



## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Sometime in the 1990s a rumour began circulating that forty percent of students who had recently graduated from the University of Zimbabwe (henceforth referred to simply as UZ) had tested HIV positive. This statistic was alarming for two reasons. First, it was apparently based on a cohort of recent graduates rather than on a representative sample of the total student body. Second, the statistic was double the national HIV prevalence at the time. As with most rumours, however, this one was more useful for what it revealed about students' general fears and concerns, than it was for the truth of its contents (see Fine 2007; Stadler 2003; White 2000). In the UZ case, the forty-percent statistic appeared to reflect three key anxieties: namely, students' concerns about high-risk sexual behaviour at the institution; students' fears about their own vulnerability to HIV infection during their time on campus; and concerns about the lack of any meaningful responses to HIV on campus by university authorities. Over the years this rumour has become muted. But the sense that the UZ campus is a breeding ground for HIV infection has remained pervasive among students.

Unfortunately, university authorities and the government have tended to downplay the presence of the epidemic at the institution. There appears to be a general belief that university students do not constitute a 'high-risk' population for HIV infection, especially when compared to in-school youth or youth from poor and marginalized backgrounds. University students' high levels of schooling are seen as somehow protective, even though existing evidence suggests otherwise and points to a rather

complicated relationship between level of education and risk of infection. In Zimbabwe, HIV prevalence among men was shown to decrease with increasing levels of education. But an opposite pattern was observed for women (*Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey 2005-6*: 223). Although the classification of individuals into ‘high risk’ and ‘low risk’ populations is a useful strategy, which enables public health practitioners to determine which populations to target and to decide where to direct scarce resources, it has some major disadvantages. Categories of ‘risk’ mask and oversimplify the nature of HIV and AIDS and result in the marginalization of those groups that are erroneously classified as being at ‘low risk’ for HIV infection (Kleinmann 1997), such as university students. Furthermore, in Zimbabwe where the HIV epidemic is generalized and just about everyone is ‘at risk’ of infection, the notion of ‘risk groups’ is misleading.

The lack of any published data on HIV prevalence among university students in Zimbabwe, and indeed in much of Africa, has resulted in this group of youth being sidelined by HIV prevention efforts, most of which are directed at in-school and out-of-school youth from poor backgrounds—who are considered to be at ‘high risk’ of infection (see Bassett and Kaim 2000; Gregson et al 2002). Furthermore, because very little is known about university students’ specific vulnerabilities to HIV infection, the few interventions that have been developed for them are usually based on generic models of ‘youth sexual behaviour’, and do not take into account the many ways that university students’ experiences are different from those of other young people. Cairns et. al. (2006:160) argue that universities have been lukewarm in their response to HIV because ‘the cost of mounting HIV/AIDS programmes for students at universities represents a cost without any prospect of direct benefit accruing later’. This is because students are

only at university for limited periods, often three to five years, and universities thus have no way of assessing the effectiveness of their interventions. It is telling, too, that even in countries like South Africa, where universities have been proactive in responding to the HIV and AIDS in its universities, the first nationwide survey to determine HIV prevalence among university students (*HEAIDS Report 2010*) was only carried out in 2008. It entailed twenty-three tertiary institutions in South Africa and it revealed an HIV prevalence of 3.4% among students compared to the national prevalence of eighteen percent. South Africa is therefore an exception in this regard.

In this thesis I attempt to do three things: (a) to examine how ‘campus cultures’ shape the sexual behaviour of students at the UZ, their expectations from intimate relationships and the meanings that they attach to sex, sexuality, love and romance; (b) to investigate how students construct, enforce, reproduce, rethought and challenge masculine and feminine identities; (c) to explore how students constituted, understood and avoided risk. The thesis should not be viewed as yet another study of ‘youth and HIV’. Rather, it is a study of youth sexualities against the specific backdrop of a university campus, on one hand, and a severe national economic crisis, on the other. This perspective allows me to pay attention to those areas that are often neglected in HIV research, such as the institutional settings in which sexual and romantic partnerships are established (Campbell et al 2005; Korner et al 2005; Lesch and Kruger 2005), as well as the social networks that channel and condition the selection of potential romance sexual partners (Brummelhuis and Herdt 1995). Furthermore, this particular perspective also allows me to examine how broader environmental factors, such as an economic crisis in

this case, affect the choices that university students make regarding love, sex, romance and indeed their responses to the HIV epidemic.

## **Literature Review**

Many people imagine the university to be a place of learning (Lahelma 2002), progress and modernity (Amoa 1979; Gelfand 1973). It is also where students will be inscribed with bourgeois values (Lukose 2001; Roberts 1983; Armer and Youtz 1971) and where they will, ostensibly, be prepared for middle-class careers and lifestyles (Dwyer and Wyn 2001). In this way, university education is thus a form of symbolic capital, which serves to legitimize class distinctions in society (Bourdieu 1999). According to van den Berghe (1973), students from poor backgrounds expect upward social mobility as a result of their university education, while Roberts (1983) notes that students from wealthier backgrounds still expect their university qualifications to protect them, at the very least, from downward social mobility. While most students subscribe to this official view and indeed expect to emerge from university equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to fit into bourgeois society, this is not all that the university experience represents for students.

‘College life’, is a term that Moffat (1989) has used to refer to the world that students create for themselves and which represents how they want to experience their time on campus. This world, Moffat notes, is often at odds with what university authorities and parents’ expect of university. Many scholars have shown that for many students, ‘college life’ is about having ‘fun’ and universities are places where they will

initiate and acquire sexual experience (Boswell and Spade 1996; Handler 1995; Sanday 1990; Moffat 1989), Universities are also places where gender role expectations will be rethought, challenged and reproduced and where students will actively fashion feminine and masculine identities for themselves. This literature review shall focus more fully on these issues.

There is general consensus in much of the literature on university students in Africa and elsewhere that university campuses offer many opportunities for romantic and sexual relations to occur. This is in part because university has long been consciously constructed as a liminal, or 'transition' stage for students (see Pace 2004; van den Berghe 1979; Moffat 1989). As a result, both society and students expect university to be transformative, not just academically, but socially as well. For Epstein et al (2001:156), therefore, 'university offers a legitimate entry into the adult world of sex'. This is in stark contrast to young people in school who are discouraged, and often punished, for having boyfriends or girlfriends as they are seen as being immature (Stambach 2000; Willis 1977). A brief discussion of liminality is useful at this point. Turner (1967:95) defines liminality, a concept he borrows from van Gennep 1909, as 'a state that is neither here nor there' and in which individuals find themselves 'betwixt and between the positions arrayed by law, custom, convention'. He argues that all periods of transition are liminal and occur in three stages. First an individual is ritually (and even spatially) separated from the wider society (i.e. the pre-liminal state); then the period of transformation (i.e. the limen) begins; and lastly, the transformed individual is reincorporated back into society (post-liminal). Most crucially here, Turner considers liminal states to be highly permissive and anti-structural in that they often involve the suspension of everyday

norms and regulations. This suspension, he further argues, is integral to the transformation of the liminal subject.

Because of their highly permissive nature, many university campuses offer some of the best conditions for the suspension of everyday norms particularly in relation to students sexuality and their sexual conduct. A number of scholars suggest that many students come to university with the expectation of initiating or increasing their sexual experience. In his study of students at Rutgers University in the US, for instance, Moffat (1989) notes that many of the students with whom he interacted expressed frustration at still being virgins. A female student explained, 'I was ready to get rid of it (her virginity) but nobody wanted the damn thing' while a male student, in turn, lamented, 'I believe in premarital sex. I just haven't been fortunate enough to have any'. Living arrangements in most residential campuses also offer many opportunities for sexual relations to occur. This is because there are few restrictions on the entertainment of members of the opposite sex in students' rooms. Many universities allow students to entertain guests in their rooms throughout the day and late into the night. Consequently, it is common for students' sexual partners to sleep over at night in their rooms, even though this often goes against university regulations. Female students at the University of Botswana, for instance, reported that their roommates regularly had boyfriends sleep over, sometimes in total disregard of their presence (Chilisa et al 2001). In van den Berghe's (1977) study of a Nigerian university, male students who shared a room made arrangements for alternative accommodation if one of them wanted to bring a girlfriend over for the purpose of sex. Furthermore, sex on campus is not confined to a nocturnal activity but occurs at any time of the day and in any secluded place other than in a student's room.

University can also be described as a ‘romance and marriage marketplace’, hence the primacy of intimate relationships for many students (Lukose 2001; Moffat 1989; van den Berghe 1977). Students often face enormous pressure to participate in this marriage and romance marketplace. Students therefore spend much of their leisure time attending parties held on campus, investing in trendy clothes, staying in a fraternity or sorority and being sexually available. Besides being enjoyable, these are strategies that they employ in order to be visible in the romance marketplace. In a study of students at the University of Botswana, Seloilwe (2006) identified a number of reasons why students felt compelled to engage in romantic liaisons. Female students, she noted, were looking for marriage partners, economic security, prestige (i.e. by dating desirable men, they proved that they were sexually attractive to the opposite sex) and good grades (i.e. by pursuing relationships with male lecturers). For male students, on the other hand, being in romantic relationships was about sexual gratification, stress relief (i.e. alleviating the pressure of academic commitments) and bolstering their masculine identities. Seloilwe’s findings are not unique to the University of Botswana but have been confirmed by studies conducted elsewhere (see Boswell and Spade 1999; Handler 1995). Sometimes, the impersonal nature of university campuses pushes students into seeking companionship through romantic relationships.

An examination of gender relations in many universities reveals some of the complexities and contradictions of university as a place of progress, and throws into question the view that university students are ‘better placed to confront and break conventional gender and sexual roles’ (Roberts 1983). In many universities in Africa and elsewhere, male students in particular have been shown to participate rather actively in

the maintenance and reproduction of gender stereotypes. Sexual aggression towards females, for instance, appears to be central in the creation of male students' masculine identities and often takes various forms. In Zimbabwe, for instance, male sexual aggression often entails the seduction of vulnerable females, often first year females who are not yet acquainted with campus culture (Gaidzanwa 2001). In some American universities, on the other hand, male sexual aggression is typically enacted via fraternities and can involve the raping of female students as illustrated by fraternity brothers who sometimes gang rape female students to the point of unconsciousness (Sanday 1990). Other times it includes verbally harassing female students who are considered to be 'inappropriately dressed' (Lukose 2001). Moffat (1989) described how feminine dressing, especially sexy blouses, elicited catcalls and lewd comments from male students in the co-ed residence that he was staying in. As a result, many female students in the residence hall resorted to wearing jeans and T-shirts as a way to downplay their sexuality. The sexualisation of female bodies, as many feminist scholars have shown (e.g. Kauffman 1997; McKinnon 1989), is a strategy that men commonly employ in an attempt to keep women subordinate and 'to re-inscribe relations of power' (Green 1999:3).

In his study of university students in a number of countries in Southern Africa, Kelly (2001) that universities are male spaces in which female students generally do not feel safe. In addition to being expected to minimize their visibility in the public spaces of university, there are often specific spaces that are not open to female students. Pattman (2001:214) notes that students at the University of Botswana were afraid to walk past the university bar, which he describes as a conspicuously masculine space, for fear of being insulted by the male students who patronized it. In American universities, fraternities



typically represent those institutionalized spaces that women cannot traverse unless there is a party going on. Even then, the women who attend parties arranged by fraternities are seen as being sexually available, and when they become the unwilling participants in a ‘gang bang’ (i.e. group rape), they are said to have ‘asked for it’ just by their mere presence at the fraternity (Sanday 1990). Moffat (1989) also observes that women students were generally very subdued and allowed male students to dominate them. A female student in Boswell and Spade’s (1996) study summarized gender relations at her university in the following way: “men are dominant...they are the kings of the campus. It is their environment that they allow us to enter; therefore we have to abide by their rules’.

Student politics is another arena where women are actively, and often violently, kept out. Studies conducted in universities in both Africa and the west show that female students who decide to run for student council positions are usually verbally and sometimes even physically harassed by their male counterparts. (Zeilig 2007; Lukose 2001; Manwa 1995). Of even greater concern, though, is the fact that many universities in Africa do not have policies to deal specifically with sexual harassment and gender violence. As a result, these practices usually go unreported and unpunished (Zindi 1994). The disproportionately higher numbers of male students in most universities partly explain male dominance in these institutions. When men dominate in institutions, as Yodanis (2004: 657) pointed out, ‘the policies and practices of these institutions are likely to embody, reproduce and legitimate male domination over women’.

Male domination in academic institutions is further reproduced through a number of other ‘male bonding’ rituals (see Simpson 2005; Willis 1997). First year male students, for instance, are often taken through a number of rituals that are intended to transform

them from ‘boys’ to ‘men’. In their studies, Pace (2004), Sanday (1990) and Moffat (1989) note that most of the rituals involved humiliation, hardship and violent games. Furthermore, male students who refused to partake in ritual activities, such as ‘gang banging’ risked being labeled ‘wimps’ and ‘gays’. Although homosexual students are denigrated and harassed in many universities (see Pattman 2001), Sanday (1990) points out that, in essence, most male bonding rituals reflect the ‘tension between homosexual curiosity and the heterosexual norm’. She further argues that practices like ‘gang banging’ enable male students to ‘enact their homosexual desires within an acceptable context’. Moffat (1989), in turn, refers to the ‘homosexual ironic’, which allows for physical contact between males but without attracting the label of homosexuality to themselves. In his study, Moffat observed that many of the fun activities that fraternities organized for inevitably involved some cross-dressing and near-nudity. Most of the sporting activities that male students, and indeed men in general, participate in are emblematic of the ‘homosexual ironic’.

‘College life’ in general, and students’ sexual practices in particular, have major implications for the spread of HIV and AIDS. This is especially poignant where in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the epidemic is a major public health issue. Studies suggest that many students have difficulty coping with the unbridled freedom that they find on campus, especially as it relates to sex and dating. A common finding in most studies is that condom use among university students is very low. Studies also show that students generally have negative attitudes towards condoms and condom use. Less than half (45%) of sexually active Nigerian female students surveyed in Olley and Rotimi’s study (2003), for instance, reported using condoms all the time while as many as thirty-nine

percent reported ‘occasional’ condom use. At the University of Venda in South Africa, forty-three percent of female students visited the on-campus clinic to request emergency contraception between 2006 and 2008 (Mavhandu-Mudzusi 2009). Of these, thirty percent had not used condoms at all because the sexual encounter was unplanned, while many more students reported experiencing problems with actual condom use, such as breakage and slippage. In other studies, the non-use of condoms by university students was associated with partner disapproval (ibid), lack of easy access to condoms (Peltzer 2000), fear of being labeled as promiscuous, especially for female students (Masvawure et al 2009), trust in a relationship (Seloilwe 2005) and alcohol and drug use (*HEAIDS Report* 2010). Studies conducted by Terry et al (2006) and Masvawure (2009) on condom use patterns at the University of Zimbabwe reveal similar trends. For instance, as many as forty-four percent of female students at the institution reported not using condoms during their last sexual encounter compared to thirty percent of male students (Masvawure 2009).

The other prevention methods that are actively promoted in HIV interventions are abstinence and mutual monogamy. Studies conducted in African universities show that most students are not sexually abstinent. At the University of Zimbabwe, as many as eighty-three percent of both female and male students reported that they were sexually active (Terry et al 2006). This statistic correlates to national figures contained in the Demographic Health Survey (2005-6), which show that sexual debut occurs after age eighteen for most Zimbabweans. However, it is important to note that nearly a third of young people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four reported having their first sexual encounter before the age of eighteen, while a further five percent reported sexual

debut before the age of fifteen (ibid). Many of the sexual practices that university students engage fall into the ‘high risk’ behaviours category that is commonly used by HIV practitioners.

Besides the low use of condoms, university students often have multiple sexual partners. Boswell and Spade (1996), for instance, identified three types of romantic relationships that were common among students. ‘Hooking up’ was the dominant and most preferred type: it involved one-night stands with no strings attached. ‘Seeing each other’ was the second type and referred to ‘open’ relationships in which two students who were sexually involved were also free to date other people. The third type was the standard ‘steady boyfriend or girlfriend’ relationships, which were monogamous and entailed some level of commitment. Studies conducted elsewhere confirm this general classification. Seloilwe (2006:7) observed that some female students at the University of Botswana engaged in ‘partner exchanges’. This involved small groups of friends exchanging partners for short periods of time for no reason other than sheer ‘exhilaration’. Anarfi (2000) observed that many students in Nigerian universities often fluctuated between two sets of partners: those on-campus partners and those off-campus. The latter referred to long-term relationships that both female and male students had ‘back home’ and who they spent time with during the vacations. On-campus relationships were typically short-term and non-committal.

Finally, students’ sexual networks have been shown to be quite extensive. Van den Berghe (1973) found that female students preferred dating older, employed men, such as lecturers and civil servants, while male students found sexual gratification from non-university females, often school girls and sex workers. Sexual networks, particularly

those that also span across generations have been identified as some of the key drivers of the epidemic in the continent (see Thornton 2009). In fact, the current global response to HIV prevention places emphasis on the reduction of multiple and concurrent partnerships, particularly those that are also intergenerational and transactional in nature (see Pisani 2008; Epstein 2007).

Many of the *ethnographic* studies that I refer to in this brief literature review were conducted in western universities, particularly the United States. This reflects the paucity of ethnographic studies conducted on the experiences of students in African universities. In contrast, there is growing literature on university students and the HIV epidemic in the continent. However, as my literature review again reflects, most of these are in the form of cross-sectional surveys whose primary goal is to identify ‘risk behaviours’ that occur among students and the relationships between identified ‘risk behaviours’. Unfortunately, such studies only succeed in abstracting individuals from the social contexts that inform their sexual behaviours and choices regarding love, romance and sex. It is these various gaps that the thesis hopes to address.

### **The Research Setting: The University, ZANU-PF and national politics**

The UZ was established in 1955 by the then colonial government of Rhodesia (Gelfand 1978) and currently has approximately fourteen thousand undergraduate students and approximately two thousand postgraduate students (Terry et al 2006). Less than thirty-five percent of the student population is female. The institution has ten faculties and the majority of these offer three-year undergraduate degree programmes. Exceptions include

the Faculty of Law and the Medical Schools, whose degree programmes are four years and longer, respectively. The UZ is a residential campus and accommodates at least three thousand students in eleven residences, nine of which are located on the UZ campus and two of which are located in the city centre and cater for medical and social work students. The UZ boasts of being the oldest university in the country and of having been the *only* university in the country for over three decades, until the early 1990s, when the National University of Science and Technology was established. Currently, there are a total of twelve universities<sup>1</sup> (7 public, 4 private) in Zimbabwe. See map on page 15.

Black students constituted only forty percent of the student population in 1973 (Mlambo 1995). After the attainment of independence in 1980, the University of Zimbabwe was re-structured to be more accommodating of black students, most of whom had been unable to attend university because of unfavourable policies by the colonial government (Cheater 1991). By 1984, four years after independence, black students made up eighty percent of the student population, which stood at five thousand then (Bennell and Ncube 1994). Besides correcting the imbalances created by colonialism, the independence government was in dire need of highly educated blacks to occupy various government positions. In fact, until fairly recently—in the last five years perhaps—graduates from the UZ were assured of relatively well paying jobs as civil servants. Following independence, therefore, the UZ was consciously re-constructed to be a ‘developmental university’ that would contribute to the attainment of the socialist ideals of the new government (Bennell and Ncube 1994:590). Despite the economic crisis, the

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<sup>1</sup> The public ones are: National University of Science and Technology, Midlands State University, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Bindura University of Science Education, Lupane State University, Great Zimbabwe University and the Zimbabwe Open University. The private ones include: Africa University, Solusi University, The Women’s University in East and Southern Africa and the Catholic University.

Map of Zimbabwe showing the major cities in the country



Source: CIA World Factbook

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/zi.html>

government remains the largest employer of university graduates, though an increasing number of students are leaving the country in search of better paying jobs prospects abroad. Those who take up jobs in various government departments do so largely because they lack alternatives. During fieldwork, many students explained that working for the

government was ‘a last resort’ and that the only benefit that came from being a civil servant was that one acquired the necessary work experience that would make it easier for one to find employment in the non-governmental sector.

A number of Zimbabwean academics allude to the UZ Amendment Act of 1990 as the turning point in the university’s autonomy and the beginning of hostile relations between the university and the government. According to Cheater (1991), the amendment gave the Chancellor of the institution the power to appoint the Vice Chancellor, while the Minister of Higher Education was given the power to directly appoint seventeen of the forty-three members who made up the University Council. Academics and students objected to the amendment because it essentially made the UZ an extension of the government, as well as opened it to political manipulation (Sithole 1998). This is because occupants of most key posts at the institution would be political appointees and would be directly accountable to the Minister of Higher Education and the State President, who also happens to be the Chancellor of the institution. As my discussion chapter four shows, the level of intolerance of student activism on the UZ campus over the last ten years mimics the government’s intolerance of any form of opposition to its policies at national level.

The government’s interference in the running of the UZ became more blatant as the political and economic situation in the country worsened. UZ students were seen as being pro-opposition mainly because a large number of the key leaders in the main opposition party, the Movement from Democratic Change (MDC), are UZ alumni. They include Tendai Biti, Arthur Mutambara and a number of former student leaders who became Members of Parliament for the opposition. Many more UZ alumni hold



leadership positions in various human rights organizations in the country. It is not only students who are active in opposition politics, but a number of lecturers as well. Examples include Lovemore Madhuku, a lecturer from the faculty of law, who is currently the chair of the National Constitutional Assembly, a non-governmental organisation that has been lobbying for a new national constitution since 2000. John Makumbe, a political science lecturer, has been a vocal critic of the government and is a founder member of a good governance and human rights group called Transparency International Zimbabwe.

The government has responded to the pro-opposition activities of both students and academic staff in a variety of ways. The preferential enrollment of graduates from the national youth training camps that are managed by the ruling party, ZANU-PF is one. In 2004, for instance, there were rumours that various departments had been forced to enroll students from these camps, even though many of them did not meet the basic university entrance requirements. Once enrolled at the institution, these youth are believed to serve as government spies and informers who monitor and report anti-government sentiments. Youth from the camps have also received preferential treatment with regards to employment opportunities in various government departments. The government's zero tolerance attitude towards student activism and all forms of protest action at the institution is another. For example, in 2007, university authorities tried to restrict the number of male students who were resident on campus by accommodating female students in former male-only residence halls. This was because male students are considered to be the main instigators of student unrest at the institution. Campus closures for months at a time are another common response to on-campus demonstrations.



It is interesting to note that even though the government has infiltrated the space of the university, pro-government students who are members of the on-campus ZANU-PF branch are not as vocal or as visible. From my observations, there appeared to be great stigma attached to publicly admitting that one was a member of the ruling party even though it was public knowledge that the ruling party had a branch on campus. This is not to say students had no relation to the ruling party. The relation was there, but it was hard to gauge; it seemed more oriented to logics of patronage than ideological support. For instance, many male students I knew regularly attended rallies and meetings organized by ZANU-PF and they would justify their actions by pointing out that a lot of free food and drink was usually provided at these events. The same students would also attend rallies and meetings by the opposition for the free food and free T-shirts provided at the events. In many ways, this follows political patterns elsewhere in the country, with the exception that students tend to be more vocal about their ideological leanings than most of the population.

The UZ has not been spared from the economic and political crises bedeviling the country<sup>2</sup>. When I was an undergraduate student in the mid-nineties, the UZ was arguably a privileged space and students were largely cushioned from the hardships faced by the wider society. For instance, when there were electricity cuts and water rationing in the country, the university was *never* cut off, even though the affluent suburb, Mt Pleasant, in which the UZ is located, was. Furthermore, the UZ approximated a three-star hotel in many ways: the university provided students with bed linen, which in turn was laundered weekly. Cleaning staff swept students' rooms on a daily basis and polished the floors

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed discussion on the debates surrounding the nature and origins of the political and economic crises in the country, refer to the 2009 Bulletin No. 82 by the Concerned Africa Scholars. <http://concernedafricascholars.org/docs/acasbulletin82.pdf>

weekly. Breakfast in the various dining halls consisted of beef or pork sausages, baked beans, poached, scrambled, boiled or fried eggs, bacon and a choice of two types of cereal. Lunch and supper consisted one of the following: rice and chicken; rice and beef; *sadza* (i.e. a thick porridge made of corn meal) and chicken; *sadza* and beef and occasionally French fries and fish, as well as cold meat platters and a variety of salads. Depending on one's selection, breakfast could cost anything from Z\$1 (then about USD.10) to at most Z\$6, while lunch often cost between Z\$4 and no more than Z\$10 (i.e. USD.40 and USD1.25 respectively). In my first year, I received a government grant of approximately Z\$2,000 for a ten-week trimester and with careful budgeting, I could very comfortably have all three meals daily and still have about Z\$400 to spend on clothes and stationery. For the majority of students, many of whom were from rural areas and poor working class families (see Bennell and Ncube 1994), UZ was indeed the land of surfeit, while home was the land of scarcity.

When I conducted fieldwork the reality was very sobering. Life on campus for most students was a daily struggle. As of 1999, the Government had introduced a 'fifty-fifty' fees policy in which students were expected to meet half of their tuition and living expenses on campus, while the government met the other half. During 2006/2007, this facility was increasingly becoming redundant. The amounts offered by the government were often not even enough to cover tuition fees and many students had to find alternative sources of income. A male student informed me that the last stipend that he had received in 2006 amounted to just a quarter of the required tuition fees. However, he was still expected to meet his living expenses for a fifteen-week semester using the same funds. For many students, funding from the government was no longer guaranteed and

most had to pay their own tuition, accommodation and subsistence fees. In August 2006, resident students were charged Z\$40million (then the ‘black market’ equivalent of USD27) for accommodation and food for the semester. By February 2007, this amount had shot up to Z\$365 million due to inflation (USD19 at the new prevailing street rate), yet those students who were getting some support from the government had only received grants of just Z\$1 million (i.e. less than USD1) for the semester. This situation was further compounded by severe shortages of cash as many people, students included, were often unable to access money from their banks for days on end.

Many resident students were going without regular meals, often subsisting on bread alone. In response, university authorities decided to make meals compulsory for all resident students. All students who secured accommodation on campus were thus expected to pay in advance for their meals for the semester, in addition to their accommodation fees. Through this system, resident students would thus be assured of three meals a day: breakfast, lunch and supper. However, the success of this facility was short-lived, as the quality of meals quickly deteriorated due to a combination of factors, key of which was hyper-inflation (66,000% percent) during 2006, and government price-control induced food shortages. According to students, by mid-semester, breakfast consisted of a very thin porridge (students had to provide their own sugar) while lunch and supper consisted of *sadza* (i.e. a thick porridge made of cornmeal and which is the staple diet in the country) with beans and one or two pieces of meat. Most students I knew simply stopped taking their meals at the dining halls because of the poor quality and quality. One morning in June 2007, students were confronted with bolted doors when they went for breakfast. Food supplies had apparently run out and the university had no

funds to purchase new stock. Students were asked to pay an additional one million Zimbabwe dollars (then about USD40) each so that new food supplies could be purchased but they refused. This culminated in a spate of violent clashes on campus as students blockaded dining halls and prevented colleagues who had paid the additional amount from having their meals. In response, university authorities decided to evict students from the residence halls and these remained closed for the remainder of 2007 and much of 2008. Although university authorities pointed to various ‘health hazards’ on campus—particularly the dilapidated plumbing system—as the reason for the continued closure of the residences, students knew that the decision was primarily politically motivated. The government was particularly uneasy at the prospect of having disgruntled students present on campus during the 2008 elections, as it feared that the opposition party, the MDC, would mobilize students in anti-government protests.

Life at the UZ during the 2006/7 academic year was very unstable. Lecturers went on a strike for higher wages and better working conditions in September and this strike continued for almost six months<sup>3</sup> (Gaidzanwa 2007). Many students thus spent most of their first month of the academic year loitering on campus with very little to do. Many of the conversations that I had with first year students during this period revolved around their concerns about their fate: would the university close? Would the semester be extended? How long would it take them to complete their studies? Lecturers went on strike again in the second semester. In the table below, I quote extensively from the journal entry of a first year female student I had asked to keep a record of her activities on campus over a period of a week (12 to 19 March 2007). Her entry captures the

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<sup>3</sup> Not all faculties participated equally in the strike action, hence students from the law faculty, commerce and business studies and the physical sciences were able to attend many of their lectures.

frustration, ambivalence and listlessness that most students experienced as a result of the on-going lecturers strike and gives a good feel of what life was like for many students during this period.

Fig. 1: A Female Student's Daily Activity Schedule

<b>Day</b>	<b>Activities</b>
Monday	Woke up at eight-thirty. Did my laundry. No lectures as yet. Went to the library to send some emails to a few friends. At one-thirty went for lunch...Spent the rest of the day sleeping.
Tuesday	Ironed my clothes in the morning. Still no lectures, nothing much to do. Went to Bon Marche [a supermarket that is within walking distance from campus] to look for cereals but the prices are beyond my budget. In the evening my boyfriend comes, brought me pizza...
Wednesday	If only lectures had started, I would have something to do. Went to town to see my cousin. Spent rest of the day in bed. At least my mom called...
Thursday	Still no lectures. I'm not impressed. I dont like school that much but this is going way too far. Went to see a pregnant girlfriend. Had fun at her house...my boyfriend didn't call the whole day. I am worried...
Friday	I spent the whole day in bed. I'm stressed out-it has something to do with my boyfriend. There are rumours that [campus] might close. That's impossible. I'm stressed. Will anything change in this country. It is so de-motivating to think that even after getting a degree I might still remain unemployed! I don't care anymore whether campus closes or not! Whatever!
Saturday	I'm going home. Nothing much to do here. I watched four or five movies and slept after midnight.
Sunday	Woke up at five past eight. Had an argument with my brother about how I was dressed...At least that's one thing I like about college: FREEDOM [her emphasis] to do anything, go anywhere and to dress anyhow. I miss college. Lectures or no lectures. I'll go back tomorrow morning.
Monday	Woke up at nine. I help with the chores. Off to college. Ahhh! The taxi fares have gone up again!!! Unbelievable. How do they expect us to cope...

Although standards at the UZ have deteriorated drastically because of the country's decade-long economic crisis, and although poverty has found its way into the UZ campus, many students (and the public) still consider, and experience, the UZ as a site of progress, modernity and development. In addition to being exposed to middle-class and bourgeois values in the lecture rooms, students at the UZ are further exposed to these values in a very physical sense. The location of the UZ campus, not just in the capital city, Harare, but specifically in the affluent, upper middle-class neighbourhood of Mount Pleasant is a case in point. Until recently, this particular location appeared to function as a buffer zone that shielded students from the poverty that existed in the rest of society. For instance, when students step outside the UZ campus, they are immediately confronted by images of success—double-storey homes or sprawling single-storey homes with manicured gardens and remote-controlled gates. The UZ campus is also within walking distance of various embassies and foreign missions as well as of ostentatious shopping malls, such as Groombridge, Bond, Second Street Extension, Avondale and Arundel. It would appear that the UZ's suburban location was meant to be inspirational and to make students realize the kinds of bourgeois lifestyles that they could potentially have as a result of their university experience. The transformative experience of campus life thus takes on a very visual level for many students.

## **Research Methodology**

I chose to conduct my fieldwork at the University of Zimbabwe for reasons of familiarity: I had done both my undergraduate and graduate studies at the institution, as well as

worked there. In fact, I had not left the institution since enrolling as an undergraduate in the mid-nineties. Upon completion of my graduate studies, I took up a job as a lecturer in the Department of Sociology. A year later, in mid-2001, I started working with an on-campus HIV prevention organisation. For the next four years, I spent virtually every single day (Monday to Sunday) at the institution working closely with female and male students.

I commenced fieldwork at the University of Zimbabwe towards the end of August 2006. This date coincided with the start of the 2006/7 academic year and the arrival of nearly two thousand new students. These new students were especially important to the study because they represented a group of students who were as yet unfamiliar with life at the institution. By focusing on them, I could therefore gain insights into how they were inducted into the UZ ‘campus culture’ and could trace the various metamorphoses new students underwent during their first year of being on campus. The start of a new academic year, particularly the arrival of new students, is a significant period in the calendar of the institution and it remains that way for much of the fifteen weeks of the first semester. During the first week of each year, which is known as orientation week, the UZ campus is abuzz with activity in a way that it is not at any other time of the year. A large part of my time during this first week was therefore spent doing participant-observation. I observed new students going about their registration. I observed them spend many hours in a variety of queues—for accommodation, to open bank accounts, to pay fees at the bursars office. And I observed them as they participated in the various activities that had been organized for them, such as health talks on HIV and sexually



transmitted infections organized jointly by the Student Health Services and SHAPE<sup>4</sup> Zimbabwe Trust, political talks organized by the Student Executive Council and church-related discussions. During this first week, I spent close to twelve hours a day on campus, often arriving at 9am in the mornings and leaving for home after 9pm. This way, I was able to observe campus life in the day-time and at night-time. Everyday, I surveyed the notice boards for information on the different events on offer for the day or the week and tried to attend as many as I could.

Later, I was officially hosted by SHAPE, an HIV prevention organisation that has been implementing its activities at the UZ since May 2000. I had worked with the organisation fulltime since its inception but had stopped in August 2004 when I left to pursue graduate studies abroad. Therefore, not only was I familiar with the organisation's work, but I also knew that it attracted thousands of students to its activities every year. For purposes of my research, this meant easier access to students. During the first semester (Aug-Dec 2006), I worked primarily from the SHAPE office, where I had been assigned space in the reception. I shared the reception with a female student from another university who had decided to do her work-related training with the organisation. However, we rarely had the office to ourselves as student volunteers, known as SHAPE members, constantly came in to ask for assistance with organizing this or that event. Sometimes they just came in to relax between lectures. In addition to the SHAPE members, various students would stop by the office to find out more about the organisation and to sign up for its various activities. In short, it was extremely rare for the office to be without students.

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<sup>4</sup> SHAPE is an acronym for Sustainability, Hope, Action, Prevention, Education.

Working in the reception area kept me abreast of the latest gossip and the various social dramas unfolding on campus. I was also exposed to the various challenges, mostly financial and social, that students faced and these were often the subjects of discussion among those who visited the SHAPE office. One of the major advantages of working in the reception was that I could observe students ‘being students’. For instance, on numerous occasions I had watched male SHAPE members proposition female students they found attractive, right there in the office and in my presence. All the SHAPE volunteers knew who I was and were familiar with my research agenda as the SHAPE Director had explained it at a meeting that had been organized for volunteers at the start of the semester and which I had attended.

When I began fieldwork, I had specifically requested to work with different SHAPE Associations, of which there were eight. Students initiated and managed these associations and their mandate was to find exciting ways—such as dance, music, drama, debate—to raise awareness on HIV and AIDS. The associations met weekly to plan their events and had a combined total of up to a hundred and fifty members. I conducted numerous in-depth interviews and informal conversations with the leaders and committee members of these associations and attended many of their activities. However, most of my time was spent closely following the activities of three associations: the Interact Club, which was responsible for organizing weekly discussion forums on gender, sexuality and HIV; and the Poetry and Music clubs, which used poetry and music, respectively, to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS and other social issues on campus. Between 2006 and 2007, these were the most active SHAPE Associations and they were more consistent in organising weekly activities. Every Tuesday afternoon, I also attended a SHAPE Club

Leaders meeting which was held in the SHAPE reception and at which leaders of the various associations gave feedback on any activities that they had planned for the week or for the semester. The majority of second and third year students who participated in the study were drawn from this particular group of students.

From January to December 2007, I decided to spend less time in the SHAPE office and more time in the student residences and the other public spaces of the UZ campus. I wanted to diversify my sample to include those students who were not as actively involved in HIV and AIDS issues as the SHAPE students were and to see what ‘ordinary’ students’ experiences on campus were. I relied on the contacts that I had established at SHAPE and asked SHAPE members to refer me to their colleagues and friends, who in turn introduced me to more students. Through these ‘networking’ (otherwise known as ‘snowballing’) techniques, I gained access to a diverse group of students, particularly first year female students and Christian students. Spending more time in student residences also enabled me to observe everyday life in the residence halls and to better understand where, how and with whom students spent their leisure time. During this period, I conducted formal in-depth interviews with selected students and held numerous informal conversations with individual students and groups of students. I realized that female students, in contrast to their male counterparts, preferred me to talk to them in the presence of their friends, rather than as individuals, hence many of my conversations were held with between two and six students at a time. As with most group settings, some individuals were more vocal than others, so I would often arrange a separate meeting where I would meet with some of the less vocal students in order to get their opinions on various issues. I also requested ten female students to keep weekly

journals as I wanted to better understand how students spent their time on campus. I had moderate success with this technique, unfortunately, as many students worried that others, especially roommates, would come across the journals and read their private thoughts. Although I had requested students to simply record their daily activities and share whatever they felt like sharing, I soon realized that many saw the journals as the place to record their most intimate thoughts and experiences. I stopped using the journals after two weeks, but the information I collected was incredibly illuminating, as will become apparent later in the thesis.

My core sample comprised of forty students (twenty females and twenty males) who I interacted with on a regular basis throughout the course of my fieldwork. The majority of the female students in the sample were in their first year of study, while the majority of the male students were in their third year. The students' ages ranged from eighteen to twenty-six and most were resident on campus. In terms of socio-economic status, many of these students were from urban, working-class and lower middle-class backgrounds. About a quarter were from middle-class backgrounds while a small number were either from fairly affluent families or from poor, rural households. Let me point out, however, that at the time that I conducted fieldwork, traditional ways of determining socio-economic status, such as parental occupation, had lost their relevance given the economic crisis that was gripping the country. In the past, most students whose parents were employed in the civil service as teachers, nurses and related white-collar jobs generally fell into the middle-class category, while those whose parents were factory or informal sector workers were generally considered to belong to the working class. In

2006, earning one's salary in foreign currency, or merely having regular access to foreign currency, was a far better predictor of socio-economic status than actual occupation.

Although I had fairly easy access to students, my fieldwork was not without its challenges. For a start, I would have preferred to secure a room and reside on campus, but this was not possible because of the highly contested nature of on-campus residence. I felt that it was unethical to deprive a truly needy student of a place to stay given that I already had my own place as well as a car that made it possible for me to stay really late on campus. I therefore missed a number of significant events, which occurred at night and had to rely on the accounts given to me by students. One of these events occurred in July 2007 and involved the burning down of a male visitor's car by irate students. I discuss this incident in detail in Chapter Two. The second involved a bomb threat in one of the residences. Riot police and the army were called into campus at midnight and female students were evacuated from the hall in question. Both events were significant because they altered the tempo of the university and eventually led to the eviction of all male students from the residences.

The second challenge that I want to highlight here pertained to my positioning in the field. Many students initially thought that I was an undergraduate student at the institution and so they tended to relate to me as one of them. However, when I explained that I was doing research for a doctoral thesis, they would begin to view me as an authority figure. I particularly experienced the latter challenge with female students. Many of them openly expressed admiration at my academic and work history and at the fact that I was so 'independent', since I was not married and had no child. Female students often wanted to know how I had managed to accomplish this and if I ever

worried that I might not meet the ‘right’ man, as men would feel threatened by my ‘independence’. While these concerns provided an easy entry point into discussions about love, romance and dating, I worried that students’ perceptions of me as an ‘authority’ would increase the social distance between us. I experienced similar challenges with some of the SHAPE members. When they realized that I was a co-founder of the organisation, I ceased to be just a ‘student’ and became an authority figure. With time, however, the forty students that I followed closely seemed to get over their initial concerns and began to relate to me more as an older sister than an authority figure who would judge and chastise them for their actions. Many students later informed me, when I asked, that they found my honesty and ‘humility’ reassuring. This, I believe, explains some students’ willingness to divulge very personal details about themselves.

The third limitation of the study is that it focuses exclusively on students’ heterosexual experiences and is completely silent on the issue of homosexuality. When I asked students if they had ever heard about homosexuality on campus, or if they knew of any homosexual students, the response was often brief and along the following lines: of course there were homosexual students on campus, but these students kept their activities secret for fear of victimization. On a number of occasions, however, I was told that homosexuality was common among female students but that it was difficult to learn more about these experiences. I do not recall any of the students that I interacted with expressing positive views about homosexuality during my fieldwork. This silence mirrors how homosexuality is generally viewed in the country: it is not spoken about publicly and when it is, it is usually in negative terms (see Epprecht 1998, 2005). The Zimbabwean

president, Robert Mugabe, is famous for referring to homosexuals as being ‘worse than dogs’ (Wieringa 2009).

My fieldwork experiences taught me a number of important lessons regarding conducting research on sex and sexuality. First, that ethnography offers perhaps the best way of investigating the private lives of individuals (see Parker et al 1991; Brummelhuis and Herdt 1995). Both male and female students were more willing to share intimate details about their lives after they had at least spent some time with me and we had established some form of rapport. The fact that I had very little success getting students to keep journals illustrates many people’s general reluctance to leave a paper trail of their most intimate thoughts. Second, that research is a relationship that requires reciprocity on both sides. In contrast to most public health approaches that require minimal involvement between researchers and research participants as a way of minimizing researcher bias (Hennekens and Buring 1987), ethnography requires the exact opposite (see Niehaus 1994; Odzer 1994). Some of my best data came from those students who considered me a friend, not just a graduate researcher. It was these particular students who called me up when they needed financial assistance, for instance. It was also these students who asked me very personal questions about myself, demanding that I trust them in turn. While these calls for reciprocity often presented ethical challenges, they are what give ethnography its human face and hence an extra edge over other research methods.

### **Outline of Thesis**

This thesis comprises a total of nine chapters, all of them concerned with different aspects of sexuality at the UZ campus. Chapter Two and Chapter Three focus specifically

on female sexualities while Chapters Four and Five focus on the construction of masculine identities on campus and how this in turn affects male students' sexualities. In Chapter Six, I examine Christian sexualities and in Chapter Seven I examine the university's response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic at the institution.

Chapter Two delves into the intimate and sexual lives of female students at the UZ and focuses primarily on these students' sexual agency. In the chapter I argue that the liminal nature of the UZ campus provides female students with innumerable opportunities to transcend, re-fashion and subvert society-wide expectations regarding female chastity and modesty. In relation to the HIV and AIDS epidemic, I argue in Chapter Two that young women are not only at risk of HIV infection in contexts of danger (e.g. such as when they are coerced into having sex), but also in contexts of pleasure. Sometimes female students' quest for sexual pleasure takes precedence over their concerns about HIV infection and young women will, of their own volition, opt not to engage in safer sex as a result. While sex and its meanings are the primary focus in Chapter Two, in Chapter Three I orient myself to the broader issue of femininity and female sexuality. Here, I tackle the phenomenon of transactional sex, or sexual economic exchanges, as it exists on the UZ campus in order to highlight the complex relationship that exists between femininity, sexuality and consumption. The chapter calls for a re-thinking of taken-for-granted truths regarding young women's vulnerability to infection and particularly challenges the notion that transactional sex relationships are always about sex (for the men involved) and money (for the women involved). Again, drawing on the experiences of specific female students at the UZ, I explore what else female



students—and their male partners—get out of transactional sex besides money and sex respectively.

Chapter Four lays the foundation for my discussion of male sexuality. In this chapter, I describe the dominant model of masculinity on the UZ campus and its main predicates—anti-authority, rebelliousness, fearlessness, intelligence—in order to show how these same attributes affect how male students handle themselves sexually. It is impossible to fully appreciate male student behaviour at the UZ without first understanding the masculine ideal that prevails at the institution. I therefore examine how masculinities are enacted, contested and reinforced in three contexts, namely in male students’ interactions with each other, in their interactions with authority figures on campus and in their interactions with ‘outsiders’, that is, individuals who are not, or are perceived not to be affiliated with the institution. Chapter Five goes on to illustrate how the dominant masculine ideal at the UZ shapes relations between male and female students on campus and also how it especially shapes male students’ sexual preferences. The chapter not only explores the different kinds of intimate relationships that male students establish while on campus but also seeks to account for the widespread use of violence in most of these relationships.

Religion, sex and sexuality are the main issues of interest in Chapter Six. Here, I discuss what ‘living a Christian life’ entails for Christian students and I focus on the various strategies that the latter employ in their attempts to overcome sexual temptation given the highly sexualized nature of the UZ campus. This chapter also discusses some of the key Christian messages on dating and sex that students are exposed to on campus and examines how students engage with these messages and with what outcomes.

Chapter seven chapter assesses the university's response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic at the institution and highlights the difficulties involved in implementing a prevention programme on a university campus. My discussion in this chapter centres primarily on the experiences faced by SHAPE Zimbabwe Trust, a non-governmental organisation that has been implementing an HIV intervention at the UZ since May 2000.

In the last chapter I discuss the implications of the study for HIV prevention in Zimbabwe, especially in relation to those programmes that are directed at young people. The study clearly illustrates the critical role that social—and institutional—contexts play in shaping young people's sexuality and sexual behaviour. The study also shows that while so-called 'HIV-risk' behaviours (e.g. multiple sexual partnerships, sexual economic exchange relationships and the non-use of condoms) might appear to be the same the world over, the actual forms that they take and the meanings that they hold for individuals are not. The latter are often mediated by the social—and institutional—contexts in which they occur. The thesis argues that, to be effective, HIV interventions must simultaneously attend to individual 'risk' behaviours as well as to the social contexts in which these behaviours occur are enacted.



## Chapter Two

### **‘Active Lust Seekers’: Female Students and Sexual Pleasure**

‘...Girls should stop acting as if they don’t like sex...From what I have seen from girls *pano pa* [here on] campus, they look forward to that [sic] more than guys do’.

This statement caught me off-guard, not only because of the contempt with which it was uttered, but also because it was made by a first year female student, in the presence of her best friend and was addressed to me, a virtual stranger. This was my second meeting with Neria, a first year female law student and her friend, Saru, a first year female student studying for a Bachelor of Arts degree, and already, both had stunned me with their frankness around sexual issues and especially around their own sexual experiences. I had only met the two for the first time the previous day—they were part of a formal group discussion that I had convened with eight first year female students.

In the group discussion both had been quite vocal on the issue of sex and again, Neria had quite cheekily declared that she never had reason to turn down her boyfriend’s sexual advances: ‘If he asks [for sex], I give him. Why not? It’s not like girls don’t enjoy sex. They do!’ I found this openness by a young Zimbabwean woman both intriguing and refreshing. It is not often that one comes across or reads about young African women’s positive pre-marital sexual experiences. Usually, such experiences are couched within the framework of coercion and abuse, particularly if monetary exchanges are involved or if there are power differentials in the relationship. Alternatively, women are simply



presented as uninterested in sex. When they are shown to have any interest in sex, it is often within the context of lesbian relationships. As Vance (1989) notes, female sexual desire is often viewed with suspicion ‘from its first tingle’ and is thus relegated to the realm of the immoral. Very rarely, as Anfred (2004) observes, are studies of female sexuality in Africa written from the perspective of women themselves. Neria’s comments, and indeed the experiences of the six female students that I discuss in this chapter, challenge these stereotypical portrayals of female sexuality, especially their negation of sexual pleasure for young, unmarried heterosexual African women. As I will show, sex is not always something that is ‘done’ to young women; neither are young women always passive and reluctant participants in sexual encounters. This is true even in contexts where women’s perceived passivity is coded in local languages, as it is in all Zimbabwean vernaculars. For instance, in the Shona vernacular, a man marries while a woman is married (*ndakamuroora vs akaroorwa*); a man ‘does’ sex while a woman is ‘done sex to’ (*ndakamuita* [lit. I did her] versus *akaitwa* [lit. she was done]).

In this chapter, I draw attention to the centrality of the sexual pleasure narrative for a specific group of female students in order to show how some female students use their time at university to actively construct sexual identities that subvert and challenge broader societal gender roles. The liminal character of the UZ campus, I further argue, allows these particular female students to transgress personal and social boundaries (Thomas 2005) as well as get a temporary reprieve from the strictures of everyday life (Shields 1991), especially with regards to their sexuality. The concept of liminality allows me to foreground the sexual agency of young African women and to understand

the various contexts and circumstances in which young heterosexual women sometimes are ‘active lust seekers’, rather than sexually disinterested actors.

The first part of my discussion will focus on how female sexuality (particularly that of young African women) has typically been portrayed in scholarly literature, especially in public health and social science studies on HIV and AIDS which have informed the global response to HIV prevention in Sub-Saharan Africa. I will also discuss the main ways that female sexuality is generally imagined and constructed in Zimbabwe. The second part of my discussion will hone in more specifically on the issue of female sexuality at the University of Zimbabwe and the ways in which the six female students’ sexual experiences both transgress and conform to university-specific and societal-wide expectations of ideal female sexuality.

### **Public Imaginations of Female Sexuality in Africa**

A number of scholars have pointed to the ‘problematic nature’ of female sexuality, both as an academic subject and as a practice. Arnfred (2001), for instance, notes that graduate students are often discouraged from writing about female sexual desire and pleasure as it is tantamount to committing career suicide. The topic is simply seen as being too frivolous in many academic circles, and thus exists as a privileged site of investigation for senior scholars who have already established themselves. Female sexuality is portrayed as positive only if it is in the context of heterosexual marital unions (see Rubin, 1989). Oftentimes, though, the positive aspects of female sexuality are muted and/or actively negated—both in practice and in academia. Literature on female sexuality can be

classified into two main groups: that which portrays women as sexual *objects* and that which portrays them as sexual *subjects*. The view of women as sexual objects is a strong and conspicuous theme in many feminist writings (e.g. McKinnon 1989) as well as in the HIV and AIDS literature. According to this perspective, women are viewed as ‘acted upon’, ‘vulnerable’ and ‘powerless’ where their sexuality is concerned.

Kitzinger’s (1994) take on female sexual pleasure offers a fitting example. Kitzinger insists that even seemingly personal and intimate aspects of women’s lives, such as their sexuality, are the products of relationships of power and are rooted in the broader institution of hetero-patriarchy. The problem, she explains, is that sex and sexual desire are both constructed as the ‘eroticization of subordination’ (p 206). For instance, she asserts that what women describe as sexual enjoyment is really an enjoyment of subordination and powerlessness because the sexual act essentially entails the eroticization of power differences. For Kitzinger, the sexual act is no more than a ‘re-enactment’ of subordination and she treats female sexual pleasure as a form of false consciousness. This is my point of departure: her complete rejection of the possibility that women can truly desire and enjoy sex in a patriarchal society. Such a stance, unfortunately, perpetuates the stereotype that women are *always* victims in the sexual act and that subtle processes of manipulation and control are always at play when women engage in and enjoy the sexual act. Furthermore, this kind of analysis ignores the basic fact that power is not always exercised from the centre but from ‘innumerable points’ as Foucault (1978:94) pointed out.

The public health literature on HIV and AIDS in Africa is also replete with images which portray women as *reluctantly* sexual and passionless. This is particularly

common in those studies that focus on ‘transactional sex’ and ‘survival sex’ (e.g. Iversen 2005; Dunkle et al 2004; Larry et al 2004) and those that focus on women’s disproportionate vulnerability to HIV infection (see any UNAIDS Global Report; Heise and Elias 1995). In most of these studies, women are presented as ‘acted upon’ by philandering husbands or boyfriends and what is often highlighted is the fact that many women are usually ‘faithful’ or ‘virgins’ until they are placed in positions of vulnerability, and infected with sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, by their male partners. These accounts also locate women’s vulnerability to sexual exploitation in their material conditions: it is typically young women from poor backgrounds who are said to be at greatest risk of infection. I do not intend to dismiss or trivialize these observations, which are grounded in years of thorough empirical research. Rather, I seek to show that they focus on just one of many aspects of female sexuality. Surely, vulnerability and powerlessness are not the end-all and be-all of female sexuality, neither do these characteristics define it. Furthermore, in highlighting these issues, I seek to draw attention to the fact that it is not only within the context of powerlessness that young women are vulnerable to HIV infection.

The second dominant discourse regarding female sexuality in Africa is one that acknowledges that women are sexual subjects, with the ability to ‘act’ as much as they are also ‘acted upon’. The literature that falls into this second category takes two forms: one that is ‘tinged with undertones of moral condemnation’, to borrow Arnfred’s (2004) phrase, and the other that embraces and celebrates female sexuality in all its many facets. The literature that falls into the first variant views female sexuality, especially as it relates to sexual desire and pleasure, as unnatural, undesirable and outright dangerous. Again,

this is especially common in many of the public health studies on HIV and AIDS and in the colonial literature on African women (cf. Schapera 1933; Little 1973). Besides resulting in the stigmatization of HIV positive women who are seen as embodying an ‘unruly’ and ‘out-of-control’ female sexuality, such a discourse also results in one-sided HIV prevention strategies (e.g. girls saying no to sex) that are aimed at containing active female sexuality. For instance, many HIV and AIDS interventions that focus on ‘prostitution’ do just that: they tend to view women who engage in prostitution variously as sexually aggressive, hyper-sexed, foolish, naïve and misguided. ‘Prostitutes’ come to be viewed as those women who have failed to contain their sexuality. The presence of elaborate systems aimed at regulating unruly female sexuality, which range from the seclusion of women in some Muslim societies (see Mernissi’s book *Beyond the Veil*, 1987) to accusations of witchcraft (see Badoe’s discussion of ‘witches’ camps in Ghana, 2005) to surveillance by women’s church groups (see Mate’s discussion of discourses of femininity in Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe, 2002) illustrates the far reaching effects of this particular type of discourse. It also reinforces Gagnon and Smith’s (1967) apt observation that ‘the very idea of female sexual freedom is itself an intolerable idea in most societies’.

The second variant, which informs this chapter, celebrates active female sexuality. This variant is epitomized by the writings of a number of scholars (e.g. Mead 1973; Vance 1989; Parker 1991; Bolton 1995; Paiva 2000, Spronk 2005; Bernstein 2007) and some African feminists (e.g. McFadden 2003; Tamale 2005; Machera 2004). These scholars are dedicated to the study of female sexuality, particularly women’s experiences of sexual pleasure and sexual desire, the conditions under which these experiences occur



and the meanings that these experiences have for women. The significance of these scholars' work is that it has expanded the body of knowledge regarding female sexuality, especially as they show that danger and pleasure are ever-present realities in all women's lives. As Vance (1989) asserts, it is all too easy to cast women's sexual experiences as either wholly pleasurable or dangerous and yet, women's actual sexual experiences are more complicated, more difficult to grasp and more unsettling (p 5). Here I deliberately focus *only* on young women's narratives and experiences of sexual pleasure and positive sexuality. I realize the limitations of taking such a one-sided approach but feel justified given the paucity of studies on the subject. Furthermore, adopting this particular approach will afford me greater scope to explore the repertoire of practices and actions that constitute sexual pleasure for some female students at the UZ.

### **Public Property: Young Women's Sexuality in Zimbabwe**

Two incidents illustrate how female sexuality, especially that of young unmarried women, is publicly imagined in contemporary Zimbabwe. The first incident occurred some five years ago, in 2003, and concerned condom adverts by the Population Services International (PSI) that were being aired on the national broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC). One of the adverts showed two obviously middle-class, college-type young women having a meal at a fast food outlet. In it, one of girls leans forward towards her friend, confidentially, and excitedly shares, between girly giggles, that she has met a new guy who is 'smart, handsome but above all he uses PP! [PP, which stands for Protector Plus, is the brand name for the PSI condoms]'. The girls burst out

into naughty giggles and the advert closes with a strong male voice urging the viewer to ‘always use Protector Plus: Your Friend for Life’. In the second advert, a young, unmarried couple is preparing for a weekend getaway. As they make their way to the door, with their bags in tow, the woman turns to her boyfriend and gently asks: ‘Honey, haven’t you forgotten something?’ He smiles at her, pulls out a pack of condoms from his pocket and quips ‘Do you mean these?’ The woman then directs her gaze to the viewer and announces that she and ‘the man I am going to marry always use PP’. Again, as in the first advert, the same male voice comes on and urges the viewer to ‘always use Protector Plus: Your Friend for Life’.

These particular adverts were targeted at young women between the ages of 16 and 25, as they had been identified in various national studies as being both sexually active and having extremely high rates of HIV infection (see the Young Adult Survey, 2002). Furthermore, young women had also been shown to have the lowest condom use rates in the country. A particularly gloomy prognosis given by many of these studies, and which helped usher in various national attempts at creative programming, was that a fifteen-year-old Zimbabwean had only a fifty-percent chance of reaching the age of fifty, given current HIV infection trends. With generous funding from USAID and the Centres for Disease Control (CDC) and strategic support from the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (MoHCW), PSI thus became something of a fad between 2002 and 2004. For instance, PSI adverts played incessantly during prime time viewing on television and during important events, such as the World Cup Soccer games. There were also countless PSI posters and stickers printed on glossy paper and in full colour advertising the PP condoms everywhere—in the shops, on public buses and taxis and in hair salons. As part

of its social marketing approach, PSI initiated a talk-show called *This is Life*, which aired weekly, again at prime viewing time. It also funded numerous radio-based discussions and game-shows on the epidemic. *This is Life* was made particularly popular by the fact that it was hosted by a trendy and beautiful young Zimbabwean actress and musician, and by the fact that fashionable ‘body-tops’ (i.e. form fitting T-shirts) for women, muscle-tops for men (i.e. form fitting T-shirts) and caps were among some of the goodies that were dished out to participants during the show. The body tops and muscle tops were extremely popular with young people, including students at the UZ.

The stir the adverts caused when they were first aired is emblematic of how youth sexuality, especially female sexuality, is viewed in the country. Church groups and individuals who identified themselves as ‘parents’ were unhappy with the adverts. They argued that they promoted and condoned pre-marital sex by young people, and downplayed the importance of sexual abstinence. The fact that the young women in both adverts were depicted as being sexually in-charge did not help matters. The negative relation led PSI to modify the second advert: instead of the woman making reference to ‘the man I am going to marry’, in the modified version it is the man who speaks and he makes reference to ‘the woman of my dreams’. This modification helped to portray the couple in a more socially acceptable way as it downplayed their marital status. Interestingly, the first advert, which seemed to generate the most angst, was not modified, but it stopped airing for some months.

Female sexuality in Zimbabwe, as in many African countries, is considered an important family resource, and so is heavily guarded and monitored by family members (Stewart, et al, 2003). Although Bourdillon (1989) argues that premarital sex was

generally acceptable in pre-colonial Shona society, especially if it led to marriage, and Jeater (1993), in turn, notes that Shona society promotes the pursuit of sexual pleasure for both men and women, the influence of Christianity has contributed to a situation where premarital sex is widely frowned upon. A strict moral code regarding pre-marital sex by young women, is still (symbolically, at least) maintained and enforced in Zimbabwe and female sexuality is always under intense public scrutiny For instance, young women are still expected to be virgins when they marry and bridewealth payments, schools and the church continue to function as some of the key regulatory institutions intended to enforce these expectations. Pre-marital pregnancy in Zimbabwe is especially problematic and often results in young women being kicked out of their homes by their parents or being forced into early marriages (Stewart et. al., 2003). Because the family is responsible for regulating female sexuality, young women who fall pregnant and are not married are therefore seen as an indictment on the family—and the mother, in particular.

Holland et al (2003) observe that a modest femininity, which produces a passive female body rather than an active one is still the norm in most societies, both developed and developing. In recent years, calls have been made by some ‘traditional leaders’ for the resumption of nation-wide virginity testing of unmarried young women as a way of curbing the spread of the HIV. The chief from my rural home in Rusape, Chief Makoni, for instance, began conducting virginity tests in the community, which culminated in a ‘graduation ceremony’ attended by community members and at which the confirmed virgins were awarded certificates. The parents of the graduating girls also received recognition at these ceremonies and were commended for ‘good’ parenting and for instilling ‘good’ [read ‘traditional’] values in their children. Needless to say, women’s

organizations and some AIDS Service Organisations took exception at this approach, arguing that the burden of behaviour change was being placed squarely on young women, while young men were absolved of any responsibility. Furthermore, these groups argued that this parading of virgins was counter-productive: the young women would become the targets of both young and old men's lascivious attentions while the belief that having sex with a virgin is a cure for HIV infection would also enhance, not decrease, their vulnerability. Virginité testing as a response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic has been noted in other African countries, such as South Africa, where Leclerc-Madlala (2001) notes that there has been an increase in the number of new organizations whose mandate is to advocate and conduct virginité testing on a regular basis. In the discussion that follows I will show how the university is delicately poised at the cusp of both acceptance and rejection of active female sexuality.

### **Female Students as 'Active Lust Seekers'**

The female students I discuss in this chapter are exceptional in their willingness to publicly acknowledge that they not only engage in pre-marital sex but that they find sex pleasurable. The term 'active lust seekers'—which I first heard used by Sunny Bergman in an interview on the South Africa radio station Talk Radio 702—reclaims women's right to enjoy sex and aptly describes the experiences of the female students in question. Let me illustrate. When I asked Neria and Saru what they considered to be the appropriate length of time to wait before a relationship became sexual, Neria was dismissive of the concept:



“The idea that you should wait for a while, its bull. Why? Why? Why? What are you waiting for? What do you want to know? What? I don’t see why people should wait, really, ‘coz while you are waiting he is busy doing someone else!”

Between laughs, she explained:

“To be honest, I slept with my guy, ah, within a month! [of meeting him].He was my first, so he wouldn’t use it against me. But he might. But ah, I was so, I couldn’t wait!”

Saru’s take on the issue was simple:

“If you want sex, get a steady boyfriend. Let’s not hide behind saying ‘ah, let’s not do it’. We are doing it. So, if you are to do it, get one person. [Get a] steady boyfriend.”

In both responses, the two friends situate pre-marital sex in the realm of the normal. As far as they are concerned, the expectation of abstinence is unrealistic and problematic, particularly its underlying assumption of the sexually uninterested female. They pointed to the attention that female students pay to their appearance just before they go to see their campus-based boyfriends (in their rooms), as indicative of female students’ interest in relationships that are sexual. Their logic was, why go to such lengths unless you want sex? At the time of the interview, there had been no lectures for over a month due to strike action by lecturers and Neria had spent much of this time staying at her boyfriend’s place, as a live-in girlfriend. She explained to me that she carefully planned her visits to coincide with the days just after her menstrual flow:

“This first week here, [pointing to a calendar that she had been drawing during the interview] I am on him like mad...and the last days before my period. So, like I just visited on the 25<sup>th</sup>. This was my last period [points out a date on the calendar]...I did him here *futi* [again]. We did here, up to here. Yeah, these first five days. *Ndichingopedza* [as soon as my period ended], I went to his house. We stayed up to here...then I disappeared for a while. So this is 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10...up to day 10, I was with him. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 I was away, just calling to

say hi. Then on day 19, I went [to his place]. They say the corpus whatever has disintegrated... whatever... So, I went...”

What is striking in this account is how Neria portrayed herself in very active ways. Throughout the interview she mentioned that *she* ‘did him’ or that ‘we did it’, but never once did she refer to herself as having ‘been done’. Her role as an active lust seeker was prominent in her account of her sexual exploits.

All the female students I discuss in this chapter portrayed themselves in such active ways. For instance, Joyce was a second year medical student, who had fallen pregnant during her first year and was now a young, unmarried mother. She entered the room I was in (which belonged to Tari, another female student), with great aplomb and thrust the package she was carrying into Tari’s lap. ‘Ladies, please buy these clothes’ (i.e. *Tengai hembe idzi vasikana!*) she implored in the vernacular. ‘My mother just came back from South [Africa]’, she continued. Joyce cut an impressive figure in fashionable slim-fitting jeans and she was definitely what most male students at the university would have considered an attractive girl. That she was peddling wares was in itself surprising as it contradicted her seemingly middle-class, well-to-do exterior, as did the fact that she was a mother to a year-old baby girl. She readily explained this as an outcome of her outrageously amorous sexual trysts as a first year student. Joyce spent an hour with us. She dominated the conversation space with nostalgic recollections of what she described as her ‘wild’ sexual encounters with the father of her child, a fellow student: ‘We used to skip class and go to his room and have sex. We did this most afternoons. We would have lunch together at the DH and then go at it afterwards. We even did it ten times in one night! We were crazy!’

Her recollections were tinged with nostalgia for two main reasons. First, she had since broken up with the father of her child because of his infidelity. Apparently, he had been seeing another female student the whole time that he was with her—a fact she had a hard time making sense of considering that they virtually spent all their free time together. Secondly, her nostalgia seemed to be the outcome of one who has learnt important life lessons the hard way. In hindsight, Joyce was of the view that her sexual exploits were a bit ‘over the top’. She attributed this to her excitement at having made it to the university and to her naivety as a first year student coming from an all-girls boarding school. By drawing on her university student identity to explain her sexual behaviour, Joyce situated her experiences within the realm of the liminal: she was only able to engage in these activities because of her ascribed identity as a university student and because of her interpretation of what this ascribed identity meant, especially in terms of the permissible and the prohibited. Both Joyce and Neria were very much aware that, outside of the walls of the university, their behaviour would be seen as unacceptable and unbecoming. At the same time, they were also very much aware of the possibilities that existed for them, because of their liminal qualities of the university experience.

As active lust seekers, the female students I discuss place a premium on the pursuit of pleasurable sex in and of itself. This was especially evident in the manner that the students spoke about their experiences. Joyce was clear that she, and not her boyfriend, had initiated many of their sexual encounters, while Neria matter-of-factly explained that condoms interfered with her full enjoyment of the sexual act: ‘Condoms are too clinical! I know that there isn’t much of a difference [*Hapana hapo difference yakanyanya ka*], but I like to know that it’s just me to him, not me to him through some



plastic!’ To maximize her enjoyment of the sexual act, Neria had also tried out a number of things, mostly kegel exercises to tighten the vagina and ‘going commando’ (i.e. panty-less) to dry it out. Again, she insisted that she did this for own enjoyment as much as for her boyfriend’s. In the excerpt below, she explains her actions in greater detail:

Neria: There are also these muscle tightening exercises... *unomboita weti* [you release the urine] then you stop, *womboita* [then you release again], then you stop...it works. It’s like so tightened, its like being a virgin, you know...but you don’t have to overdo it. If you tighten when he’s inside, you could hurt him. It could crack...

Me: Really?

Neria: Yah. It’s hard to learn the tricks of it. And there is stuff like when you are indoors and you are a woman...sometimes it [i.e. the vagina] gets too watery...so, if you don’t want it to be too watery, you stay indoors without a panty on.

Me: And it works?

Neria: It does. I have tried it. I will be dry most of the day. *Unotoona kuti* [you realize that] I am not producing any stuff. Rather than those driers [i.e. herbs and other traditional methods that are used to dry out the vagina] that cause cancers and stuff like that.

Although dry sex is usually discussed as a masculine pleasure in most of the literature, Scorgie et. al., (2009) found that the women in their South African study dried out their vaginas because they too enjoyed the friction that this caused during sexual intercourse. Machera (2004) suggests that we learn much more about female sexuality when women’s sexual desire is depicted as an ‘autonomous gesture [and] as an independent longing for sexual expression, satisfaction and fulfillment’ (p 165). If one draws from Ralph Bolton’s (1995) list on the ‘joys of sex’, it is possible to pick out at least fourteen different ways in which sex is a positive experience for Neria, as contained in the excerpt above. For

instance, sex is play, adventure, transcendence, fun, fantasy, interaction, connectedness, pleasure, liminality, growth, giving, sharing, ecstasy, experience, an expression of emotions and a source of meaning. Play, adventure and experience are particularly strong themes in Neria's narrative. This is clear when one considers that Neria consciously prepares for a pleasurable sexual encounter by tightening and drying her vagina; that she deliberately plans her visits to her boyfriend's place to coincide with the end of her menstrual period and that she gets to 'play house' in the two weeks that she spends at her boyfriend's place. Far from being victims, Neria and Joyce consciously elect to make pleasurable sex a key aspect of their university experience. And because their sexual aggressiveness runs contrary to societal norms of a modest, disembodied female sexuality, these female students seem almost dangerous and thus represent the ultimate liminal subjects, as I will show towards the end of the chapter.

In contrast to Neria, whose sexual experiences were reserved for her boyfriend, Nakai, a final year science student engaged in what I will refer to here as 'lust sex' with multiple concurrent partners. I had already known Nakai for at least a year when I decided to talk to her about her campus experiences. The conversation occurred on a Friday afternoon in the SHAPE. Nakai was a volunteer with the organisation. 'I am free for the rest of the day', she had declared when I reminded her that I wanted to chat with her. 'We can do it now'. She did not mind chatting in the office, even after I explained the potentially 'sensitive' nature of the issues I wanted to explore. She laughed my concerns away and firmly shut the door that separated the reception area that we were in from the adjoining accounts office. Then she pulled her chair quite close to mine and, in hushed tones asked 'Where do you want to start?'

Two hours later, I knew about every man that Nakai remembered dating since joining the university. There were ten men in total. She explained that she had not had any time for dating when she was at high school, largely because she had attended a ‘girls only’ boarding school. It is quite common for students from ‘girls only’ schools in the country to prioritise academic achievement over and above dating, hence a fair amount complete their high-school education without ever having been involved in intimate relationships with the opposite sex (Dangarembgwa 1989). ‘I had no time for boys!’, Nakai had declared. That was, at least until after she had written her Advanced Level examinations and had very little to do for three months as she awaited her results. It was during this period that she met her first boyfriend, whom she described as an ‘older man’ and a ‘politician’. During our conversation I soon found out that Nakai preferred dating much older and politically connected men. As a result, seven of the ten boyfriends that she told me about were much older than she was. For instance, a prominent politician that she was currently dating was at least sixty years old. A company director with whom she had been involved in an on-off relationship was in his early forties. Another politician that she had dated in the past year was in his late forties. At the time of the interview, she was in concurrent relationships with four men. Nakai was twenty-three years old.

Lust is the dominant theme in the incidents that Nakai chose to share with me that afternoon, and it is her own lust, in particular, that is implicated. Furthermore, Nakai did not downplay the fact that she was sexually adventurous and sexually uninhibited; if anything, she played it up and seemed to thrive on it. Even in her physical appearance, Nakai was deliberately sexual and she wore her feminine sexuality rather conspicuously, and almost like a badge of honor. She was fair skinned, short and quite curvaceous—

characteristics that many Zimbabwean men find particularly attractive (see Burke 1993). Her wide hips and small waist were what one immediately noticed in a first encounter, in large part because she typically dressed in clothes that further exaggerated her curves. Nakai preferred short skirts and form-fitting denims and blouses and she was very much aware of the effect that she had on men. For instance, when I asked her how she had met the elderly politician, she responded that it had been at a political rally and, pointing to her curves, she remarked ‘He couldn’t resist when he saw all this’. Nakai claimed that her relationship with the sixty-five year old politician was platonic: ‘You won’t believe it but he only kisses me on the cheeks or hugs me. Nothing more’. However, she had been sexually intimate with all her other boyfriends.

In one account, she described an incident involving a former lover that she bumped into in her second year. It had been some months since the relationship had ‘simply fizzled out’, as she described it. ‘When we met that day, we could both feel the chemistry between us still. So we arranged to meet later that evening on campus’, she continued. Nakai knew that the meeting would culminate in a sexual encounter, so she collected the keys to a friend’s room, who was spending a few days off campus. At that time Nakai did not have on-campus accommodation and was commuting from home. When he visited her later that day they had sex. Their desire for each other was so great that they proceeded to have unprotected sex even though she was having her menstrual flow. ‘My period had started earlier that day, but he didn’t mind! So we did it!’ ‘That must have been messy’ I commented. To which she burst out laughing and responded, ‘It was a messy process indeed! And I had to wash my friend’s bedding afterwards!’ They did not see each other much after that.

Nakai also described her relationship with the company director, whom I shall refer to here as Eddie. ‘I met Eddie through his brother, who was actually the one interested in me. I had heard a lot about Eddie since joining the university, but I had never met him in person. So, when I eventually met him I was like ‘Wow! So this is Eddie!’” By the end of that first meeting, Nakai and Eddie had been sexually intimate. ‘It was the fastest time it’s ever taken me to be sexual with anyone!’, she laughed at the recollection. ‘But he was very good’, she added, alluding to his sexual prowess. I quickly stopped her from elaborating on these experiences as the company director in question was someone I knew quite well. Nakai was aware of this and expressed great surprise that I had not been aware of her relationship with him. This relationship lasted two months before Eddie terminated it. ‘We are now just very good friends and we look out for each other’. I later figured out that ‘taking care of each other’ meant being occasionally available for each other’s sexual desires. Months later, I attended a discussion forum in which this particular phenomenon was given a name: ‘kissing friends’, or ‘friends with benefits’ and where it emerged that it was quite a common practice among both female and male students.

Again, it is significant that Nakai described her sexual encounters in very positive ways. She seemed to value the opportunity that the university space presented her to live out her sexuality as she pleased. Nakai also appeared to derive sexual pleasure, as much from actual sexual encounters as she did from her awareness of her physical sexual attractiveness. The latter enabled her to use her sexuality in thrilling and adventurous ways. Nakai could very easily be dismissed as an out-of-control, sex-crazy, immoral young woman. However, as Ssewakiryana (2003) argues, it is much more useful to

investigate how unconventional behaviours are played out, rather than asking if behaviours are conventional or not. In the case of the female students I discuss, their ‘unconventional’ behaviour is, interestingly, played out in what are typically considered to be very masculine ways. As active lust seekers, these female students therefore appear to exist ‘betwixt and between’, appearing to be not quite female (due to the impropriety of their behaviour) and yet not quite male either (even though they act like men in their sexual aggressiveness). As many scholars have shown, the adoption of an assumed persona is integral to the creation of liminal subjects (St John 2001; Skelton and Valentine 1998; Edgar 1990; Smith-Rosenburg 1990). Also, as Shields (1991) argues, liminality represents a moment of discontinuity in the social fabric and a loss of social coordinates; it offers a time-out from everyday demands and so marks special and extraordinary experiences (p 85).

That the female students in this chapter experienced their sexuality in ‘special and extraordinary’ ways was particularly evident in the manner in which they discussed their experiences. They were all aware of the temporality, and university-specific nature of their experiences and they all seemed to be capitalizing on this. All four girls discussed thus far looked forward to marriage after university: Neria had a steady boyfriend whom she hoped to eventually marry; Saru had broken up with ‘the love of her life’ and was exploring ways of getting him back; Nakai identified one boyfriend as serious even though she was simultaneously involved with three other guys; and Joyce was between boyfriends, at the time of the research. One of the ‘extraordinary’ ways in which these students realised they could experience university life was through their sexuality. For instance, Nakai described the politician she was involved in as having been unable to

resist her physical assets, particularly her curvaceousness. On the other hand, Saru narrated an incident in which she and Neria were offered a ride by a total male stranger, which culminated in him taking them out for supper and spending a substantial amount on them. Saru explained that the guy had become quite interested in them after ascertaining that they were university students.

As first year students, Neria and Saru seemed particularly taken in by the power that they seemed to wield over men and also by their ability to successfully manage relationships with multiple men. Both boasted that they had spent the first semester (which is fifteen weeks long) not taking their meals at the dining hall but eating out instead. Saru was involved in three relationships with men she described as ‘friends, even though I’m sure they might see me as their girlfriend’. She had devised a strategy of ensuring that these men would never meet each other: the first man would visit her between 5pm and 7 pm, during which time they would go out for a meal off-campus; she would then inform him that she had a discussion group at 7pm, so that she would be available for the next men who, in turn, would visit her from 7pm to 9pm. Saru and the second man would go out to a nightclub for drinks and a meal and upon being dropped back on campus at 9pm, she would then visit her campus-based boyfriend in his room till 10:30pm, when residence hall visiting hours ended. I explore this idea of active female sexuality as power and adventure in greater detail in the next chapter.

### **Active Lust Seeking as ‘Contextual’ Performativity?**

The kind of active lust seeking exhibited by some female students poignantly captures the ways in which, according to Vance (1989) ‘women’s actual sexual experiences are more complicated, more difficult to grasp and unsettling’. For instance, we might ask, should the actions of these female students be interpreted as their way of resisting social norms that prioritise a modest, contained female sexuality? Are these students creating and seeking out pleasurable sexual experiences as a way of rebelling against society? Or, are they merely taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the permissiveness of university campuses? In other words, are they simply experiencing university and living in the moment, rather than making a political commentary on gender roles? I would like to draw on Butler’s concept of performativity to argue that, as much as active lust seeking represents transgression, it also represents a certain level of conformity.

Butler (1993) defines performativity as ‘the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names’ (p 2). She gives the example of a newborn baby whom the doctor or nurse announces to be a ‘he’ or ‘she’. This act of ‘naming’ or ‘hailing’ produces the newborn as such: either as a ‘he’ or a ‘she’. More importantly though, this process of naming has to be constantly affirmed, that is, ‘reiterated’ in order to produce a ‘he’ or a ‘she’. In essence therefore, it is a *lifetime* of being hailed as ‘a girl’, for instance, that produces the girl, and enables her to enact particular social scripts as ‘normal’ and others as ‘abnormal’, rather than isolated incidents (see White, 1999). I would like to argue that a similar process of performativity appears to be at play at the UZ and contributes, interestingly enough, to the production of the active lust seekers on campus. I therefore propose the term *contextual* performativity, to denote the



interpellation that is directed towards female students and in their specific capacity as university students. Let me illustrate.

All female students at the UZ are referred to as *USA* (an acronym for University Spinsters Association, pronounced as ‘you-suh’). This is an ascribed identity that one gets by virtue of being a registered female student at the institution, regardless of one’s marital status. The male student identity, conversely, is referred to as *UBA* (University Bachelor’s Association, pronounced ‘you-bah’). These two terms have been in use since 1993 (Manwa 1995) and they seem to point to very specific ways of being a female or male student at the UZ. It is telling that these terms are not based on sex—e.g. University Females/Women’s Association and University Males/Men’s Association. Instead, they are based on marital status, single-ness or unmarried-ness in particular: spinsters and bachelors. If one also considers that even married students are referred to as *UBA*’s and *USAs*, it is clear that sexual availability (as denoted by spinsterhood and bachelorhood) is an integral aspect of the university student identity.

The stereotype of the ‘typical’ *USA* as held by both students and the general public, also tends to focus on the sexual lives of female students. The ‘typical *USA*’ is seen as sexually liberal as well as sexually aggressive and these characteristics are embodied in the ‘*USA*’ interpellation or hailing and it greatly influences gendered relations at the institution. Male students often summarised their views of *USAs* in the statement: ‘*USA haaite*’ (i.e. *USAs* are untrustworthy), which suggested that they were uncontrollable and devious—especially where sexual relationships were concerned. *USAs* are thus considered ‘players’, in much the same way that men are considered players, and are said

to be able to juggle multiple and concurrent sexual relationships while never getting found out. A male student captured this belief in the following statement:

“There is no way [that] I will ever date a USA. Maybe if we start [dating] when she is in part one, first semester. [I wont date someone] who has been at this institution for a year or more. No way. The innocence is lost. There are no virgins here [on campus].”

A common example that is used in general student discussions to prove that *all USAs* are sexually devious and untrustworthy is that of the ‘third year syndrome’. This refers to the allegation that female students who are in their final year of university are desperate to secure university-educated husbands before they graduate. To achieve this goal, final year female students are caricatured as turning to religion in order to appear ‘chaste’ even though they might have previously lived the ultimate *USA* life of sexual experimentation. The conclusion is that even *USAs* who claim to be Christian cannot be trusted, as they are likely to be sexually ‘impure’. Some of these female students are said to be so desperate that they will even ‘trick’ male students into making them pregnant in the hope that this will lead to marriage. The *USA* identity therefore symbolizes corrupted female sexuality.

Neria, Saru, Joyce and Nakai seem to embody most attributes of ‘*USAs*’. It can be argued that these female students are performatively produced through their interpellation and hailing as ‘*USA*’ during the three or four years that they spend at the university. An intense period of ‘*USA* utterances’ occurs during the early days that female students spend at university, particularly during Orientation Week, and continues for the duration of their stay. This hailing appears to be aimed specifically at producing a ‘*USA*’ subject. While active lust seeking by young, unmarried women is frowned upon in the general Zimbabwean society, at the university the situation is much less clear. Active lust seeking

by female students appears to be discursively produced as the norm, albeit a problematic norm. In this instance, the performativity that produces female students as ‘*USAs*’ is therefore very specific to the university setting. The consistent rejection of the idea that *USA*’s can be ‘chaste’ or faithful is indicative of the ‘ways in which the body can be re-styled in non-normative and occasionally subversive ways’ (Morris 1995).

I would like to add here that in certain contexts a non-normative re-styling does become the norm in certain contexts; this certainly appears to be the case at the UZ. While female students will generally respond to their interpellation as *USAs*, they are often eager to qualify the term by explaining precisely how they are and *are not USA*. Usually they accept the *USA* interpellation in so far as it denotes them simply as female students at the UZ but they will often go to great lengths to explain that they are ‘straight’ *USA*’s, in the sense that they are not cunning and devious. Even then, however, their protestations often go unheard and are usually dismissed.

The last point I want to discuss is Butler’s notion of reiteration, i.e. that ‘the act that one does, the act that one performs, is in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene’ (Digeser 1994:657). The negative connotations attached to the female university student identity are not just confined to the university campus and to students themselves. Rather, the interpellation continues outside the university and often precedes female students enrollment at the university. In the general public imagination, the lack of adult or parental control that characterizes many universities and the fact that female students can entertain males in their female rooms until late at night is seen as corrupting. Furthermore, female students are not seen as being strong enough, or even willing to resist the temptations that they find at the university. A number of final year

female students I knew especially those whose homes were in the capital city, faced major problems when their parents refused to allow them to live on campus. The primary concern appeared to be that residing there would place them—and particularly their sexuality—outside the realm of family surveillance. Nakai had faced such a problem when she first came to the university. Her parents only allowed her to secure a room on campus in her second year and only after a prolonged negotiation. She was, however, still expected to spend her weekends at home.

## **Conclusion**

There are two lessons to be drawn from this material. First, as I have shown, by neglecting or moralizing the realm of female sexual pleasure, the contemporary scholarship on African sexuality and HIV/AIDS fails to grasp a key aspect of its purported subject. Nakai, Saru, and company might be dismissed by others as ‘typical *USAs*’, but this stereotype sheds very little light on their actual motivations and interests. Second, their ‘active lust seeking’ is impossible to understand outside a specific context: the university. It is seen as both a liminal space, where males and females share space in a unique way, and a liminal time, between a highly surveilled adolescence and (what is perhaps an equally surveilled) marital life.

With regard to the former, interesting parallels can be drawn between public perceptions of female students and public perceptions of so-called ‘town women’ during the colonial era. Both have *always* been constructed as dangerous and out-of-control, primarily because of their presence in the city, which is considered an urban and modern space and is thus seen as existing outside of traditional systems of control and regulation

(Little 1973; White 1990; Jeater 1993; Barnes 1999; Scarnecchia 1999; Jacobson-Widding 2000). As Elizabeth Schmidt (1996:157) points out, ‘it was assumed that any African female in the urban areas would be ‘ruined’ by some man’.