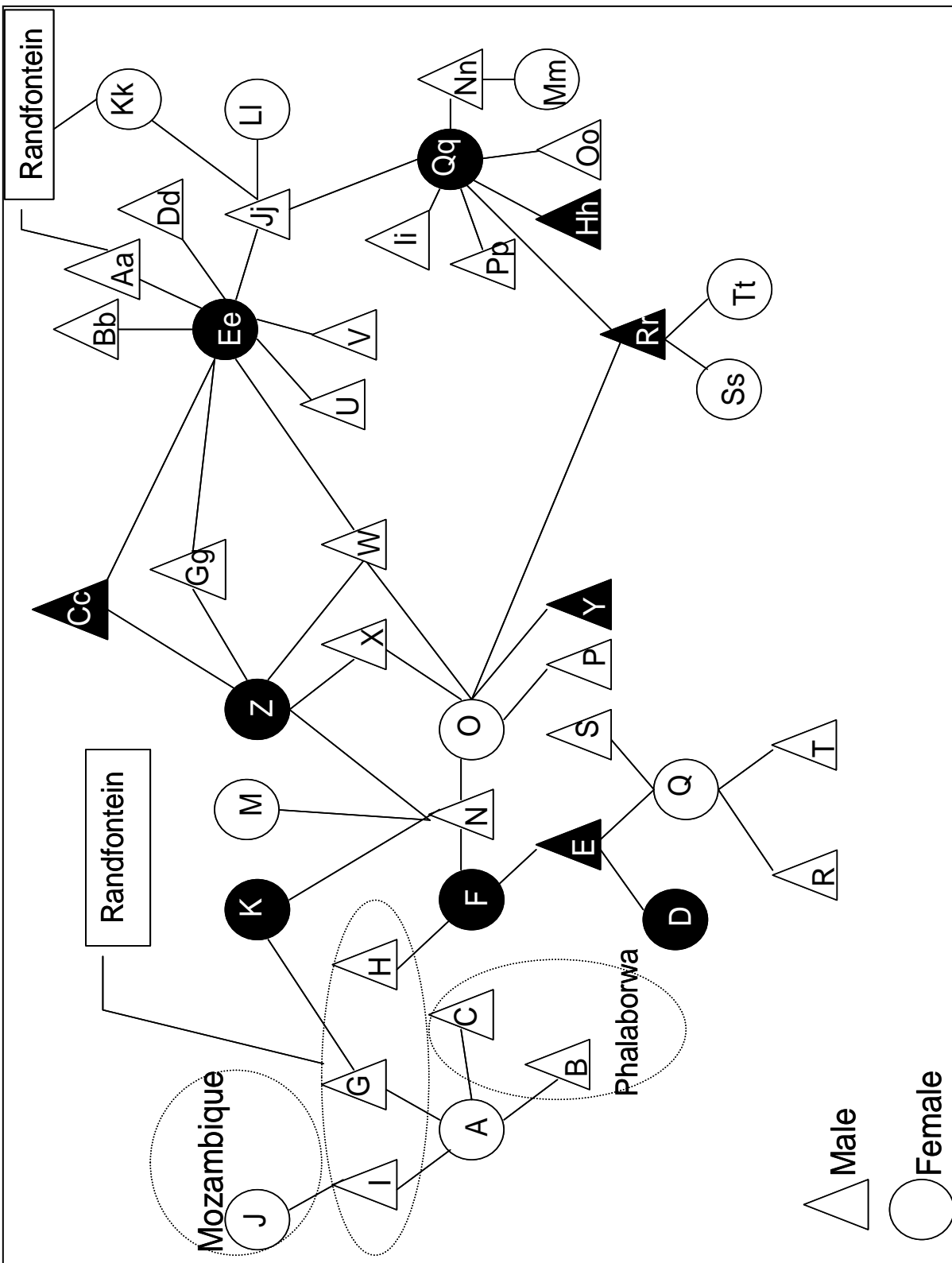


voices, smoked cigarettes, drank beer and made sexual overtures to the male drinkers. Men would hardly ever consider taking their girlfriends to shebeens and tavern lounges. Shebeens were places not deemed fit for respectable women. When a few young women came to Sollys' Tavern with their babies on their backs and started dancing and drinking, the male drinkers chased them away, threatening to beat them with sticks and bottles. My male informants agreed that these settings were not places to meet 'decent' women.

### **SEXUAL NETWORKS OF INFECTION**

So far I have argued that a result of a diversity of relationship forms is the emergence of multiple and coterminous sexual relationships. Different forms of relationship are defined as responding to different needs both material and emotional, creating the possibilities for a multitude of relationships that occur at the same time. The relationships are most conducive to the spread of HIV are those that are transacted over time and in space such as those between men and their wives and their mistresses. This is evident in the structure of sexual networks, such as the one portrayed in Figure 2. This network is based on a post-hoc analysis of data collected through sexual biographies and neighbourhood accounts of other peoples' sexual relationships. A review of this material revealed that certain named individuals were linked through sexual relationships, sometimes at the same time, and often in multiple ways.

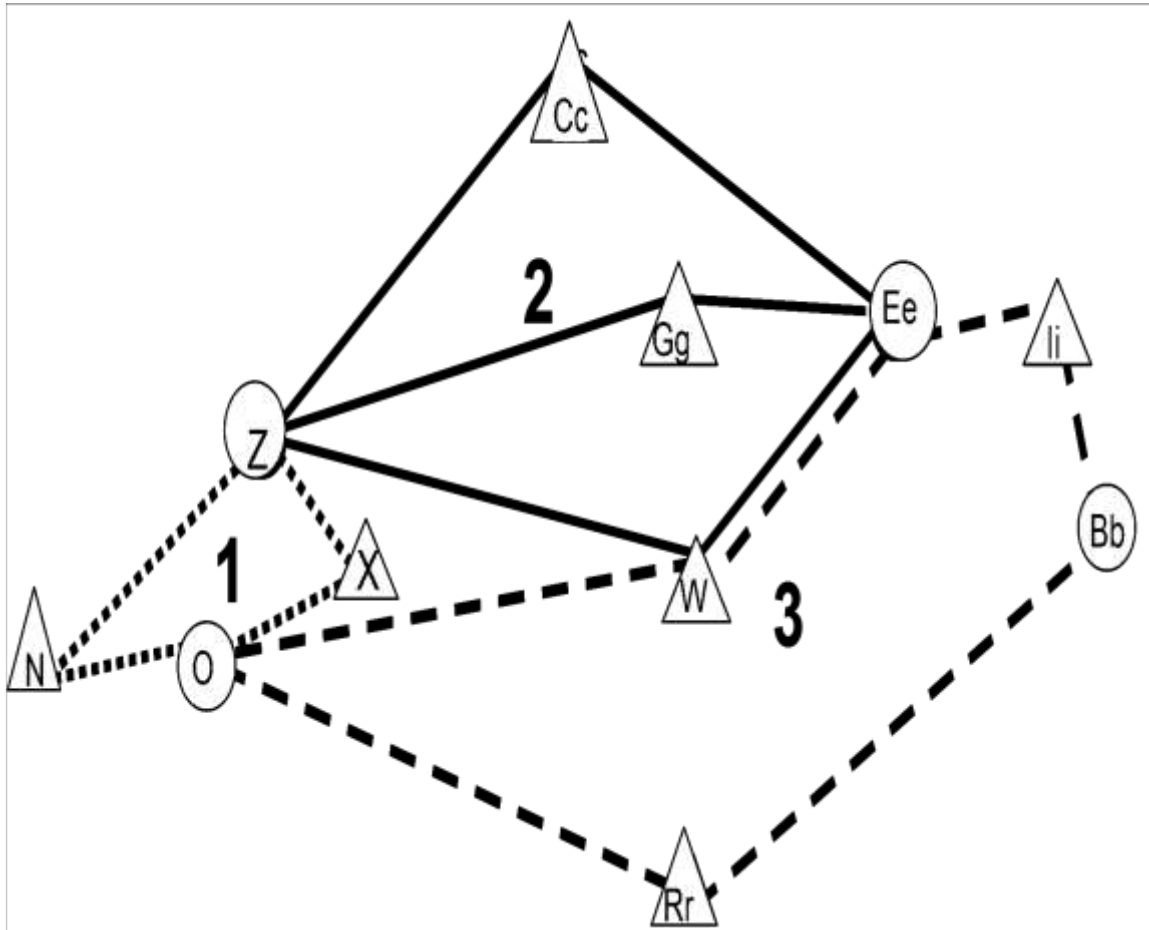
Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of a sexual network



Demographic features: The sexual network depicted in Figure 1 comprises 41 individuals. More males (27) than females (14) make up the network. Ages ranged between 19 and 64, with an average age of 28 for females and 39 for males. The network also represented a wide range of social classes. Included in the network were teachers (5), policepersons (3), businessmen (8), truck drivers (3), taxi operators (2), unemployed (12), scholars (2), self-employed (4), and two are unknown.

The network spread beyond Bushbuckridge and included individuals from Randfontein, Tzaneen, Phalaborwa and even Mozambique. For example *J* is *I*'s wife; *I* is a mine worker employed in Randfontein who maintains three households: in Beline (Gaza Province in Mozambique) where his wife resides, in Randfontein where he has a small shack, and in KwaBomba where he has helped his mistress (*a*) build a house. This not only gives the network national and international interconnectedness with other sexual networks, but creates the opportunity for multiple sources of HIV to enter into the network.

Sexual partnerships: Notably, more men (11) than women (7) had multiple sexual partners. Seven of the 27 men had two sexual partners, while four had three or more sexual partners. However, on average, women tended to have a higher number of sexual partners. Seven of the women in the network had three or more sexual partners. *Ee* had nine sexual partners, and *Qq* had six partners.



**Figure 3: Diagram of a sexual network showing the three main network hubs**

Multiple linkages: The sexual network has a fairly robust structure due to the existence of multiple linkages between individuals and parts of the network. Figure 3, portrays the network as consisting of three sub-networks which are composed of the following individuals: (1) *N, Z, O, X*; (2) *O, W, Ee, Jj, Qq, Rr*; (3) *Z, C, Ee, W, Gg*. Each of these sub-networks is connected to the other through more than one relationship: **1** is connected to **2** through *O*'s relationship with *W*, but also *Z*'s connection to *Cc*; **1** is connected to **3** through *O*'s relationship with *W* but also with *Rr*; **2** is connected to **3** via *Ee*'s relationship with *W* but also between *Ee, Gg* and *Cc*.

AIDS deaths: Six males and six females were identified as having died from AIDS related infections. Notably, nine of these individuals were those who also had multiple partnerships. However, and equally important, two men and one woman were in single partnerships.

This analysis of a sexual network reaffirms the significance of migrant movement, forms of transactional sexual relationships and long term unions between men and their wives and mistresses. The network is broad in terms of spatial spread, but also with regard to social demographics, involving a wide range of men and women. This means that even those who occupy fairly peripheral positions in the network have the potential to be exposed to HIV. The overlapping relationships that create multiple connections between individuals mean that the network can survive even if individuals leave.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter underscores the observation that multiple, concurrent sexual partnerships facilitate the spread of HIV through sexual networks. This translates into a need for HIV prevention messages to call for a reduction in the number of sexual partners, to diminish the connections between one and others in sexual networks. Yet, it is critical that the emergence and prevalence of multiple concurrent partnerships is understood in terms of social and economic transformations and that the focus of prevention interventions address the underlying structural reasons for multiple partnerships. To understand why multiple concurrent sexual partnerships occur requires an understanding of the social structure and meanings of these relationships; in other words their social and cultural construction (Parker 2001).

In their sexual biographies, my informants described the many different ways in which sexual relations could be defined and interpreted. The multiple meanings attached to these relationships legitimised having multiple relationships without necessarily engendering conflict. Sex with one partner constructed as a long term romantic relationship did not contradict having another partner for support, companionship or sexual experience. Men and women's narratives highlighted that sex was regarded as a means of social reproduction as well as satisfying emotional needs. Having many partners ensured that all their needs could be satisfied.

A focus on the social structure of sexual relationships avoids the pitfalls of ascribing HIV risk solely to individual behaviours and deficits in knowledge. The study of sexual networks reveals that individual sexual behaviours do not necessarily determine risk of HIV infection. Instead it points toward individuals' positions within the network and their interconnectedness with others. Sexual networks help to explain the dispersal of HIV. Yet the question that remains is why such networks continue to persist despite the obvious risks of infection (cf. Thornton 2009).

One of the reasons for the durability of sexual networks is the multiple linkages between clusters within the networks. As was clearly illustrated in the case study presented in this chapter, the death or departure of an individual from the network does not undermine its internal structure because of the presence of multiple linkages.

Another important feature of the sexual network is its invisibility. The sexual network is an invisible structure to those who constitute it. This is because certain forms of relationship are secret. For example, extramarital affairs may be kept hidden from spouses. Moreover, members of the network may not be aware of the existence of others

in the network due to geographical separation. In the case study presented in the chapter, the sexual network transcended national and international borders.

The connections within a sexual network may only become partly visible if individual members become ill or die from HIV/AIDS. Yet suspicions of AIDS are suppressed and hidden. There is seldom public acknowledgement that a particular individual died from AIDS. Without this acknowledgement, the network is able to continue to develop. This may also explain why silences surround death from AIDS. Revealing the cause of death as AIDS threatens to make apparent the relationships and flows of infection between individuals. In the next chapter we start to explore in more depth the ways in which AIDS was concealed and revealed in everyday life.

## END NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> The epidemiological concept of ‘core groups’ refers to small numbers of people infected with HIV or sexually transmitted infections that transmit the disease and therefore sustain epidemics. ‘Bridge populations’ are comprised of persons who have sex with core group members and with the general population (Aral 2000). The idea of risk groups is additionally problematic as it promotes blame and a false sense of immunity amongst those who are not defined as at risk.
- <sup>2</sup> For the majority of girls and boys in KwaBomba, coming of age falls outside of parental regulation and authority. Many children grow up with limited adult supervision. A survey of school going children undertaken in Bushbuckridge reported that 18% of respondents lived without either of their biological parents and 43% with only one biological parent, usually their mothers (Stadler et al. 1996). A detailed analysis of the insecurities of childhood in the lowveld can be found in van der Waal (1996) and Kotzè (1992).
- <sup>3</sup> Approximately half of South African adolescents are sexually active by the age of 16 (Eaton et al. 2003). In a national survey, the median age of sexual debut was 16 for males and 17 for females (Pettifor et al. 2005). A survey conducted by the Health Systems Development Unit (HSDU) of adolescent sexual health amongst 900 school going youth aged 16 to 21 years reported a slightly earlier average age of sexual debut of 15 (Stadler et al. 1996). These surveys define sexual debut in terms of penile-vaginal

penetrative sex. Yet, my informants made a clear distinction between the play sex of childhood and the real sex of later adolescence.

- <sup>4</sup> The words *jolling* and *joller* were probably first associated with the sub-cultural style of the white male ‘Ducktails’ in the 1950s (Mooney 1998). They also appear in Malan’s biographical account of coming of age in Johannesburg in the 1960s: ‘The word is essentially untranslatable, but any tattooed gangster from the coloured slums could define its essential ingredients: *drank, dagga, dobbel en vok* – drink, dope, dice, and fucking’. (Malan 1990, 52) Epprecht (2001) notes that *jolling* means selling boys for prostitution and for anal sex.
- <sup>5</sup> Being a church member does not imply protection against HIV, but as Garner (2000) argues, religious affiliation may reduce extra-marital and pre-marital sexual activity.
- <sup>6</sup> The interview from whence this quote comes was conducted by a female research assistant. It is unlikely that she would have been quite so open in my presence.
- <sup>7</sup> The chyme from the gall bladder of the goat has cleansing properties and is used in Kgaga mortuary rituals (Hammond-Tooke 1981, 92). The use of the chyme in the *ku xuva* is intended to cleanse the family of pollution resulting from the pre-marital pregnancy.
- <sup>8</sup> The Civic Association is a village based group that usually deals with cases of common law (assault, accusations of witchcraft, domestic conflict), as the first step before referring these to the *bhandla* (court of elders) who could in turn report to the *kgoro wa hosi* (chiefs court) and finally to the magistrate or social worker. Criminal cases were often first heard by the civic association community policing forum and then referred to the magistrate. In the case under discussion, Jacobs Sibuyi was asked to sign consent to be lashed. This was to stop him from laying a charge of assault against the members of the civic association who meted out the punishment.
- <sup>9</sup> This was consistent with a widely held idea that the kidneys cleansed the blood and were essential for sexual functioning.
- <sup>10</sup> The act of having sex was described by the verb *ku kanza* which also describes stamping maize meal in a mortar and a pestle. The penile – vaginal imagery is obvious.
- <sup>11</sup> Flowers’ *et al.* (2000) observations of interactions between gay men in pubs, public toilets and parks (the ‘bars, bogs and bushes’) illustrate this point extremely well. For example, meetings in pubs were more likely to engender conversation between men. Patrons were also under constant surveillance from others in the bar which encouraged restraint. In contrast, meetings in the parks and toilets were spontaneous, clandestine and impersonal, with no need for conversation or discussion, let alone negotiations around safer sex. See also Henricksson & Månsson’s (1995) ethnography of a gay men’s sauna in Stockholm. Certain spaces within the sauna where sexual advances are acceptable are classified as ‘hot’, while the ‘protected’ areas were spaces where sexual advances are not permitted.