



Chapter 3

The ‘Business of Survival’? Pimping and Transactional Sex at UZ

Relationships of exchange have long excited anthropologists, resulting in the seminal works of Mauss (1954), Malinowski (1961) and Sahlins (1965), among others. However, it is those that entail exchanges in women, and indeed exchanges in women’s bodies, that continue to baffle and intrigue (Levi-Strauss 1969; Rubin 1975; also Strathern 1988). In this chapter, I focus on sexual-economic exchange relationships—which are popularly referred to as ‘transactional sex’ relationships in the HIV and AIDS literature—which exist at the UZ. My intention in this regard is two-fold: to examine what exactly is ‘transacted’ (or exchanged) in transactional sex, other than—or in addition to—sex and money; and to examine how the transacting parties manage the ‘exchange’ relationship. Women’s sexual agency and the association of sex with adventure and power, themes that I introduced in the previous chapter, continue to be the subjects of primary interest in this chapter. Only this time my analysis goes beyond female students’ pursuit of sexual pleasure to examine other aspects of active female sexuality as exhibited by female students at the UZ. In the last sections of the chapter I examine the phenomenon of pimping⁵ at the institution in order to illustrate what happens when a third party enters what is typically considered a ‘dyadic transaction between self-interested individuals’

⁵ I use the word pimping, with its attendant association with prostitution, simply because the students themselves, both male and female, refer to this type of transactional sex as such, and they distinguish it from the more common sugar daddy relationships.

(Parry 1997). It is in this latter part of the chapter that I will also investigate what *men* get out of transactional sex relationships, other than or in addition to sex. I further explore the implications of this type of pimp-mediated transactional sex on female students' agency and autonomy.

Numerous studies on the topic of transactional sex in Africa suggest that limited material resources create conditions of extreme vulnerability for women and girls (Longfield et al 2004; Kuafe-Defo 2004; Kaufman and Stavrou 2004; Luke 2003), which in turn, push women into outright 'prostitution' or into transactional sex relationships. In contrast to 'prostitution', the term transactional sex is used to denote the experiences of 'otherwise ordinary' women (as opposed to sex workers) who are forced to make a living through selling their bodies (Cote et al 2007; Wojcicki 2002; Hunter 2002). Transactional sex is therefore typically cast as a 'last resort' strategy for economically disadvantaged women while prostitution is seen as sex work that is freely entered into (Wardlow 2004). Furthermore, prostitution, unlike transactional sex, is understood as entailing exchanges in which the price for sex is clearly stated and agreed upon in advance (Bene and Merten 2008; Swidler and Watkins 2007). In contrast, transactional sex is typically used to describe an exchange that is less formal than prostitution in that there may not be a price agreed in advance, or sex may be exchanged for other forms of support, not just money (Epstein 2007; Pisani 2008).

I would like to preface my discussion of transactional sex at the UZ by examining three key but, in my opinion, problematic assumptions that underpin contemporary understandings of the phenomenon. The first is the taken-for-granted idea that money and sex are *always* the things exchanged in transactional sex relationships. Here, I argue, it is

useful to refer back to White's (1986) influential work on prostitution in Nairobi during the 1980s. White shows that even a seemingly straightforward practice like prostitution often entailed much more than the simple exchange of money and sex. For instance, '*in addition to providing sexual services*', White (1986: 256) argues, 'prostitutes in Nairobi also routinely provid[ed] bed space, cooking, cleaning, bath water, companionship, hot meals, cold meals and tea'. She famously terms these non-sexual services 'the comforts of home' and argues that these nonsexual services were usually just as important to the men concerned as the actual sex. Clearly, these transactions are far more complex than straightforward exchanges in which women give sex and men give money. It is these other non-sexual aspects of transactional sex relationships that I will investigate later in the chapter.

The second assumption is that intimate relationships that entail monetary and/or material exchanges are necessarily exploitative (Maganja et al 2007; Pettifor, Beksinska and Ress 2000). In reality, the 'intimate' and the 'material' straddle each other in ways that make it impossible (if not meaningless) to separate the two. Wojcicki (2002) and Hunter (2002), both writing about sex-for-money relationships in South Africa, argue that the exchange of material goods is commonly used as an indicator of partner commitment in much of Africa. The transfer of material goods from a man to a woman is therefore crucial rather than inimical to many intimate relations. A clear example of this are bridewealth payments, which are arguably as much a test of a prospective groom's ability to provide materially for his future wife and family, as a transfer of uxorial and genetricial rights between the parties involved.

In a study of transactional sex among women fish traders in Malawi, Swidler and Watkins (2006:12) argue that these relationships are part of broader ‘systems of interdependence that characterize African societies’, in which ‘women need patrons to provide for them [while] men need clients who provide them with an outlet for the display of power, prestige and social dominance’. The authors suggest that transactional sex is therefore a corrupted form of such patron-client relationships and they insist that these are of much greater importance to most Malawians than the monetary and sexual exchanges themselves. Transactional sex for the women fish traders thus acts as a much-needed social safety net. Despite a long theoretical tradition of dividing intimate and material spheres (Zelizer 2005), their entanglement is not unique to Africa or to so-called developing country contexts (Poulin 2007).

The third assumption views transactional sex through a single, narrow lens: as a survival strategy of economically disadvantaged women (Pettifor, Beksinska and Rens 2000, Meekers and Calves 1997). While this is certainly true in many Zimbabwean cases (see Muparamoto and Chingwenya 2009, Muzvidziwa 2002, Matshalaga 1999), especially given the country’s incessantly shrinking economy, it does not explain why relatively well-off young women—such as some of the female students I discuss in the chapter—engage in the practice. For many female students, and indeed for many women, decisions are often motivated as much by the desire for conspicuous consumption as they are by subsistence. Hunter (2002) refers to two main types of transactional sex in South Africa—‘sex linked to subsistence’ (for which poverty is a key factor) and ‘sex linked to consumption’ (for which poverty is a not a key factor). Wojcicki (2002), in turn, makes a similar distinction, but adopts the terms ‘informal sex’ and ‘survival sex’ to differentiate

between those sex-for-money exchanges that are culturally acceptable and those that are linked to poverty, respectively. A comparative study conducted by Moore et al. (2007) in four African countries, namely Malawi, Uganda, Ghana and Burkina Faso, found no significant differences in household economic status, orphan status or level of education between which young women received money in exchange for sex and those who did not (see also Iversen 2005, Kaufman and Stavros 2004).

A recent paper by Bene and Merten (2008) further illustrates these multiple meanings of transactional sex in Africa. The authors focus on women fish traders in different African countries and show how ‘fish-for-sex’ is resorted to *both* as a short-term survival strategy in times of economic crisis *and* as a longer-term business strategy for profit maximisation. The women fish traders in question established ‘temporary marriages’ with fishermen as a way of assuring themselves of an uninterrupted supply of fish, particularly during periods when fish were scarce and competition among traders was extremely high. These temporary marriages were not confined to periods of economic hardship, but were incorporated into the women fish traders’ long-term business strategies (cf. Muzvidziwa 2002). This suggests that in some cases, even after subsistence needs have been met, these relationships will not necessarily be terminated but will continue to be maintained in order to fulfil other, non-survival needs.

In this study, some female students from lower middle-class backgrounds used transactional sex to attain an otherwise elusive modern lifestyle, while those from upper middle-class backgrounds used it to maintain an already privileged class position. For yet others, transactional sex spared them from having to manage the usual encumbrances of emotional commitment and sexual exclusiveness associated with standard

boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. Furthermore, many female students exercised considerable agency and employed a variety of strategies to benefit maximally from transactional sex relationships.

NABAs, Big Dharas and the ‘Sugar Daddy’ Presence at the UZ

On 15 July 2007, the government owned daily press, *The Herald*, carried a story headlined ‘When love turns sour’, which detailed the unfortunate incident of a sugar daddy whose car was set alight by UZ students. Below is a short excerpt from the paper:

“When love turns sour, it is like buttermilk. The more you shake it, it spills out of the churn and the more it gets sour’ (sic), a philosopher once said. This is what a sugar daddy, a respectable member of his church, recently experienced at the University of Zimbabwe, after his Toyota Camry was reduced to a shell by unruly students, following a dispute that he had with his young varsity girlfriend. The sugar daddy is believed to be in his 40s and has been a headmaster of several schools while his lover, young enough to be his daughter, was a final year student.

[An eyewitness is quoted as saying: The girl’s room at the New Complex was the most beautifully furnished room on the UZ campus. It was home away from home. She had gadgets like a microwave, television and DVD player while she wore trendy clothes bought by her ‘old’ boyfriend]”.

This dramatic incident was also worthy of coverage on the national broadcaster, ZTV, where it aired during the main news of the day. The manner in which the incident was reported in the press, particularly the issues that the reporter chose to focus on, encapsulates how many Zimbabweans (public health practitioners included) view these relationships. In the press report, as in the overwhelming majority of scholarship, the focus is on the huge age and wealth disparities between the sugar daddy and the female student and on the considerable material resources that were said to flow from the male to

the female. And although the article poked fun at the sugar daddy for dating someone ‘young enough to be his daughter’, curiously, it did not just as readily offer an explanation as to why the sugar daddy was in such a relationship to start with, as it did for the female student. And while I do not dispute that sex is more often than not exchanged in these relationships, I do question the glib assumptions that are made of such relationships, especially the taken-for-granted claim that men enter them solely to get sex. In fact, I argue that the mere fact that a sex worker would cost sugar daddies substantially less suggests that they must be after more in these relationships (Hyde 2007; Iversen 2005; Haley et al 2004; Leclerc-Madlala 2004; Longfield et al 2004). This view is increasingly gaining favour in emerging studies on the phenomenon. In her study of university students in South Africa, Leclerc-Madlala (2004:1-2) argues that transactional sex is primarily a quest for ‘a successful and modern life’, a ‘pursuit of modernity’ and a strategy that these young women use to modernize themselves and ‘pursue images and ideals created by the media and globalisation’ (*ibid*). The near obsessive purchasing of expensive commodities by these young women is therefore primarily about them fashioning themselves as ‘successful and modern’ subjects, than it is primarily about subsistence and survival.

This certainly seems to be the case in the UZ sugar daddy incident recounted earlier. While the newspaper report focused on the materially beneficial aspects of the relationship for the female student—the fact that she had the most beautifully furnished room at the UZ campus, containing a TV, DVD and a microwave as well as the fact that she wore trendy clothes—it is important to note that all the items mentioned are hardly the things that one needs for ‘survival’. If anything, these were expensive commodities

associated with sophistication, success and modernity. In practice, therefore, the sugar daddy phenomenon at the UZ is no more an exchange of sex and money than the kula is simply just an exchange of *mwali* (necklaces) and *soulava* (armshells), among the Trobriand Islanders. As Malinowski (1922:94) explains, ownership of these valuables, even if it is just for a few minutes, brings ‘a great deal of renown’ and enables one ‘to exhibit his article, to tell how he obtained it and to plan to whom he will give it’. There appears to be a direct correlation between a sugar daddy’s ability to attract the attention of a young, intelligent, university female and his social status in his peer group. This is why sugar daddies always want to take their young charges ‘out’, particularly to those public places that afford the greatest visibility.

Transactional sex at UZ is often referred to as a *Big Dhara* relationship. The term *dhara* is a slang derivative from the Shona word, *mudhara*, and refers to elders or big men. The term ‘Big Dhara’, as used by most Zimbabweans, draws attention to the ages of these men, on one hand, and to their socio-economic status and physical attributes on the other. Most Big *Dharas* are quite portly and seem literally to carry their wealth on their persons. Often, the ‘portliest’ Big *Dharas* drive the latest ‘Mercs’ (Mercedes Benz) and are typically chauffeured around. Big *Dhara* or *NABA* relationships are the equivalent of ‘sugar daddy’ relationships, the latter which are typically defined in the literature as referring to relationships involving ‘an adult male who exchanges large amounts of money or gifts for sexual favours from a much younger woman (Luke 2005:6). The use of the term Big *Dhara* to refer to sugar daddies has only recently entered the general parlance, while the term sugar daddy has been in use since the mid-1990s.

There are subtle differences between Big *Dharas* and another category, *NABAs*. The acronym *NABA* (which stands for Non-Academic Bachelor's Association) is a UZ specific term that is used by students to refer to any man who is not a university student. Although the term encompasses male alumni from the UZ (hence a recent twenty-something graduate is also referred to as a *NABA*), it is usually used scathingly to refer to all 'outside' men who visit the university. Therefore, while a *NABA* is also typically constructed as an older and wealthy man who dates female students, the term is not synonymous with Big *Dhara*. The latter is reserved for politicians, government ministers, businessmen and directors of non-governmental organisations, who are viewed as being considerably wealthier than *NABAs*. This distinction is usually contained in the question 'Is her *NABA* a Big *Dhara*?' which students often ask during conversations on the topic.

Access to, or ownership of a car is central to both categories, and any car that is seen parked outside the female students residences, especially at night, is automatically assumed to belong to a *NABA or Big Dhara*, and is at risk of being vandalized, or set alight, as happened in the incident reported above. In fact, one too many 'anti-*NABA*' demonstrations by male students led to the introduction of a new security measure in which no cars are allowed into the university campus after 6pm. Visitors coming into campus after this time have to find someplace else to park their cars, as the safety of their vehicles is not guaranteed. During fieldwork I observed that most visitors—the overwhelming majority of whom were indeed male—resorted to using the university taxi rank for this purpose. Each time that I stayed late on campus, I would move my car to the library car park, which was not only within full view of the security personnel manning the main university entrance, but was also a distance away from the student residences.

Sugar daddies, at the UZ as elsewhere, seem to be unpopular with everyone else but the young women that they date. Sugar daddies evoke negative emotions in many people, as they are viewed as predators who will readily prey on unsuspecting and gullible young woman in order to satisfy their own selfish sexual needs (Niekerk 2001; Kim et al 2001); they are also often seen as primarily responsible for the high rates of HIV infections among teenage girls (Joint Report by UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM 2004). At the UZ, Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* are unpopular among male students for a number of reasons. First, they are seen as ‘stealing’ potential sexual and romance partners away. Second, many Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* are either politicians within the ruling party, ZANU-PF, or they are businessmen with close ties to the ruling party⁶. Most male students strongly resent the presence of ZANU-PF on the UZ campus because of the party’s repressive policies and autocratic mode of governance. However, whereas most people see Big *Dhara/NABA* relationships purely in terms of exploitation, the discussion that follows clearly shows that the parties involved often experience the exchange relationship in much more complex ways.

‘Better things to buy’: Female Students and Prestige-making

“I can’t really say it was financial ‘coz my parents can provide. It’s just this thing, you know. It’s whereby you tell yourself that I’ve got money but I can’t use it to buy takeaways. I’ve got better things to buy...So, if somebody is there, who will buy the takeaway for me, why not?”- Samantha, 2nd year Social Sciences student

⁶ In recent years, Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* have also come to include members of the opposition party, the Movement of Democratic Change (MDC). There have also been reports in the national press of members of the MDC who have been implicated in transactional sex relationships with under-age girls.



“I don’t even know what drove me to be in that relationship, ‘coz my mother’s sister [owns] a salon. She always says if you want to have a new hairstyle, come to me. If you have got something you need [sic], come to me. My brother works for some NGOs⁷ [and he also says] if you have anything, some problems, come to me. I’ll give you anything that you need. My mother is a teacher, of course, but she’s [also] a florist. She always sends me money. Of course, I just need to be flashy on campus. That’s what I wanted” – Tendai, 2nd year Arts student

These were the responses that I got from two friends, Tendai and Samantha, whom I spoke to separately. Although they acknowledged that some female students were pushed into Big *Dhara* relationships because of economic need, and they even gave me examples of friends and other female students in such situations, they were adamant that this was not the case for them. As the quotes show, Tendai and Samantha had a number of people that they could turn to for financial and material support and hence appear to have no reason to be in these types of relationships. However, the fact that they were suggests that these relationships are not always about financial need—even though money and material resources are often a key feature.

These relationships must therefore hold other attractions for young women. The notion of being ‘flashy on campus’, that Tendai mentions in the second quote, seems central. All ten female students who openly disclosed that they were involved with Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* alluded, directly and indirectly, to this notion of ‘flashiness’, which can be described as the desire to be *seen* and to be *visible* on campus through conspicuous consumption. Through their ‘flashiness’, these female students get an opportunity to assert themselves, variously, as more sophisticated, more successful and even more

⁷ i.e. non-governmental organisations

sexually desirable than their peers. There was a sense of prestige associated with consumption in luxury consumer goods.

The association of gifts with prestige is a very common phenomenon in anthropology. Bohannan (1955), for instance, identified three spheres of exchanges among the Tiv. In the first, exchanges serve a subsistence function and involve exchanges of foodstuffs, household utensils and some tools. The second sphere is directly associated with prestige and involves the exchange of brass rods and slaves, while the last sphere entails what Bohannan calls ‘rights in dependant persons’, that is, the exchange of women particularly through marriage payments. What is particularly interesting about exchanges that confer prestige is that they often also straddle the utility divide. As Bohannan explained, even though brass rods and slaves have an economic value, they are exchanged primarily for their prestige value, rather than for their utilitarian value. Much the same can be said of exchanges between female students and Big *Dharas* and *NABAs*: while the money and gifts transacted surely have ‘use-value’, the attraction lies more in the prestige value or ‘flashiness’ associated with these relationships than in the contributions that they make to subsistence. Being ‘flashy’ is about competing with one’s peers and asserting one’s superiority over them, as well as carving out a niche for oneself as a ‘high status’ individual on the UZ campus. To reduce all of this to mere utility is to miss a great deal.

It is immediately clear when talking to female students that regular conspicuous consumption of *food* is central to the notion of ‘flashiness’. As mentioned in the previous chapter, female students are proud of the fact that they eat out for most of the semester, thereby shielding themselves from what is often seen as the ‘indignity’ of campus meals.



Consider the following description of campus meals that was given by Noma, a first year student, and which was echoed by many students, both female and male: ‘At one-thirty [pm] I went for lunch at DACS [i.e. residence dining hall]. The food was bad, the soup was watery and [there was] a fly in my plate!’ Besides the obvious fact that campus meals were of terrible quality and insufficient quantity, many students considered it a mark of extreme poverty if one was solely dependent on campus meals. Students therefore greatly valued ‘eating out’. For the female students in question, avoiding campus meals—especially those from the dining halls—meant that they were not as ‘ordinary’ as their peers given that conspicuous consumption in food was ongoing (one has to eat daily) and thus required a constant supply of cash and tremendous resources to sustain. As one female student impressed upon me: ‘Imagine going through a whole semester without going to the DH [dining-hall]!’ There was a sense of awe in her voice as she said this.

Tendai had ‘dated’ a fifty-something Big *Dhara* during her first year and she narrated, at length, how she and her friends ‘ate out all the time’ and she spent a great deal of time giving details about the various food items they bought with the money they got from her Big *Dhara*. She explained that on the days that she did not eat out, she purchased her meals from either the campus supermarket or from the Senior Common Room. These were both expensive options for the average student. The Senior Common Room was for lecturers, non-academic staff and graduate students, hence meals were not as highly subsidised as they were in the residence dining-halls. Nevertheless, the meals were of a superior quality. The campus supermarket, in turn, represented the most expensive meal option on the UZ campus, and was referred to by students in the

vernacular as ‘*Ende munodhura*’, that is, ‘You are So Expensive!’ Meals at the supermarket cost almost twice as much as they did at the residence dining halls even though the quality and quantity was often a point of contention with students. Because of the expense involved in taking one’s meals from these two places they therefore constituted ‘flashy’ behaviour, albeit not as much as eating out off-campus.

Tendai’s account of her relationship with the Big *Dhara* warrants further attention. Although in our conversations she described her relationship in terms of a utilitarian model, her subsequent definition of what being broke means to her, illustrates the non-utilitarian nature of these relationships:

“I think about that man when I was just broke. That’s the only time I think of him. And I think ‘Oh, I have only money to buy bread. What about these things? I need something like pie, like takeaways, like twister...”

It is clear from the above that Tendai did not talk about absolute levels of poverty. She could still afford to buy bread at a time when bread was beyond the reach of most students, including many civil servants. Bread is not typically the kind of consumption that UZ students associate with ‘flashiness’, but its general unavailability in the country and consequent un-affordability at the time of the interview (July 2007) had catapulted it into the category of a prestige-conferring food item. Not so for Tendai, however: she preferred to dine on ‘twisters’—a supposedly low-fat wrap sold at Kentucky Fried Chicken—and ‘pies’. These are clearly non-subsistence foods and required tremendous financial resources, hence the prestige attached to them. As Leclerc-Madlala (2004) noted with regards to university students in Kwazulu-Natal (South Africa), perceptions of ‘need’ rather than actual ‘need’ are crucial factors behind university female students’

participation in transactional sex. This is why many young women readily classify cell phones, fancy clothes and luxury transportation as needs, rather than as wants.

Among the female students that I spoke to, pizza and cerevita (a type of cereal imported from South Africa) were the most coveted foods. It is no coincidence that these foods were also quite expensive. Even those students who were not involved in *Big Dhara* or *NABA* relationships described a satisfactory date as one that entailed ‘going out for pizza’, and a good boyfriend as one who ‘brings you pizza when he visits’. Male students (and some females) often identify these two food items as the key reasons that female students prefer dating non-students. A male student explained: ‘It makes a lot of difference if someone brings you pizza, Chicken Inn [i.e. a popular fast food chain that sells deep-fried chicken and french fries) and that sort of thing’. Consequently, female students often snub advances from male students by asking them ‘*unondipei?*’ which literally means ‘what can you *give* me?’ and figuratively means ‘what can you *do* for me?’ Unlike in other parts of the world such as the USA and the UK where fast food is generally affordable, fast food in Zimbabwe is typically out of the reach of most people and is thus associated with the well off.

‘Flashiness’ through food seems best suited for showing off to one’s close friends and associates, and allows one to assert oneself as being of a higher social status within ones peer groups. This is because it is mainly those individuals that one invites to one’s room who get to see the empty pizza box and the cerevita or the ‘fine furnishings’ one has. It is also one’s close friends and immediate associates, such as corridor mates, rather than the generality of the campus population, who would know that ‘one always eats out’ and ‘never dines on campus’. Nakai, who I introduced in the previous chapter, narrated

the story of a girl in her corridor who would only dispose her empty pizza boxes at the weekend. According to Nakai, this girl would deliberately walk *very slowly* to the trash can (which was in the foyer, a very public space), so that everyone would see her huge pile of large pizza boxes accumulated during the week. Nakai further noted that the girl would even speak disparagingly about campus meals and declare her aversion to them. Such behaviour, Nakai explained to me, made other female students envious and could push some into Big *Dhara* and *NABA* relationships.

Female students, like most other young women, also use their relationships with Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* to purchase fancy gadgets, fashionable clothes and fancy hairdos as well as for facials, pedicures and manicures. Samantha, a second year Social Sciences student, explained:

“The pressure is there, like right now you go into campus and you see the other girls are flashy and all that...so you get the pressure that ‘Oh! I’m wearing these clothes. I’ve had them for so long’...Basically, it’s all about clothes. With girls it’s about looking nice. Getting your hair done. I know most girls, some go out with ministers and all that, [and they] are doing it just to get their hair done or something”.

In contrast to food, fancy clothes, hairdos and gadgets appear to be used to achieve ‘flashiness’ at a much more general level. This is because they are much more visible and thus enable female students to be noticed by the generality of the student population. As the pizza story above clearly shows, female students want to stand out from other female students, and their competitiveness and rivalry is directed at each other. ‘Clothing’, as Hansen (2000:6) points out, ‘is a special commodity because of the way the dressed body mediates individual and collective desires’. At the UZ, body-hugging clothes, such as

hipsters and tank-tops, are considered particularly trendy among female students, even more so if they happened to be imports from the United Kingdom. Hipsters are basically any type of jeans that are ‘low-rise’, meaning that one wears them on the hips, rather than at the waist. At the time of the research, the ‘skinny leg’ and ‘bootleg’ were the most popular types. Tank-tops, on the other hand, encompass a whole range of tight-fitting blouses, often made from fabric that stretches, and they can be completely sleeveless, halter-necked, strappy or short-sleeved. The general idea with these types of clothes—and one that conforms to the visual aspect of ‘flashiness’—is that one shows lots of skin and curves. In a group discussion or ‘talkshow’ entitled ‘Dress Code’ organised by the Catholic Society on campus, a female Christian student argued that dressing is precisely about expressing one’s sexuality, and that female students want to be noticed as women. She explained:

“I’m actually glad that God made me a woman so I’ll always wear...clothes that cling ‘coz there is something here [points to her breasts], which defines our sexuality. We have something here [points to her waist] and here [pointing to her hips and bottoms]. I wear what accentuates my figure, accentuates my sexuality”.

In fact, during my fieldwork, hipsters had assumed some level of notoriety at the campus, because they often exposed female students’ panties each time the latter bent forward or sat down on a chair. This unintended exposure was particularly pronounced when female students alighted from the sixteen-seater public taxis, as they had to bend forward to get out. It was during these times that other passengers got a less-than-welcome full view of the young women’s panties. Male students, and other female students, considered the sight of these panties especially disturbing if a female student was wearing a G-string, as one also got a glimpse of the uppermost part of the girl’s buttocks. Indeed, in the

talkshow in question, a male student elicited much laughter and applause from the group when he advised female students to stop wearing jeans that are too small [*kana risi kukwana harisi kukwana*, lit, if it [i.e. the jeans] does not fit, don't wear it] and which expose body parts 'that should not be in the open'.

Female students' fashion sense appeared to be influenced by a number of things, of which the media was key. Many of my informants followed two TV shows religiously, namely a daily local soap called 'Studio 263' and the African Movies shown on weekends. The African Movies shown are usually from Nigeria and Ghana and most Zimbabweans find them especially fascinating because of the strong West African accents of the cast members. (The story lines are also intriguing as they focus on witchcraft and unrequited love). In most of the African Movies, young women are depicted as extremely fashion conscious, almost to the point of being ridiculous. They wear tight-fitting jeans and skimpy tank-tops and they also tend to have ostentatious hairdos, mainly in the form of artificial hair pieces, which are popularly known as 'weaves'. Weaves are hair-pieces that are sewn into one's own hair and are typically modeled along white hairdos. They often look and feel like white people's hair. It was therefore not uncommon to see female students with waist-length, super straight hair topped off with a perfect 'fringe' (cut bangs). In fact, the heroine in the local soap, Studio 263, and her 'sister' often wore their hair in very long weaves.

Generally, women who wear weaves prefer those that are considered to be 'one hundred percent natural', as opposed to those that are 'synthetic'. This is because the former look less artificial and can sometimes be mistaken for one's own hair. However, the more natural looking a weave is, the more expensive it is. I got a clue of just how

expensive some of these weaves could be when Tendai made the following statement in relation to a special brand of weave, known as Sangika, which her Big *Dhara* bought her once: ‘It’s too expensive! I [only] dreamt of having Sangika when I have worked for ages! (sic)’. In addition to having the ‘natural’ variety, how the weave is attached to one’s own hair is equally as important, as a badly sewn on weave can look shabby thereby interfering with one’s desire to look expensive and sophisticated. I often observed female students go through the following ritual in relation to weaves: after complimenting someone’s weave, for instance, most female students would immediately want to know the brand of the weave and then the name of the hair salon and/or hair stylist where the weave was done. Furthermore, much advice is circulated among friends and immediate colleagues on the salons to avoid when having a weave done. After having her Sangika sewn on, Tendai informed me that her friend also wanted the same hairdo, so she (Tendai) had called up her Big *Dhara* for more money.

Besides these two TV shows, female students were also strongly influenced by South African soap operas and magazines as well as fashion trends from South Africa, the United Kingdom and Dubai. The first two represent the major countries that most Zimbabweans have migrated to in order to escape economic and political strife. Dubai, on the other hand, became a popular trading destination during the peak of the economic crisis and most people who went there purchased various electronics (especially inverters) and clothes for reselling in Zimbabwe. Clothes from these three countries are sold in public markets, known in Zimbabwe as ‘flea markets’. These markets are very popular with female students, partly because they offer a cheaper alternative to formal clothes boutiques. It is therefore not uncommon to see large numbers of female students

dressed in relatively similar clothes depending on what is considered to be the fashion trend at that moment.

One of my informants, Sihle, captured the level of pressure that exists among female students. In her diary entry, Sihle described an afternoon spent engaging in ‘girl talk’ with her female classmates. She wrote that ‘girl talk’, ‘usually revolves around five topics: hairstyles, fashion, movies, music and boyfriends. She placed three stars on the fifth item (to emphasise its importance, no doubt) and made the following comment: ‘Some female students are willing to date any guy, not minding his age, as long as he would give them gifts [sic], buy clothes for them and give them cash’. Sihle did not approve of such actions, and took even greater exception when her peers made fun of the fact that she was already engaged. Of this experience she wrote:

“When they discovered am (sic) already engaged and dating one guy, they laughed at me and said these days guys do not date to marry and that my ring was just a way of showing my boyfriend was possessive. I really was not in the mood to argue so I just excused myself and went to sleep in my room”.

Sihle’s account illustrates the pressures that female students experience in their peer groups and provides deeper insights into why some (though not all) of them opt to be in relationships with Big *Dharas* and *NABAs*.

The pressure to be fashionable, and to appear a certain way, is not unique to these female university students, nor is the self-image that they are trying to create. If anything, fashion has come to be synonymous with female youth culture across the globe (see Luke and Kurz’s 2002 review of transactional sex in twelve countries in Sub-Saharan Africa; also Weinbaum et al 2008). Cole’s (2004) study of transactional sex in Madagascar is

illustrative. She demonstrates how teenage girls are pressured by their peers, and even by their parents, to enter into sexual exchange relationships with *vazaha* (that is, foreign men from Europe) so that they can access foreign consumption goods, of which fashionable hairdos and clothes are part. Similarly, through the consumption of expensive food, female students are able to construct themselves, not only as different from their peers, but also as successful, desirable, middle-class subjects.

Much has been written about the conspicuous consumption of the middle-class and about how consumption in unproductive goods, in particular, is considered much more honorific and reputable (Verblen 2000). Featherstone (2000:95), in turn, argues that consumerism is a form of ‘stylistic self-consciousness, which allows everyone, regardless of age and class position, to create a life-style of their choice through the ‘assemblage of goods, clothes, experiences, appearance and bodily disposition’. Featherstone’s notion of *stylistic self-consciousness* suggests that the adoption of particular lifestyles is a deliberate decision that individuals make, and not, as he puts it, something that individuals ‘unreflectively adopt through tradition or habit’. In the remaining parts of the chapter I would like to address myself to the question of what Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* get out of these relationships.

Managing Reciprocity in Big *Dhara*/*NABA* Relationships

A gift is always a provocation to reply (Mauss 1954). It is therefore fitting at this point to attend to the question of what female students give in return for the money they receive from Big *Dharas* and *NABAs*, which money they in turn use for prestige-making. Do

they, as the literature suggests, reciprocate sexually? Or do they find ways of wriggling out of this obligation to reciprocate (Sahlins 1965)? If they do, what strategies do they employ and with what outcomes? Do they even consider it to be ‘reciprocation’? In attempting to answer these questions, the complexity of transactional sex as a practice and the inadequacy of the sex-money dichotomy become very clear. Clearly, transactional sex is not ‘prostitution’ in the sense that one sells sex at a pre-determined price that is communicated to men, who are the buyers (see Hyde 2007, Odzer 1994). Neither can one conclude that it is definitively sex work either. Wojcicki (2002: 339) uses the Zulu term *ukuphanda* to refer to what she describes as ‘sex-for-money exchanges that take place outside of commercial sex work’. The UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Gender and HIV/AIDS (2005) for instance, defines sex workers as ‘female, male and transgender adults and young people who receive money or goods in exchange for sexual services, either regularly or occasionally, and who may or may not consciously define those activities as income-generating’. Most definitions make any material exchange in the context of a sexual relationship evidence of sex work, thus occluding the type of transaction sex that exists on the UZ campus. In fact, female students—and many young women in general—actively exploit these ambiguities to their advantage, resulting in a situation that Sahlins (1965) referred to as ‘negative reciprocity’, that is, when one party to a transaction benefits at the expense of the other.

Let me begin by distinguishing two types of female students: those who prefer to date older men for sentimental reasons and those who do so for prestige-making purposes. This distinction is important for understanding how female students manage reciprocity in these relationships. In the previous chapter I discussed the case of Nakai,

who finds older men attractive as sexual partners. Her reasons for being in these relationships were partly sentimental (she loves them) and partly sexual (she finds them good in bed) and partly prestige related. But unlike the female students I discussed earlier who appear to use these relationships to attain a high social status on campus, Nakai used her relationships with Big *Dharas* to *maintain* her already high social status and so did not consider sexual relations with her Big *Dharas* as a form of payback for the material goods they lavished on her. If anything, she considered these ‘exchanges’ to be normal aspects of any intimate relationship. It is important to note that Nakai was from a privileged background: her family lived in one of the wealthiest neighbourhoods in the capital and was politically connected. This is largely how she gained access to various politicians—both from the ruling party and from the opposition.

This is in direct contrast to the majority of female students I spoke to, most of whom appeared to engage in transactional sex primarily for prestige-making reasons. As a result, they were not too keen to reciprocate sexually. Many of these students thus developed ingenious strategies aimed at wiggling out of the obligation to reciprocate sexually. At one of our meetings, Neria and Saru, the two friends I introduced in the previous chapter, launched into a lengthy discussion on how to avoid paying back for the ‘gifts’ one receives from Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* through sex. One strategy that they considered virtually foolproof involved wearing a sanitary pad each time when they went out on evening dates with Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* and pretending that they were menstruating. Neria narrated an incident in which a ‘date’ turned awry and she found herself trapped in a dingy motel, 10km away from campus, at 4am, and in the company of a man she had only met the previous afternoon. Neria explained that when the man

made sexual advances towards her, she informed him that she was having her period and when he didn't believe her, she invited him to 'feel' her pad. According to Neria, the man turned away in disgust and never bothered her again all night. He did however threaten to confiscate her mobile phone as payment for the money he had spent on her at the club. Neria admitted that this had been a very 'close call' and that next time she might not be as lucky. A number of female students I spoke to were aware of this 'pad decoy'.

Samantha, mentioned earlier in this chapter, claimed to have successfully avoided physical intimacy by using embarrassment as a strategy. When her Big *Dhara* tried to kiss her one day, she spurned his advances by 'playfully' yelling out 'Child abuse! Child abuse!' Apparently, the Big *Dhara* found this jest to be in bad taste and he did not pursue the matter any further. Samantha also took advantage of the fact that they were in a public place, and in the company of a third person. Her friend, Tendai, had also used a similar strategy successfully. Each time her Big *Dhara* made sexual advances towards her, she would remind him that he was old enough to be her father. Again, this seemed to put him off and he settled for other forms of physical intimacy with her, such as kissing. He also did 'childish things' with her body, which she didn't specify. Consequently, she was able to maintain a month-long relationship with him without ever reciprocating sexually even though he had spent millions of Zimbabwean dollars (perhaps USD100) on her and at one point left his BMW with her.

A number of female students involved in Big *Dhara* and *NABA* relationships explained that one has to be 'clever' in these relationships in order to avoid paying back through sex. One female student was unsympathetic of women who feel that they always have to reciprocate in sexual ways. Her argument was as follows:

“The problem with most girls is that they feel like they owe a guy something because he spent a million on them. What they do not realize is that a million dollars means nothing to the guy [because he has a lot of money]”.

As far as she was concerned, it was women’s own actions, particularly their tendency to make a ‘big deal’ of the resources men spend on them that made the latter expect and demand sexual favours from them. Finally, many students terminated their relationships before sexual demands were translated into action, a common female strategy (Longfield et al 2004). By acting creatively, many could successfully stall relationships from becoming sexual for a month or longer (as in Tendai’s case) and then terminate these when the demands became too persistent. However, these strategies did not always work. Female students explained that when they found themselves in situations where it was impossible to avoid reciprocating sexually, they often tried to manage the timing of sexual encounters instead. This entailed engaging in some kind of cost-benefit analysis, as the following statement suggests:

“You have to weigh up if a blouse is worth giving him sex. Obviously, it is not. So if a guy wants sex just because he bought me a blouse I will tell him to take it back!”

Furthermore, female students tried to accumulate a number of gifts before they felt justified in acceding to sexual demands. While sexual access was sometimes conceived of almost entirely in terms of a gift threshold and while this material calculation appears to conform to the standard model of transactional sex, the important thing to remember is that not every gift is equal, nor do women easily accept that every gift should automatically lead to sex. For these young women, therefore, transactions are always

negotiable. Very few studies on transactional sex explore women's agency in these relationships.

Big *Dharas* and Pimp-mediated transactional sex

I have thus far examined what female students get out of these relationships and will now proceed to interrogate what Big *Dharas* and *NABAs*, in turn, get out of transactional sex. To help me do this I will use the example of a phenomenon I refer to as 'pimp-mediated' transactional sex. Given the general difficulty involved in directly studying the men who buy sex (Bernstein 2007; Hunter 2002; Odzer 1994 for exceptions), the experiences of the male student pimps I discuss here provide valuable insights into what transactional sex at the UZ means for the Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* involved. This is because, as the discussion that follows will show, male student pimps offered developed very close relationships with Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* and were therefore privy to the latter's intentions and motivations. In addition, pimp-mediated transactional sex is an interesting phenomenon for my purposes in this chapter in that the presence of a third party—in this case the pimp—challenges the simple dualisms generally associated with the transactional model and brings to the fore the incredible intricacy of sexual-economic exchanges.

I literally stumbled on this form of transactional sex just as I was preparing to wrap up fieldwork, towards the end of 2007. I was lounging at home, when Justice came in from the UZ, where he was a student. Justice was the younger brother of a friend with whom I shared a house. After the usual enquiries about how his day had been, he informed me that he had had to break up an altercation between his two friends, over a

‘pimping’ deal gone awry. ‘Pimping?’ I asked, not quite understanding what the word meant. Because of the influence of American hip-hop, male students often adopt the lingo used in hip-hop songs and so one is never quite clear about the meanings attached to particular words. Justice explained that his friends had been reluctant to divulge details of what exactly had gone wrong, but he had gathered that one of them had nearly exposed his colleague’s identity as a pimp. What intrigued me the most however, was that Justice was more worried by the fact that his friends were pimps rather than by the fact that there was pimping at the institution. As I began asking students about the practice, I was further struck by the fact that most students were more interested in how I had unearthed the presence of the practice on campus. Many students were aware of the practice and personally knew fellow students who were involved in it. Weeks later, Justice secured me an interview with one his ‘pimp’ friends.

I deliberately use the term ‘pimp’, despite its attendant negative associations, simply because that is how the practice was referred to by all the students that I spoke to. In the literature on sex work, pimps are generally characterized as men who ‘manage’ sex workers and profit off the earnings that these women make (Bernstein 2007). While relations between pimps and the women they ‘manage’ are widely considered to be exploitative, Bernstein (2007:53) points out that, in reality, relations tend to be ‘far more complex’. As will become evident, pimp-mediated transactional sex, as it exists on the UZ campus, is perhaps best likened to an ‘escort service’ in which male students find interested female students to provide a variety of sexual and non-sexual services to men who are willing to pay. It is also important to bear in mind that, unlike conventional

pimps, male students who are involved in pimp-mediated transactional sex do not exercise much physical control over the female students that they ‘manage’.

Jabu, a male student pimp that I interviewed at length simulated a conversation between himself and a Big *Dhara* or *NABA*, in order to illustrate how pimp-mediated transactional sex works:

“Mr X calls [and says] ‘Young man, I intend to travel to Mutare over the weekend. I would like someone to accompany me and keep me company. I will be going on Friday, coming back Sunday. Can you find me someone?’ ‘Ok. Fine. I can get you someone. What kind of person are you looking at?’ ‘Ah, well, I would like someone who is a social bug, a person who can talk [etcetera]...’ ‘Any physical specifications-slim, tall or whatever?’ And in my mind I already know my person. I’ll have to find Susan or maybe call Joyce, or whatever the case may be. And that’s it.”

In the above excerpt Jabu describes his relationship with an existing Big *Dhara* or *NABA*, whom he referred to as ‘clients’ throughout the interview. According to him, a ‘client’ might call him with a request for the company of a female student to accompany him on a weekend getaway. The client might ask for a female student that he has used before or he can specify what type of female student he wants. At the time of the interview, Jabu claimed to have a pool of twenty-seven female students that he could draw from. When I remarked that I thought that was a large number, Jabu dismissively responded, ‘Twenty-seven out of fourteen thousand?’ He was making reference to the student population on campus. Other students I mentioned the numbers to agreed with me, and a male student commented: ‘When you get to those numbers, that is, ten or more, you are actually like [one of] the big guys. Most of the time you only have like two people. Two or three. Maybe four’.

According to Jabu and a number of male students I spoke to, many of whom insisted that they were not pimps but were aware of how pimping worked, a pimp gets paid directly by the client. The pimp might also claim payment from female students each time he sends them over to service a client. Jabu explained: ‘I’m the business person here...I believe that I should make the most money, but that’s not usually the case anyway. But I make quite an amount. I am not complaining’. However, the arrangement with female students was often a very complicated business given that the latter were not always paid in cash for their services. A female student who accompanies a client on a weekend excursion, for instance, could be ‘paid’ in kind in the sense that all her meals and expenses would be taken care of by the client. The client might also give her some pocket money during the trip, but very rarely was a fixed amount negotiated in advance, as is often assumed. Sometimes, though, and through her pimp, a female student might request money for new clothes or other expenses from the client and she would then share some of this money with the pimp. The pimp essentially acts a middleman and handles all communication between a female student and a client. I will explore the management role of pimps in greater detail later in the chapter. Before I turn to the question of what Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* get out of transactional sex relationships, let me briefly discuss how male students find clients and female students.

Most of my data on this phenomenon is derived from in-depth interviews that I had with five students, one of whom was female. The four male students included Jabu, whom I quote extensively because he was the only one who openly admitted to being a pimp. The other student is Justice, who first informed me of the practice. Whilst he was not a pimp, some of his friends were and hence he was privy to pimp-mediated

transactional sex's intricate workings. The last two included a male student I had known for close to two years and a male student I met at a Catholic students' discussion forum. While most students were generally reluctant to talk to me about pimping at the UZ, I had a particularly difficult time getting female students to simply share their opinions of the practice. A female student, who was a close friend, was the only female informant on this issue. This student had been involved in pimp-mediated transactional sex. In addition to these five students, I also draw on informal conversations that I had with various students about the practice.

From my various conversations, it seems that most male students were introduced to pimping by Big *Dharas* and *NABAs*, after which the former then recruited their male friends. The male student I met at the Catholic discussion forum, for instance, claimed that a Big *Dhara* once offered him a ride from the city centre to the UZ campus. When they got to campus, the Big *Dhara* had apparently asked him for help in finding a girlfriend on campus. The Big *Dhara* further explained that the male student's assistance would not go unrewarded. The Catholic student explained, 'I did not take him up on his offer, but that is just how easy it is to get involved in this practice'. He was also of the opinion that it was mostly those men who were unfamiliar with the UZ who engaged the services of a pimp. Other students, like Jabu, had relatives who were in politics or in business and so had relatively easy access to influential and wealthy men⁸. Jabu claimed to have six cabinet ministers among his clientele and this was corroborated by Justice, who pointed out that Jabu's brother had connections in government. Most pimps,

⁸ The practice of pimping on the UZ campus is just one example of the complex relationship between students and politics. Not all students at the institution are anti-ZANU-PF. In fact, the presence of the UZ-branch of ZANU-PF shows that there are some students who strongly support the ZANU-PF led government. At another level, even those students who do not necessarily support ZANU-PF are willing to do business with the party and benefit financially from it, as the pimping example shows.

however, got into the business after having been randomly approached by Big *Dharas* and *NABAs*.

There was general consensus among all the male students I interviewed that securing female students for Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* was not difficult. According to Jabu, he approached female students at random and informed them of his ‘business venture’. ‘Just look at a person’s face and you know [sic] that this person might be game for this. You take a gamble [and] go up to her. Watch a person for five minutes and you [will] learn quite a lot’. If a female student was not interested he would approach another until he found one who was. Jabu also relied on those female students who were already in his pool to help him recruit other students, usually their own friends, classmates or colleagues. More commonly, though, male student pimps approached female students that they already knew, such as classmates. According to Themba, a male student I interviewed: ‘Sometimes you can just tell. When you are hunting, you find the weakest prey. Sometimes you can just choose from a group of friends without really saying you need to do so and so. Just like that’. For Themba, the ‘weakest prey’ referred not only to economically needy female students but also to those female students who enjoyed going out and partying. Such students were said to be that much more open to participating in pimp-mediated transactional sex. In his account, Themba alludes to a third way of recruiting female students: trickery or deception. This idea was explained to me fully by the female student I interviewed. In her case, three of her male friends had introduced her to a Big *Dhara* whom they claimed was an uncle to one of them:

“One day they told me that ‘someone’ wanted to meet me. They claimed that this person had seen my photo from one of them and that he thought I was good looking. When I told them that I was not interested, they assured me that they

knew this person well, that he had lots of money and that they would be present when he visited, so that I wouldn't be alone with him. They told me that this guy had even given them some money to buy me some takeaways. Each time they would visit they would bring me some takeaways and say that the money came from this person. Eventually, I agreed to meet him and a few days later my friends showed up in my room with this old man. He was old! Maybe fifty or even sixty years old! He would buy me things or send me money through my friends [i.e. the male students] and we would go out and have fun. It was only after I decided to stop seeing this guy that I realized that my friends had lied to me. I became suspicious when they kept pressuring me not to end the relationship. Eventually they admitted that they were getting paid by the old man for having hooked him to me. If I ended the relationship, they would no longer receive any money from him. I was hurt when I discovered this and, for a while, I stopped hanging out with these guys”.

It is clear from the above that sometimes, female students might think that they are in a typical Big *Dhara*/*NABA* type of relationship, when in fact they might be in a pimp-mediated one. There are therefore many variations to this type of transactional sex. Despite this, I would like to argue that it does not dramatically alter what female students and Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* get out of these relationships. Female students continue to use these relationships to access luxury consumer goods that enable them to fashion themselves as successful and modern, as discussed in the first half of the paper.

Now to the elusive question of what Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* get out of these relationships. Is it safe to say that these men are after sex, pure and simple, as is often said to be the case? It is my contention that Big *Dharas* and *NABAs*, just like the female students I discussed earlier, use these relationships for prestige-making purposes. If one examines what Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* get up to when they are with female students, one realizes that they tend to take the latter out to very public places, such as popular restaurants and clubs that are patronized by other Big *Dhara* and *NABA* types. Consider Jabu's simulated conversation in which a Big *Dhara* makes a request for 'a social bug',

that is, a female student who is very sociable or Themba's point that male student pimps will target female students who love partying and having a good time. This is because outings between Big *Dharas* and female students usually involved taking female students to various social events, including parties hosted by the Big *Dharas* workplaces or by their business colleagues.

Furthermore, Big *Dhara's* quest for prestige and social status through these relationships is evidenced by the lengths that they sometimes went to in an attempt to transform the physical appearance of the female students that they were seeing. The female student who had been 'pimped' by her friends without her knowledge explained that sometimes her Big *Dhara* would send money for her to purchase a new outfit and get a new hairdo for an outing. Jabu also mentioned being sent money by his clients that was meant for wardrobe updates, facials, manicures, pedicures and new hairdos for various female students. Big *Dharas* therefore approved or disapproved a female students' look and readily sponsored their transformations. This is because these men accrue considerable social status in their peer groups when seen in the company of young, beautiful and intelligent university women. Consider Hunter's (2002) study of transactional sex in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. In it he quotes a sugar daddy as saying: 'sugar daddies don't like their families to know [about their actions], but they want their friends to know' (p99). The sugar daddy in question goes on to explain that such men are envied by their peers and are considered *isoka*, that is sexually successful men, because of their ability to attract young women (see also Ashforth 1999). Female students are therefore highly prized and highly desirable 'goods', which are to be shown off. Sometimes, in fact, Big *Dharas'* quest for prestige takes precedence over their desire for



sex with the young women. This is why they continue to see female students when the latter do not always reciprocate in sexual ways. Furthermore, when one considers the enormous resources that Big *Dharas* spend on female students and pimps, when they could easily spend much less on a sex worker, the ‘men want sex’ explanation seems terribly inadequate and unconvincing.

Interrogating the Pimp-Big *Dhara* Relationship

In conclusion, I will now briefly examine what a pimp brings into transactional sex and how their presence transforms these relationships. At first glance, it appears that the pimp is no more than a mere middleman or sex broker, which then begs the question why the pimp’s services are retained beyond the initial contact between Big *Dharas* and female students? Upon further inspection, however, it becomes rather clear that the pimp is central in these relationships. The pimp *manages* these relationships on behalf of the Big *Dharas*. For instance, the pimp handles all communication between Big *Dharas* and female students, since most Big *Dharas* are married men. Jabu explains below:

“If he [i.e the Big *Dhara*] was to have a personal girlfriend, that would automatically entail personal links: phone-calls and all, which usually lead to complications. The bulk of these guys are married men, you see’. [But] if I am to call him at midnight and the wife answers the phone, I just say ‘*Maiguru* [this is a term of respect that is used to refer to an older brother’s wife], may I talk to *Mudhara* [a term that denotes an older person]?’ That’s how simple it is. No suspicion. Nothing. It takes away the issue of personal attachment. It makes it easier for guys who want to maintain a clean sheet, if I may call it that, with their ‘missus’ [wife] at home”.

The role of the pimp therefore is to provide some form of protection, and much-needed peace of mind to Big *Dharas*. Pimps also facilitate Big *Dharas* easier access to female students. This is because, unlike in standard sugar-daddy relationships, Big *Dharas* are saved the hassle having to personally ‘hunt’ for, and coax young women into dating them. All the Big *Dhara* has to do is make a phone call to a pimp and specify the kind of female partner that he wants and when he wants to see her. It is the responsibility of the pimp to find the ‘right’ female, ‘prepare’ her and ensure that there are no surprises when the two parties eventually meet. Jabu mentioned, for instance, that because some Big *Dharas* can be ‘very difficult and arrogant’, he tries to pair such men with ‘an assertive someone who can stand up for themselves’. This was particularly so when Big *Dharas* requested female company for out-of-town excursions. All four male students that I interviewed acknowledged that pimp-mediated transactional sex could be very risky for female students, especially when they have to accompany Big *Dharas* on weekend excursions. Part of Jabu’s role as a pimp therefore also included offering whatever protection that he could to the female students in his pool. For Jabu this included thoroughly briefing female students on what might be expected of them as well as briefing them on the personality of the Big *Dhara* that they would be spending time with. He was not always successful, but he made an effort.

In a sense, it is the relationship between the pimp and the Big *Dhara* that becomes the focal point. For instance, in standard transactional sex relationships, it is the dyad of the sugar daddy and the young woman that is constitutive of the relationship, and it is exclusively within that dyad that transactions occur. In pimp-mediated transactional sex, however, the dyad of the pimp and Big *Dhara* is central. This is because while the

relationship between a particular female student and a Big *Dhara* can last anything from just one interaction to numerous interactions spread over a number of months, the relationship between the pimp and the Big *Dhara* tends to be longer lasting—over two years in Jabu’s case. This relationship is maintained and strengthened through the forging of fictive familial ties that enable pimps and Big *Dharas* to relate to each other as younger and older brother or nephew and uncle, respectively. Big *Dharas* seem happy enough to play the older brother/uncle role in these relationships, as indicated by the gifts that they regularly give to the pimps, of which mobile phones are a key part. While these are important for communication purposes, the fact that mobile phones were constantly upgraded to the latest models suggests that they performed more than just a utilitarian function. Ownership of an expensive phone or phones and fancy clothes were mentioned by male students as some of the things that gave away one’s identity as a pimp. Jabu had received a video camera worth about three and four hundred US dollars after one of his Big *Dhara* clients had returned from a business trip in China.

In addition to these gifts, invitations to parties and outings were also some of the non-monetary ways that fictive affinal relationships were strengthened. These parties included very simple affairs in which Big *Dhara* treated pimps and their friends (sometimes even the pimps girlfriends) to food and drink or they could be very formal affairs in which Big *Dharas* entertained business colleagues. Themba claimed to have attended a few such parties, after being invited by friends of his who were pimps. ‘I know of male students who are involved in this practice just for the free beer and free food that they get when they hang out with these Big *Dharas*’, he explained. Business parties, on the other hand, provided opportunities for pimps to network with influential people, such

as potential employers. The male students I spoke to claimed that a number of male students had found employment or vacation jobs through their links to Big *Dharas*.

Other ‘gifts’ that sustained the brotherly bond between pimps and Big *Dharas* took the form of outings to popular tourist destinations. My informants mentioned Lake Chivero (which is just on the outskirts of the capital city, Harare) as a popular destination for short outings, while Victoria Falls (which is 878km away from Harare), Chimanimani (414km away), Kariba (265km away) and Masvingo (250km away) were identified as preferred destinations for longer outings. A few pimps were said to be lucky enough to be presented with opportunities to travel outside the country, as a result of their Big *Dhara*’s connections. This appeared to be particularly so with those Big *Dharas* who were politicians, or held positions in government. Themba knew of a male student who had accompanied a Big *Dhara* on a trip to Venezuela.

Anthropologists have long shown that gifts create ‘ties that bind’ between transacting parties. The fictive relationships that are established between pimps and Big *Dharas* are reminiscent of Gayle Rubin’s (1975: 175) observation that in most exchange relationships in which women are the transacted, such as marriage payments, it is the men involved in the transacting who are linked or ‘tied’ rather than the women themselves. This appears to be the case with pimp-mediated transactional sex at the UZ.

A final interesting dimension that pimps bring into transactional sex relationships is that pimp-mediated transactional sex illustrates—metaphorically, at least—how ‘needy’ young men, and not just women, can also resort to survival sex. This is an idea that is largely missing in the literature on transactional sex in Africa. I was surprised at how the male students in my sample drew on the ‘survival’ narrative to explain male

students' reasons for being involved in pimp-mediated transactional sex. Jabu, for instance, insisted that the money he earned through pimping was enabling him to take care of his young family. He had a wife and two-year old daughter. Jabu explained that he had tried to deal in foreign currency on the parallel market but he had found this option to be too time-consuming and not half as lucrative as pimping was. He claimed that he had previously made as much as fifty million Zimbabwean dollars from one transaction (then about three to five hundred US dollars). Themba had this to say about the lucrative nature of business: 'These guys [i.e. Big *Dharas*] don't mind parting with some stuff, like ten million [Zimbabwean dollars]. [It is] obvious that it [i.e. money] doesn't mean much to them'. In addition, as earlier discussed, pimps get to meet the Big *Dharas* influential friends, some of whom can turn out to be future employers.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to destabilize some of the taken-for-granted 'truths' regarding transactional sex that circulate in the dominant public health literature on HIV and AIDS. I have especially challenged the following ideas: that *only* economically disadvantaged young women engage in transactional sex; that young women involved in these relationships are always exploited and lack any form of personal agency; and finally, that transactional sex involves an unproblematic and linear exchange of sex and money. I have shown that both female students and Big *Dharas/NABAs* use transactional sex to elevate their social status within their peer groups and that both groups employ a variety of ingenious strategies aimed at benefiting maximally from the exchange

relationship. In the second half of the chapter I introduced a new form of transactional sex that existed at the UZ campus at the time of my research, which is mediated by a pimp. I drew on this unusual form of transactional sex in order to accomplish two things: first, to examine what Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* get out of transactional sex and second, to illustrate the many forms that transactional sex can take and the implications of different types of transactional sex relationships.

In the next two chapters I orient myself specifically to the experiences of male students. In chapter four I examine the dominant model of manhood that exists on the UZ campus; this chapter sets the background against which to better understand male student sexualities in chapter five. Many of the characteristics that are associated with ‘typical’ male student behaviour, which I discuss at length in chapter four, carry over into their intimate relationships with the opposite sex as I show in chapter five.