



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
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**‘Low-risk Youth?’: Students, Campus Life and HIV at a University in  
Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

University and government authorities in Zimbabwe, and indeed in many African countries, have tended to downplay the presence of HIV and AIDS on university campuses. The general belief seems to be that university students' high levels of schooling somehow protect them from HIV infection, even though existing evidence suggests otherwise. Consequently, very little is known about university students' specific vulnerabilities to HIV infection. The few interventions that are being implemented in university campuses are often based on generic models of 'youth sexual behaviour' that fail to take into account the many ways that university students' experiences are different from those of other young people.

Through the use of ethnography, the thesis examines how institutional factors and 'campus cultures' shape students' sexual behaviour at the University of Zimbabwe, as well as students' expectations from intimate relationships and the meanings that they attach to sex, sexuality, love and romance. A key point I make throughout the thesis is that where individuals are located—both spatially and temporally—is just as important for understanding youth sexuality and the HIV epidemic as are other 'risk' factors, such as socio-cultural beliefs and poverty. The thesis also explores how 'HIV risk' is constituted, understood, deployed and avoided by university students. I argue here that 'HIV risk' behaviours such as transactional sex, multiple and concurrent partnerships and the non-use of condoms take on vastly different meanings when they are practiced by university students and within the context of a university campus. It is therefore incorrect



to abstract ‘HIV risk’ behaviours from their immediate contexts as many interventions do.



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Dedicated to the memory of Tarisayi Chabwinja.



## ACRONYMS

ABC	Abstain, Be faithful, Condom use
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
GB	Green Bomber
HIV	Human Immuno Virus
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
PSI	Population Services International
NABA	Non-Academic Bachelors Association
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SEC	Student Executive Council
SHAPE	Sustainability, Hope, Action, Prevention, Education
SHS	Student Health Services
UBA	University Bachelors Association
UNAIDS	United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS
USA	University Spinsters Association
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UZ	University of Zimbabwe





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