

**Women's agency in intimate partnerships
in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
A case study in a rural South African community**

by

Britta Thege

**Thesis submitted for the fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR PHILOSOPHIAE (DPhil)

**in the Faculty of Humanities
Department of Sociology**

University of Pretoria

July 2009

**Supervisor: Prof Andrietta Kritzinger
Co-Supervisor: Prof Janis Grobbelaar**

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

Keywords

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background and problem statement	1
1.2 Research rationale	5
1.3 Research question and objectives	7
1.4 Outline of chapters	12
Chapter 2: Literature review: continuance and transformation – South African black women’s sexuality	16
2.1 Introduction	16
2.2 Stasis and/or change: gender relations in South Africa	18
2.2.1 Paving grounds for a sexist culture: the ‘unhappy marriage’ between African sexualities and Christian morality	20
2.2.2 Rituals and rules: shaping women’s sexuality	26
2.2.3 South Africa’s road to a rape culture: transformations of sexual violence	32
2.3 Women as survivors in intimate partnerships – violence against women and non-agency	38
2.4 Women as active agents in intimate partnerships – transactional and love relationships as spaces for agency	46
2.4.1 Agency in transactional relationships	48
2.4.2 Agency in love relationships	52
2.4.3 The importance of gift-giving	55
2.5 Conclusion	58
Chapter 3: Conceptual framework of the study: setting a feminist agenda	62
3.1 Introduction	62
3.2 Review of debates in African feminism	66
3.3 Review of western feminism: the modern/postmodern controversy and its implications for feminist gender theory	70
3.4 Critique: the feminist case against postmodernism	73
3.5 The relevance of radical feminist arguments in the South African HIV/AIDS epidemic	75
3.5.1 Calling for a radical response: The liberal paradigm	78
3.5.2 Theorising heterosexuality and male domination	84

3.5.3	Theorising women’s compliance to male domination	88
3.5.4	The question of difference	91
3.6	Expanding feminist theories: the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and symbolic violence	93
3.6.1	Theorising hegemonic masculinity	94
3.6.2	Theorising symbolic violence	96
3.7	Conceptualisations of agency research	99
3.7.1	Agency, structure and practice	100
3.7.2	Reflexivity and resistance	104
3.8	Conclusion – defining my position	107
 Chapter 4: Research methodology		115
4.1	Introduction	115
4.2	Theoretical paradigm: feminist research and epistemological reflections	116
4.2.1	What makes feminist research feminist?	116
4.2.2	Epistemological reflections	119
4.2.2.1	Who produces knowledge: the insider/outsider position	123
4.2.2.2	Dilemmas of reflexivity and representation	127
4.3	From the theoretical paradigm to the strategy of inquiry	129
4.3.1	Logic of investigation and research question	129
4.3.2	Rationale for the chosen methodology	131
4.3.3	Field of study: Mmakaunyane Village as the case	134
4.3.3.1	Historical context	138
4.3.3.2	Present context	141
4.3.4	Identifying the population for study	145
4.3.4.1	Sample for the problem-centred interviews	146
4.3.4.2	Focus groups	149
4.3.5	Description of the data collection method	149
4.3.6	The interview situation	152
4.4	Working with the data	156
4.4.1	Introducing my data analysis approach	157
4.4.2	The use of qualitative content analysis in case study research	159
4.4.3	Data management	161
4.5	Ethical considerations	163
4.6	Conclusion: validity, reliability and generalisability	164
 Chapter 5: Findings: amid traditionalism and transformation – socio-economic and socio-cultural constraints on women’s agency		167
5.1	Introduction	167
5.2	Profile of the study participants	170
5.2.1	Household composition	171
5.2.2	Marital status and number of children	173
5.2.3	Socio-economic situation	176
5.2.4	Denomination	179
5.2.5	Summary	180
5.3	Socio-economic constraints in the participants’ lives	180
5.3.1	Unmarried women: in need for resources	182
5.3.2	Married women: negotiating expenses	189

5.4	The socio-cultural machinery securing masculine sexual dominance	194
5.4.1	The patriarchal code of respect and its rules of good conduct for women	197
5.4.2	Women as active agents in perpetuating patriarchy	204
5.4.3	Sex and secrecy	209
5.4.3.1	Inter-generational silence and participants' sexual education	211
5.4.3.2	Reproducing male sexual dominance: hegemonic male sex-drive and female chastity discourse	219
5.5	HIV/AIDS and the veil of silence	222
5.5.1	The denial of HIV/AIDS in Mmakaunyane	223
5.5.2	Participants' knowledge of HIV/AIDS	226
5.5.3	A step forward: talking on sexual matters	229
5.6	Lacking a vision? Viewpoints on gender relations	235
5.7	Conclusion	239

Chapter 6: Findings: relationship quality and spaces for sexual agency in intimate partnerships

		242
6.1	Introduction	242
6.2	Relationship quality	244
6.2.1	Notions of a good partnership	245
6.2.2	Notions of a bad partnership	247
6.3	Assessing the own partnership	249
6.3.1	Accounts about good partnerships – a space for agency?	251
6.3.2	Accounts about bad partnerships – a space of non-agency	257
6.3.2.1	Experiences of poor partner communication	258
6.3.2.2	Experiences of intimate partner violence	261
6.3.3	An overall relationship problem: infidelity and distrust	267
6.4	Spaces for sexual agency in different categories of intimate partnership	270
6.4.1	The personal is political: male sex-right and female sexual agency – decision-making on having sex	270
6.4.1.1	Decision-making on having sex in bad partnerships	272
6.4.1.2	Decision-making on having sex in good partnerships	275
6.4.2	Decision-making on using condoms	284
6.4.2.1	Decision making on condom usage in bad partnerships	286
6.4.2.2	Decision making on condom usage in good partnerships	288
6.5	Disclosing or hiding relationship problems?	295
6.6	Conclusion	303

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendix A: Interview Guide	353
Appendix B: Focus Group Questions	354
Appendix C: Biographical Questionnaire	355

List of Tables

Table 1: Profile of the study participants	170
Table 2: Relationship quality	251

List of Figures

Figure 1: Location of Mmakaunyane	137
Figure 2: Mmakaunyane and neighbouring communities	137
Figure 3: Model of procedure for structuring qualitative content analysis	162
Figure 4: Age groups	171
Figure 5: Household size	172
Figure 6: Family patterns	173
Figure 7: Marital status	174
Figure 8: Form of current partnership	175
Figure 9: Number of living children	176
Figure 10: Household income	177
Figure 11: Personal income	177
Figure 12: Work situation	178
Figure 13: School qualification	178
Figure 14: Denominations	179

Abstract

The South African HIV/AIDS pandemic exposed the hegemonic intersection of gender, power and sexuality. While numerous studies have focused on gender dynamics in sexual relations, the issue of sexual agency has barely been addressed in South Africa. Rural black women's agency in intimate partnership is a profoundly marginalised researched area. This study aimed to explore South African rural black women's agency in intimate partnerships at a time of transition and amidst the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It explores whether there is some empirical evidence for what is a common perception, namely the lack of agency that rural black women have in negotiating their sexual relationships and the impact that this has on the risk of HIV/AIDS. It also sought to find out whether there was any indication of transformation to be found in the gender relations among different age groups. This empirical study applied the case study method drawing on data collected from individual and focus group interviews. To address the social hierarchy of men over women a hybridised theoretical framework that follows in the tradition of radical feminists was applied. This research aimed to make a contribution from a feminist perspective that looks critically at the processes of female subordination and control. Women had agency in partnerships deemed good whereas they lacked agency in partnerships characterised by overt power or abuse. Violence is a major constraint to women's agency. Yet, the capacity for agency has always been restricted by the sexist norms and values constitutive of the structures of the community. Because of the powerful cultural template of male sex-right in marriage it is the marital status that constrains rural black women's agency in non-violent relationships the most. Male sex-right is inscribed in the patriarchal code of respect together with other rules of obedience restricting female sexual agency. Although younger women in this study showed greater discontent with socio-cultural norms guiding their lives and provided accounts which displayed having greater choices to negotiate sex and condom use, there were indications that the use of condoms would cease if a relationship turned into a marriage and that refusing sex to a husband was untenable.

Keywords

South African rural black women

Agency

Intimate partnership

HIV/AIDS

Sexuality

Male sex-right

Patriarchal code of respect

Partnership quality

Case study

Qualitative content analysis

Acknowledgements

Undertaking research for a doctoral thesis leaves one indebted to many who participate in and facilitate the process. I would like to acknowledge the following persons who contributed to my growth during this rite of passage:

Prof Andrietta Kritzing, my supervisor has played a significant role in the unfolding of the research process regarding this topic. She introduced me to new ways of thinking and tirelessly and efficiently worked as a sounding board helping me to refine and develop on items and to correct theory and data. From Andrietta's expert supervision I learned a lot about academic and reflexive research. I have been privileged to have her as a supervisor and draw on her insight and expertise.

Prof Janis Grobbelaar, whom I met through a DAAD funded project to build capacity of the Institute for Women's Research and Gender Studies. Janis, through her forceful personality, played a key role in suggesting and encouraging me to register for a DPhil in Sociology. As initiator of the project and co-supervisor she shaped the study in significant ways providing a sociological eye and encouraging the development of a line of thinking that runs through the thesis. I am grateful for those contributions.

Prof Ingelore Welp, who introduced me in significant ways to the field of gender studies. As a fellow colleague, she stimulated my interest in gender, shaped my growth in the field and encouraged my professional development by creating opportunities for growth. As a friend she encouraged me and provided sound advice when I felt overwhelmed by the process.

Most of all I have to thank the participants in this study. Without these women welcoming me into their community and unselfishly sharing their stories no thesis would have materialised. I remain deeply indebted to their honest sharing of a difficult and sensitive topic and have learned a lot from our engagement. I trust that I have represented their stories with the necessary sensitivity and respect they deserve.

Besides the significant actors, who played such a key part in the unfolding of the thesis, there are a number of other persons whose contributions I would like to acknowledge.

Dr Marjorie Jobson – thank you for introducing me to the community as a research site and to my dependable research assistant.

I have to thank my research assistant who played the crucial role for introducing me to the participants in the study and who supported me as I familiarised myself with the community.

I would also like to thank Alexa Barnby for professional editing and for being prepared to work under pressure and short time lines.

Finally, no such project is possible without friends and family, both in Germany and South Africa. I thank you all for supporting me during this process, for showing understanding and for encouraging me when I felt down.

Special thanks to Dennis and Pascal and to Marinda and David.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents. First to the memory of my mother, Helga Thege, who played a significant role in encouraging me to study and who followed my career with interest. Sadly I commenced with this study after her passing. Second, my father, Jochen Thege, was a foundation of support and lived with me through the vicissitudes of this process.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and problem statement

For some years now, women and girls have been at the centre of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa, and this was the starting point of this dissertation. Across the world, the pattern of male/female infection in HIV has changed. In many countries, early cases of HIV infection were concentrated mainly in two population subgroups, namely, male homosexuals and intravenous drug users (as is still the case in Europe today). However, as the epidemic has spread, there has been a progressive shift towards heterosexual transmission and increasing infection rates in women. Today, the reality is that, globally, more women than men are dying of HIV/AIDS, and the age patterns of infection are significantly different for the two sexes. For both men and women, the risk of acquiring HIV increases from their late teens to mid-30s (UNAIDS/WHO, 2008:2). However, among women, HIV prevalence peaks in younger age groups compared to those of men. Beyond the statistics of sex-based differences in infection rates, there are profound differences in the underlying causes and consequences of HIV/AIDS infection in men and women, reflecting differences in sexual behaviour, vulnerability and economic power.

According to UNAIDS/WHO (2008), the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS in pregnant women is to be found in Southern Africa, e.g. Botswana, South Africa, Swaziland and Lesotho; it is less prevalent in West and East Africa. HIV/AIDS began to spread through Southern Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s and initially hit South Africa pre-1994. In other words, when the apartheid state was under siege and chronic low-intensity civil war was becoming high-intensity civil war as the majority of South Africans' protests against their exclusion from citizenship grew ever more, "South Africa's peculiar history has made it a fertile ground for the spread of HIV" (Barnett & Whiteside, 2002:146). Racial discrimination, a highly mobile population and the breakdown of social structures in rural areas and townships had created patterns of promiscuous sexual behaviour as well as a widespread philosophy of fatalism (ibid:152–153).

South Africa has the largest number of HIV infections in the world with a staggering 5.5 million people infected with the virus. Furthermore, an estimated 1.8 million people have died of AIDS-related diseases since the epidemic started (UNAIDS/WHO, 2008: 4).

HIV transmission occurs mainly through heterosexual intercourse, and unsafe sex has been identified as the predominant cause of infection.¹ Although there is widespread knowledge about the preventive function of condom use, it seems that knowledge of HIV/AIDS does not significantly influence sexual decision-making and/or behaviour. These notions warrant an approach to analysing risky behaviour primarily through partnership dynamics. Women and men are vulnerable to HIV for different reasons, and gender relations are key to an understanding of the AIDS epidemic. Although AIDS exposes different patterns of structural inequalities (Gilbert & Walker, 2002) it crosses all lines of social division, including gender, race and class. In a particular way, HIV/AIDS exposes the prevailing gender relations and the definitions of male and female gender roles both in intimate relations and those in the wider society.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa coincided with the transformation of apartheid South Africa to a non-racial and non-sexist democracy. Gender equality became one of the central axes in this transition and subsequently, women's participation and representation in various fields of the public sphere increased visibly. Although achievements were partly met in the public domain, persisting inequalities in the private domain remained entrenched. It was particularly the HIV/AIDS pandemic which revealed that gender relations have not been satisfactorily transformed in the transitional state post-1994. "The AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa has thrust sexuality, sexual practices and sexual behaviour into the spotlight ..." (Silberschmidt, 2005:233).

It has been acknowledged that the South African HIV epidemic and AIDS are clearly

¹ According to Eaton, Flisher and Aarø (2003), who reviewed research on factors promoting and perpetuating unsafe sexual behaviour in South African youth, all studies give evidence of high-risk sexual behaviour, whereby three types of sexual risk behaviour received most attention: being sexually active, having many partners, and practising unprotected sex.

feminised (National Strategic Plan, 2007:35) and most young South Africans living with HIV/AIDS are female. Measuring and monitoring the extent of HIV/AIDS is no simple matter, as the number one problem in this regard is access to good quality data.² Recent representative data based on the 2005 South African National HIV Household Survey (Rehle, Shisana, Pillay, Zuma, Puren & Parker, 2007)³ suggests a far higher prevalence among young South African women, and among young African black women in particular, than previous studies have reported (Shisana & Simbayi, 2002; Pettifor, Rees, Steffenson, Hlongwa-Madikizela, MacPhail, Vermaak & Kleinschmidt, 2004b). However, race remains an important factor, reflecting the socio-economic inequalities that increase vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. HIV prevalence peaks among black South Africans.⁴ South African rural black women who are disproportionately affected by poverty and unemployment (Kehler, 2001; Bentley, 2004; Benjamin, 2007) bear the brunt of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Despite all the legal advances that have taken place since 1994, South African rural black women do not have access to the country's progress and continue to live under discriminatory cultural laws and practices in environments where traditional gender relations dominate and high levels of sexual and gender-based violence are pervasive. The majority of South African rural black women still suffer from discrimination and

² The South African government releases annual figures based on the "National HIV and Syphilis Antenatal Sero-Prevalence Survey", which is conducted anonymously, voluntarily and concurrently over all nine provinces during October each year. Over 16 000 women have participated in the annual surveys; in 2006 the previous sample size was doubled. The latest HIV data collected at antenatal clinics in 2006 from over 33 000 women suggest an overall HIV prevalence among pregnant women of 29.1% (compared with 30.2% in 2005, 29.5% in 2004; 27.9% in 2003; 26.5% in 2002; 24.8% in 2001 and 24.5% in 2000; South Africa. Department of Health, 2007). The survey is criticised for the under-representation of groups other than black (Dilraj, Abdool-Karim & Pillay, 2007).

³ Rehle et al. (2007) analysed the 2005 South African national HIV household survey to generate national incidence estimates stratified by age, sex, race, province and locality type, to compare the HIV incidence and HIV prevalence profiles by gender, and to examine the relationship between HIV prevalence, HIV incidence and associated risk factors. The research indicates that the incidence of HIV among women peaked in the 20–29 year age group at 5.6%, more than six times the incidence found in 20–29-year-old men (0.9%). Among youth aged 15–24 years, women accounted for 90% of the recent HIV infections. The study concluded that the current prevention campaigns are not having the desired impact, particularly among young women.

⁴ Statistics South Africa (2003:12) classifies South Africans by the following population groups: black African (79.0%), coloured (8.9%), Indian or Asian (2.5%), white (9.6%). Membership of a population group is based on self-perception and self-classification, not on a legal definition (ibid:vii). HIV prevalence peaks among black Africans with 13.3% compared to 1.9% among coloured, 1.6% among Indians or Asians and 0.6% among whites.

subjugation in their homes and communities (ibid:46; Benjamin, 2007:199) and a “continued tolerance of cultural inequality and denigration and abuse” (Bentley, 2004:259). Negotiating safe sex in marriage or in intimate partnerships is very difficult for them in spaces where patriarchal traditional structures are pervasive. Their lack of sexual agency increases their risk of HIV/AIDS infection considerably.

In order to minimise HIV-infection risk rural black women need to have power and control over their bodies within sexual relations when it comes to decision-making about having sex and especially condom usage in intimate partnerships. However, rural black women’s ability to make their own free choices is constrained on different levels. Sexual values, traditions and behaviours in South Africa are influenced by two major cultural forces: an African more traditional value system on the one hand, and a western, more Christian-influenced value system on the other. Compounding African black women’s vulnerability are socio-cultural norms that deny women sexual (health) knowledge and practices that prevent them from controlling their bodies. Women’s restricted sexual autonomy and African black men’s expanded sexual freedom, as well as several violent elements in common sexual relationships, are reflected in all studies on the factors that increase women’s and men’s risk and vulnerability to HIV. The prevailing gender order and the expectations of masculinity (in contrast to femininity) make women more vulnerable to HIV infection. Socio-cultural norms give more power and freedom to men, who then exert that power and control over women (Thege, 2007:21–22). Hence, a great deal of research in South Africa has been directing attention to the study of relations of power and gender inequality in contexts that shape and constitute sexual activity (Varga, 1997; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2000; Jewkes, 2002; Selikow, Zulu & Cedras, 2002; Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, McIntyre, Gray & Harlow, 2003; Dunkle, Jewkes, Brown, Gray, McIntyre & Harlow, 2004a; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; Sathiparsal, 2005; Dunkle, Jewkes, Nduna, Levin, Jama, Khuzwayo, Koss, Duvvury, 2006; O’Sullivan, Harrison, Morrell, Monroe-Wise & Kubeka, 2006; Dunkle, Jewkes, Nduna, Jama, Levin, Sikweyiya & Koss, 2007).

Various studies have documented a high incidence of non-consensual sex and African

black women's sexual lives seem fraught with physical violence, coercion and powerlessness. The HIV/AIDS epidemic underlines gender relations as being extremely coercive based on rigid gender norms in South Africa. In terms of the increasing HIV infection rates in women, a vast body of literature (cf. Fox, Nkosi & Kistner, 2003) has acknowledged sexuality and gender-based violence as key issues in the spread of the epidemic (e.g. Maman, Campbell, Sweat & Gielen, 2000; Vetten & Bhana, 2001; Dunkle et al., 2004a; Jewkes, Dunkle, Nduna, Levin, Jama, Khuzwayo, Koss, Puren & Duvvury, 2006b; Fox, Jackson, Hansen, Gasa, Crewe & Sikkema, 2007; Amnesty International, 2008).

In the transformation of post-apartheid South Africa since 1994 a range of macro-level forces shape opportunities and restrictions as for instance the restructuring of the economy and its large scale unemployment problem (cf. Michie & Padayachee, 1997). Persisting high levels of unemployment and poverty in South Africa continue to marginalise great parts of the South African population and affect black women overproportionally (Kehler, 2001; Bentley, 2004; Benjamin, 2007), often involving economic dependence on male partners. A range of studies in South Africa (Kaufman & Stavrou, 2000; Hunter, 2002; Thorpe, 2002; Selikow, Zulu & Cedras, 2002; Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Dunkle et al., 2004b; Dunkle et al., 2007) gives evidence of the fact that poverty is a driving factor for women to engage in transactional sexual relationships which puts them at increased HIV-infection risk.

1.2 Research rationale

As has been suggested, there is a strong link between sexuality, violence and HIV/AIDS as well as sexuality, poverty and HIV/AIDS bringing into focus the matter of agency in intimate partnerships. In the context of a sexually transmitted lethal disease, agency is particularly significant in terms of vulnerability and protecting oneself from infection. It would seem that South African black women's sexual agency is restricted in this regard, particularly those living in rural areas. Socio-economic and socio-cultural constraints impact severely on rural black women's agency and the choices they can make. The

majority of rural black women continue to live under poor conditions post-1994 which makes them vulnerable to exploitive sexual relations and increased HIV risk. Entrenched structures of male traditional authority and patriarchal control which may imply a certain tolerance of the widespread abuse of women can result in women's compliance with the existing patriarchal order, in taking things for granted. Violence against women has to be addressed in particular as a means of silencing and oppressing women. However, as an important concern for feminist research, the issue of women's agency, women's capacity for autonomous action in the face of overwhelming structural inequalities and cultural sanctions (cf. McNay, 2000:10), remains because it implies the notion of resisting dominant structures.

I have worked now for many years in the field of women and gender studies and for quite some time in South Africa. Through a South African colleague I had several opportunities to visit various townships and rural communities in the country where I repeatedly observed the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In order to understand the gendered dynamics of HIV/AIDS and sexuality, I spoke to a number of women and girls. These conversations aroused my interest in investigating issues of power and oppression, agency and compliance in intimate partnerships particularly in a more traditional setting owing to the fact that non-urban African black women are said to be the most disadvantaged group in South Africa (cf. South Africa. Department of Health, 1999:2). In the tension-filled field between stasis and change, South African rural black women's spaces for sexual agency in the realm of intimate partnerships at a time of transition and amidst an HIV/AIDS pandemic became of particular interest and importance to me. Women may have different spaces for agency depending on the quality of a relationship. The capacity for agency in (love) relationships free of violence is supposed to be greater compared to partnerships characterised by violence and sexually abusive situations.

For the purpose of this research study I comprehend agency as the subject's capability to act independently and to make her own free choices, so that she could have acted differently in a given situation. Female agency in sexual activity encompasses a woman's

decision regarding and control of with whom, when, where and how to have sex; negotiating and decision-making power in terms of protection, mainly condom use/safe sex in order to prevent STIs and HIV infection, but also unwanted pregnancy and her ability to articulate and negotiate her individual sexual wants and needs. In contrast, I regard rape and intimate partner violence as issues of women's non-agency constituting a major risk factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS.

As pointed out above, there is a range of studies on gender dynamics in sexual relationships as well as transactional sexual relations and gender-based and sexual violence against women which reflect on agency. But the issue of sexual agency as such has been barely addressed in the South African context, particularly within the context of rural black women's intimate partnerships. Susser and Stein (2000) examined women's agency in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia in the context of methods to protect themselves from HIV-infection, Lesch and Kruger (2004) explored the sexual agency of young coloured women in the Western Cape and Castle and Kiggundu (2007) looked at rural women's agency in the context of HIV/AIDS education for adult and youth (ABET centres) in Limpopo province.

By investigating further the relatively common perception that South African rural black women lack agency, particularly when negotiating their sexual relationships, and the impact that this has on the risk of HIV/AIDS, I wanted to draw special attention to the sphere of private intimate relationships which has been, in the main, excluded from public debates in South Africa.

1.3 Research question and objectives

Based on the assumption that black women in a rural environment have little or no autonomous agency in their intimate partnerships and, furthermore, that compliance with patriarchal rule is therefore a survival practice that is destructive in a life threatening way in the era of HIV/AIDS, my central question focuses on exploring agency of a group of black women in a particular rural community within the context of an HIV/AIDS

pandemic. The research question relates to a range of sub-questions. Based on the assumption that because of the growth of modernity in South Africa over time strict traditional notions of womanhood and manhood may lose their influence allowing particularly younger rural women greater choices, I considered age as a critical variable. Age could be seen to be linked to different experiences owing to the liberalisation of gender power relations as well as of sexualities post-1994 resulting in changing dynamics of time figurations in gender practice. Therefore, the study also sought to explore whether there is any indication of transformation within the established gender relations in terms of age groups. In other words, do young rural black women have fuller sexual agency in their partnerships compared to more mature women? This raises the question whether the HIV/AIDS crisis has a potential to “facilitate” a transformation of the existing gender order in some ways since it requires greater equality, for instance communication and negotiation among intimate partners in order to have safe sex. Finally, based on the assumption that women in good partnerships have fuller agency compared to women in bad relationships, I wanted to investigate the relationship between women’s agency and the nature of the intimate partnership among women of different age groups.

The objectives of the research are (1) to examine constraints to South African rural black women’s sexual agency in a patriarchal social order, (2) to investigate the interplay of subordination and individual choices in order to explore South African rural black women’s potential for HIV self-protection strategies in their intimate relationships, (3) to probe whether their agency is defined by negotiating the terms of their subordination or the ability to transform existing gender relations and, finally, (4) to explore whether younger South African black women living in a traditional rural environment are more critical of constraints to their agency than more senior women.

To address the social hierarchy of men over women I work from a hybridised theoretical framework that follows in the tradition of radical feminists, focusing on the personal as a key site for political action and the key role that gender inequality plays in shaping sexuality (Millett, 1970; Rubin, 1975; Daly, 1978; Barry, 1979; Rich, 1986a; MacKinnon, 1989). African feminists have until quite recently generally avoided

addressing the issue of sexuality or conducting a critical investigation into sexuality. I suggest that the question of female (sexual) agency in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic necessitates the revival of a radical feminist framework to account for the gender disparities in intimate partnerships. Radical feminism, with its focus on gender power relations within the private domain, provides a useful theoretical framework and critical concepts for the analysis of gender dynamics fuelling the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In order to theorise sexuality as a central factor for women's subordination and male dominance I make use of MacKinnon's (1989) *theory of sexuality*, Rich's (1986a) concept of *compulsory heterosexuality* and aspects of Daly's (1978) *Sado-Ritual Syndrome* explaining women's emotional compliance. I also consider Connell's (1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) concept of *hegemonic masculinity* which acknowledges a plurality of masculinities and argues for a historical character of gender and Bourdieu's (2001) theory of *male domination* in particular his theorisation of *symbolic violence* explaining how patriarchy secures women's compliance.

In order to avoid the trap of essentialism and universalism I am careful to recognise the relational and historical context in which gender emerges. I will discuss in particular the contributions of difference theorists (Spelman, 1988; Collins, 1990; Narayan, 1997; Mohanty, 1991; 2004) as useful to define my eclectic theoretical position. Working as a white Western European woman on the experiences of South African rural black women required reflection on privilege and power in the research process. I defined my role in the research as that of an outsider which raised epistemological, ethical and ethico-political questions (Bridges, 2001), and resulted in reflection on both the category 'race' as discussed in black feminist thought (Spelman, 1988; Davis, 1981; Collins, 1990) and the reproduction of colonial modes of representation and cultural reductionism as reflected by difference theorists such as Narayan (1997) and Mohanty (2004).

Guided by my theoretical framework I contextualise agency in power relations and present conceptualisations of agency through the idea of embodiment and as being inseparable from social practice. I will support the notion of the presence of structure in practice and the constituency of structures by practice as set out by Giddens (1986)

through the concept of the *duality of structures* and by Bourdieu (1977; 2001) through the concept of *habitus* and the social *field*. Finally, I address MacKinnon's (1989) idea of *consciousness-raising* as fundamental for political practice and the development of strategies for countering oppression. It is only through critical reflection of social conditions and collective action resulting from critical insight that changes in power relations might occur.

To address the research questions the research approach has drawn on feminist theory and feminist methodology and is aimed at contributing to constructing knowledge and understanding from the insights drawn from rural black women's experiences shaped by oppression.

Methodologically, feminist research prefers the use of qualitative research methods and new kinds of enquiry (cf. Baber, 2004:979), arguing that they are more adequate for comprehending women's complex realities. A major tenet of feminist methodology is that, by starting with women's everyday experiences, it gives women a voice and corrects the male-oriented perspective that has predominated in the development of social science (cf. Neuman, 2000:82). This empirical study applies a case study research design in order to gain deeper insight into the complex life situations and views of black women in a particular rural community, as well as their individual behaviour patterns and coping strategies in dealing with the patriarchal power structures directed at their sexuality. Therefore it is concerned with a range of sensitive issues which require sound ethical considerations. Participants' psychological safety was given priority and information was treated with confidentiality and anonymity.

The study explores how, in the rural community of Mmkaunyane,⁵ women and men are

⁵ For the purpose of this study I define Mmkaunyane as a 'rural' area. The definition of 'rural' is a contentious issue and there is no agreed definition of the term 'rural' in South Africa (South Africa. Department of Land Affairs, 1997). Additionally, the dividing lines between rural and semi-rural or peri-urban are blurred and although Mmkaunyane shows signs of some urban influences, I consider it as predominantly rural. Criteria to define Mmkaunyane as rural are related to some geographical-based factors and for the most part to social-based factors.

embedded in a web of beliefs and practices that shape their intimate partnerships. I chose the rural community of Mmakaunyane in the North West Province located 60 kilometres outside Pretoria, since the area is under-researched and, it may be suggested, reproduces the typical life conditions of South African rural black women. I also had access to the community through a work relationship with a human rights activist who is engaged in the area. The case study method is particularly useful in studies of such real-life situations governing contemporary social problems. The study draws on data collected from twenty problem-centred interviews (Witzel, 2000) and two focus group interviews that included five women in each group. In addition, prior to the individual interview the interviewees filled in a short questionnaire on their socio-demographic profile. The data analysis in this study was conducted by making use of so-called qualitative content analysis, an approach fusing openness and a theory-guided investigation. Qualitative content analysis offers a range of rule-based procedures for a systematic analysis of data material (Mayring, 2000; Kohlbacher, 2006).

What benefits are to be gained from this study? One important aim of this study is to add understanding of the role of women's agency in their intimate sexual relations among rural black women of diverse age groups since it is a profoundly under-researched area. This allows for a comparison of the experiences of younger women and more senior women, and an understanding of the possible impact age has on their capacity for agency, should the experiences be different. While significant work has been undertaken regarding the issue of women's poverty, agency and HIV risk (Hunter, 2002; Kaufman & Stavrou, 2002; Luke & Kurz, 2002; Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Hallman, 2004; 2005), the issue of socio-cultural constraints, agency and HIV risk still requires research. This study makes an important contribution by exploring links between socio-cultural constraints, agency and women's compliance. Women's compliance with patriarchal rule has been acknowledged as no more than a side issue in research studies in the context of gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS. I have thus sought to expand on the issue through this research. Finally, it has been suggested that Western feminists have remained for the most part mute about HIV/AIDS as a key feminist issue (Jungar & Oinas, 2005:101), whereas African feminists remained silent for long about the issue of sexuality (Arnfred,

2005c:59). This research aims to make a contribution to opening up the discussion on South African black women's sexual rights in the private domain and to advancing public and academic debate from a feminist perspective that looks critically at the processes of female subordination and control.

1.4 Outline of the chapters

Chapter 2, "Literature review: continuance and transformation – South African black women's sexuality" unpacks the broader historical socio-cultural context within which South African black women's sexuality is embedded. The two poles of stasis and change in the post-apartheid era set the frame for reviewing gender relations in South Africa. The chapter commences with a literature review on female sexuality in South Africa which reflects the impact of culture and religion on the shaping of women's sexuality. It then reviews the extensive literature on gender-based violence in South African society and in intimate partnerships and looks at studies that investigate different types of relationships from the perspective of female agency. The chapter serves the purpose of shedding light on the interplay between female sexual "victimhood" and female agency in the realm of intimate partnerships in a patriarchal social order.

Chapter 3, "Conceptual framework of the study: setting a feminist agenda" strives to provide a conceptual framework to account for the HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa as a key feminist issue, since both African and Western feminism have remained almost mute on this topic. The chapter sketches different positions of African feminism and reviews the main arguments of the modern/postmodern feminist approaches and the critique thereof. Since liberal feminism does not sufficiently address male domination in the private domain it is suggested that radical feminist arguments are most useful to account for the analysis and understanding of the gender aspects which fuel the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa. However, to counter criticism levelled against radical feminist thought, the issue of differences among women is broadly reflected upon. This chapter finally explores conceptualisations of agency in relation to the research question.

Chapter 4, “Research methodology” describes the epistemological assumptions of feminist research that guided my project and discusses the dilemmas of reflexivity and representation. What makes feminist research uniquely feminist are the motives, concerns and feminist beliefs brought to the research process. For my research I adopted a ‘moderate’ feminist standpoint position because I believe in the claim that knowledge comes from experience, that women’s experiences differ from those of men and that women’s being is shaped by experiences of oppression. To escape essentialism I adhere to the idea of a partial and located position for the knowing subject, of situated knowledge, that is, referring to a specific time in history as well as a specific physical location. Postmodernist feminist epistemologies have drawn attention to the importance of reflexivity and to the role of the researcher in constructing knowledge. Throughout this research I will reflect on my own role in the research process in terms of, firstly, the relationship with the research subjects and, secondly, the influence I have on shaping the research process, the interpretation of data and the research outcomes. Linked to the feminist paradigm, the study makes use of a qualitative research design, that is, an exploratory descriptive case study to engage the research question. Furthermore, the chapter depicts the field of study as well as the operational steps in the research process: the selection of interviewees, the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as a range of ethical considerations.

Chapter 5, “Amid traditionalism and transformation: socio-economic and socio-cultural constraints on women’s agency” presents the socio-demographic profile of the study participants followed by the interview findings. The chapter explores structural constraints, for instance ways in which socio-cultural assumptions inform gendered practices, arguing that the latter are as equally constraining as socio-economic restrictions but less visible. The aim of this chapter is to explore the links between structural constraints and sexual agency in the first place and traditionalism and the socio-political transformation going on in South Africa. In this context the AIDS pandemic is understood as a crisis in its own right which may lead to the breaking down of old taboos and silences, such as questions about the nature and impact of sexuality. In order to address structural constraints on women’s agency the chapter looks, firstly, at the impact

of the participants' economic dependency on their male partners, the exchange principle inherent in intimate relationships and ways of decision making about expenses and the links to women's agency. Secondly, the chapter enquires into traditional norms and values that constrain female sexual agency and fuel women's greater vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection. Finally, it probes the way the interviewees themselves, in the midst of the HIV crisis, question the status quo and develop critical thinking about existing gender relations.

Chapter 6, "Spaces for sexual agency in rural black women's intimate partnerships" explores the existence of spaces for feminine sexual agency in different categories of intimate partnership. The discussion is based on the assumption that women are likely to have greater capacity for sexual agency in good partnerships and to be in a better position to negotiate sex and condom use than women in bad relationships, particularly if the latter is characterised by violence or abuse. Initially, the chapter explores the interviewees' personal understanding of what constitutes a good or a bad partnership and, in turn, how they assess their own partnership. It looks at partnership problems to investigate the impact that partnership quality may have on women's agency. Furthermore, the chapter considers the question of whether women tend to share their problems with other people, in particular other women, as a source of support and power. It interrogates the central question of this study, that is, whether women have the capacity for agency in terms of their sexuality in their intimate partnerships and whether there are differences among women in different age groups in terms of making their own free choices in different categories of intimate partnership. Age is assumed to be significant as the chapter enquires into the processes of decision-making with regard to sex and condom usage in the women's intimate partnerships and ascertains whether there is any indication of transformation in the established gender relations owing to less traditional notions of womanhood and manhood among younger age groups.

Chapter 7, "Conclusion" highlights important issues concerning sexuality in intimate partnerships within the context of gender power relations. It summarises the main theoretical and empirical issues of the study and provides a critical reflection on

knowledge claims. It also discusses the limitations of the study and some implications for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature review: continuance and transformation – South African black women’s sexuality

2.1 Introduction

The pervasiveness of sexual violence as a key issue in the HIV/AIDS epidemic has been widely acknowledged (cf. Maman et al., 2000; Vetten & Bhana, 2001; Dunkle et al., 2004a; Jewkes et al., 2006b; Fox et al., 2007; Amnesty International, 2008). Causes of African black women’s over-representative infection rates reflect just how deeply male domination is entrenched in intimate partnerships – an argument that emerged during second-wave radical feminism in the 1970s and expressed in such slogans as ‘the personal is political’. Radical feminism understands patriarchy as a universal system of male domination over women’s bodies and minds. I maintain that, with the advent of HIV/AIDS, the concept of patriarchy regained some ground because the epidemic reveals “the ways in which patriarchal social orders structure the possibilities (and obligations) of sexual contact ... [according to] differentials in power – particularly between men and women” (cf. Parker, 2001:169). Since the late 1990s increasing empirical research has been conducted on the prevalence of gender-based violence in South Africa, including rape and child abuse.⁶ This has produced evidence that gender-based violence is present in many South African communities, and sexual violence perpetrated by intimate partners is a common occurrence (South Africa. Department of Health, 1999; Dunkle et al., 2003; Abrahams, Jewkes, Hoffman & Laubscher, 2004; Amnesty International, 2008).

These empirical facts raise many questions and seem to reinforce rather than bury a radical feminist analysis of sexuality which claims that male dominance is sexual. In her theory of sexuality, MacKinnon (1989), for instance, contends that the male sexual role centres on aggressive intrusion on those with less power. Her theory is characterised by the notion of the convergence of sexuality and violence: forced sex is central to sexuality and rape is indigenous, not exceptional, to women’s social condition. She perceives rape

⁶ A vast bibliographic review on gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS (in South Africa) has been provided by Fox, Nkosi and Kistner (2003).

as an act of terrorism and torture within a systemic context of group subjection. “Sexuality is conceived as a ... social phenomenon, as nothing less than the dynamic of sex as social hierarchy, its pleasure the experience of power in its gendered form” (ibid:xiii).

And so it has been argued that sexism appears to be embedded in the South African society and that male violence stands in the context of a sexist ideology and a ‘rape culture’, in which violence against women and children has become “tacitly accepted” (Guma & Henda, 2004:103).

In this chapter I pursue this argument by unpacking the broader historical and socio-cultural context within which South African black women’s sexuality is embedded in order to highlight the sexist nature of the socio-cultural tradition in South Africa. In particular, I review literature that discusses the impact of the interplay of Christianity and older African traditions in order to provide an understanding of these influences in defining South African black women’s subordinate social status, as well as the impact of culture and religion on the shaping of their sexuality. Because culture and religion operate to some extent below the level of consciousness, they may lead to a tacit acceptance of some realities – for instance rape – which is in fact unacceptable but which occurs in a sexist male-dominated culture and is accepted as being fairly normal.

Given these constraints, the question is how the sexist ideology translates into the private sphere of intimate partnerships. In order to explore South African black women’s sexual agency and thus their capacity to develop HIV self-protection strategies in their intimate relationships, I will review studies that investigate gender power dynamics in intimate partnerships and the links to HIV/AIDS risk and vulnerability. Rape and intimate partner violence as issues of women’s non-agency, as well as, on the other hand, transactional and love relationships as spaces for women’s agency will also be considered. However, under the influence of severe structural and socio-cultural constraints, I see women’s agency as being always restricted. Since my research interest is centred on an exploration of the question as to whether rural African black women’s agency is defined through

negotiating the terms of their subordination or the ability to transform existing gender arrangements, the chapter serves, secondly, the purpose of illustrating the interplay of hegemony, subordination and complicity in gender relations (Connell, 1995:80).

2.2 Stasis and/or change: gender relations in South Africa

Gender relations are historical processes and historical constructions of femininity and masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:832; 848). The overall pattern of gender relations is the domination of men and the subordination of women. While Bourdieu (2001) believes this to be a pattern of relative permanence, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:844), on the other hand, maintain this is a pattern in some ways open for challenge and change. In post-apartheid South Africa, changes in the gender order are underway, generating social contradictions and tensions in a context of legal reforms and entrenched patriarchal structures. Silberschmidt (2005:245) argues that African men representing masculinities still being rooted in the past will not let go of their privileges. Increasing (sexual) violence against women, for instance, has been interpreted as a masculine response to transition (Morrell, 2001b:28; Niehaus, 2004:392; Posel, 2004:62; Walker, 2005).⁷

Since 1994, South Africa's democratic government has developed a strong legislative framework for the purpose of achieving gender equality⁸ and since 1997 the government has established structures to bring about gender equity at national and provincial level in order to mainstream gender in all policy areas.⁹ One area of great difficulty is the relationship between customary law and the Constitution (cf. Serote, Mager & Budlender,

⁷ The transition to a liberal state also gives space to new notions of manhood. Morrell (2001b) groups South African men into three categories in terms of their response to gender changes: defensive, accommodating, and responsive or progressive. Walker (2005:225), in a study on masculinity of some young township men, found that contemporary expressions of masculinities are "embryonic, ambivalent and characterised by the struggle between traditional/conventional male practices and the desire to be a modern, respectable, responsible man".

⁸ Already in 1995 the international Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was signed (cf. South Africa. Department of Health, 1999:2).

⁹ Cf. Office of the Status of Women no year. *South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality*. For an overview of women's political participation in post-apartheid South Africa cf. Hassim (2003).

2001:162–164) since South Africa has a parallel system of law that recognises ‘Western’ (Roman-Dutch) law and traditional African forms of customary law. The latter applies only to black South Africans in respect of civil matters (Bentley, 2004:251). In this context local government remains a critical area for gender work:

The main stumbling block to gender-sensitive reform at the local level is the deeply entrenched acceptance of male traditional authority and patriarchal controls in households and local government ... one of the biggest obstacles for rural women is the contradiction between Government’s commitment to gender equality and its persistent engagement with the politics of traditionalism (Serote, Mager & Budlender, 2001:169).

Recently, Robins (2008) has addressed post-apartheid developments in relation to the sexual politics that surrounded the Zuma rape trial and attests to “a glaring gap between the progressive character of ‘official’ state, constitutional and NGO endorsements of gender and sexual equality on the one hand, and the deeply embedded ideas and practices that reproduce gender and sexual inequality on the other” (ibid:411). Robins argues that the increasing open discussion of sexuality and sexual rights in the home and in public domains has generated a conservative backlash from religious leaders and traditionalists (ibid; cf. Beresford, Schneider & Sember, 2008:213).

The following sections seek to examine the role of culture and tradition¹⁰ in defining male/female sex roles and sexual double standards, as well as African black women’s subordinate social status which translates into unequal gender dynamics in sexual relationships.

¹⁰ If I use the terms ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’, I understand culture as a learned meaning system that consists of patterns of tradition, beliefs, values, norms and symbols that are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community. The term ‘tradition’ signifies a key element of culture (myths, legends, ceremonies, rituals) (cf. Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

2.2.1 Paving grounds for a sexist culture: the ‘unhappy marriage’¹¹ between African sexualities and Christian morality

Life in rural black South African communities is characterised by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures. Key institutions in rural patriarchal societies which have to be transformed in order to achieve gender equality are chieftdom and traditional authorities, customary law, polygamy and the male-dominated homestead (Serote, Mager & Budlender, 2001:170). For Ramphele (1989:414) the reality of South Africa is that African patriarchs have both Christianity and tradition available to legitimate the perpetuation of the existing patriarchal system.

Rakoczy (2004) argues that the prevalence of domestic violence in South Africa reflects the links between patriarchy, violence and Christianity¹² and their effects on women. The model of headship and subordination has found fertile soil in patriarchal and hierarchical African cultures: wives are told to be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, since Christ is the head of the church and thus the husband is also the ‘head’ of his wife (ibid:33).

Religion, violence and patriarchy are all intertwined. ... Patriarchy is interwoven in the Christian tradition in distinct and pervasive ways. The images of God in Scripture and liturgical prayer are overwhelmingly male: Lord, King, Father. The oppression of women through patriarchal social structures increases in the religious context since the presumed ‘maleness’ of God and the male identity of Jesus are used to justify women’s subordination (ibid:31).¹³

Similarly, Nadar (2005) explores the relationship between religion, culture and gender construction (the ‘unholy trinity’) in promoting and sustaining violence against women. Nadar refers to a panel discussion, which included African traditional, Christian, Hindu and Muslim women. Each maintained that domestic violence against women was a major

¹¹ Term created by Heidi Hartman 1981. The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: towards a more progressive union. In Sargent, L. (ed.). *Women and revolution: a discussion of the unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism*. Boston: South End Press.

¹² The largest organised religion in South Africa is Christianity. Other religions are Hinduism, Islam and Judaism (cf. South Africa. Department of Health, 1999:2) and indigenous forms of religion.

¹³ In second-wave feminism it is in particular Mary Daly (1973; 1978) who challenged the image of the male-gendered God and deconstructs patriarchal religion, myth and imagery. She analyses how deceptive (male) myth creations condition the psyches of the victims as well as the victimisers who become carriers of the patriarchal myth.

problem within their respective faith communities. Nadar (ibid:18) thus suggests “that the impediments that Christian women experience from within their religion, are not very different from those experienced by women from other faith perspectives”. The panellists argued that it was the interpretation of the religious tradition, and not the religion itself, that proved to be biased against women. The interpretation of religion has always been positioned in the hands of men who asserted and maintained their superiority and position of power over women (ibid). While kinship and ‘purity’ ideologies were used in the African system to provide an ideological system of control of women, in the Afrikaner society Christianity provided the legitimation for their subordination. Afrikaner society is characterised as semi-feudal with the *pater familias*, his wife and children as a nucleus as opposed to African tribal or chiefly patriarchy (Bozzoli, 1983; concept of the “patchwork quilt of patriarchies”).

The pronounced gender inequality in South Africa has been complicated by the apartheid legacy,¹⁴ Christianity and African tradition.

Discourse and practices related to sex and sexuality in Southern Africa are characterised by an interplay of two, very contrasting, sets of ideas. On the one hand, there are notions of sexual repression that have their roots in missionary teachings of Christianity and the Western discourses of sexual repression ... A contrasting set of ideas, have their roots in Southern African cultural traditions and are characterised by a degree of openness and frankness about sex. Sexualised games played by children and ribaldry between adults and children have been a long-standing feature of normal childhood in our field site and many other parts of the country (Jewkes, Penn-Kekana & Rose-Junius, 2005:1812; cf. Delius & Glaser, 2002).

In order to understand sexual behaviour in the South African context better, we need to look at the socio-cultural concept of the nature of sexuality, the body, and the person. Thornton (2002) undertook a conceptualisation of sexuality and the body by exploring the South African socio-cultural construction of sex and the person, in which the notion

¹⁴ For instance Kadali (2005) draws attention to the fact that struggles around gender and sexuality were rendered illegitimate among “progressives” in South Africa’s struggle against apartheid for national liberation. Robins (2008:420) notes that “[d]uring the liberation struggle, questions of sexuality and sexual rights were generally sidelined and subordinated within anti-apartheid political discourse. By 2006 this had significantly changed, and sexual politics seemed to be on the rise”. Benjamin (2007:198) argues that the equality of women within the apartheid movement “was placed in a queuing system behind race and class”.

of flows of sexual substances between both sexual partners is crucial.

An African concept of sexuality, as outlined by Thornton (2002), seems to be located in the flow of substances between people, physical as well as spiritual. An interpretation of “... sexuality as being constituted by complex mutual flows of substance, spirit and values, together with a concept of the person as multiple permeable to these flows, is consistent with beliefs concerning the influence of witches, spirit familiars, and the widespread use of magic ... to control the sexual behaviour of others” (ibid:9). This interpretation suggests that ‘having sex’ is effectively defined in terms of the flow of sexual substances (semen *and* vaginal fluid), in ‘flesh to flesh’ (*nyama ne nyama*) contact, rather than as primarily the achievement of pleasure through orgasm or for reproduction. Indeed, reproduction is understood as a consequence of sexual flows that constitute a new person, just as sex itself constitutes the persons. This concept, if explored in its social context, means that the flow of sexual substances between people is accompanied by flows of gifts and money. However, the social control of sexuality and reproduction through systems of marriage and kinship must not be confused with sexuality itself:

Contemporary southern African representations of the body and practices of sexuality point toward a concept of ‘flows’ of bodily substance and gifts that go both ways in the (hetero-)sexual encounter, that is, both men and women absorb the sexual fluids of each other in a sexual contact. This implies a concept of the person that is permeable to both physical and ‘spiritual’ substances of other persons, rather than – or perhaps in addition to – a (‘Western’) concept of ‘the individual’. ... It suggests a different concept of the biological boundaries of the person that is rooted in cultural concepts of the body, especially the sexual body. This has far-reaching effects in decisions about use of condoms, but more than this, points towards a set of distinctive beliefs about sex that must be understood in terms of representations of the body, of sex and sexuality, and of the notion of the nature of the person in southern African society (ibid:3).¹⁵

¹⁵ Thornton (2002) reproduces views of traditional healers and others that limit the use of condoms; it is believed that condoms cause a backup of semen in the male and therefore leads to dangerous illness; that they come off and disappear inside the woman, blowing up the uterus and causing damage or death; that lubrication of condoms is absorbed by both men and women during sex and could lead to impurity in the blood; that there are worms in packaged condoms; and that sex with a condom is no sex at all. It was held, however, that condoms could be useful in preventing male contact with menstrual blood, and could also prevent contact with women who had recently attended funerals and who thus carried a dangerous impurity that could kill men (cf. ibid:1).

Thornton's conceptualisation of traditional African sexuality provides us with a deeper understanding of the reluctance of many men (and to some extent women) to use condoms, as well as the importance of gift-giving in relationships (see section 2.4.3).

What was important in African systems of kinship and marriage was fertility, not sexuality as such (Arnfred, 2005c:73). With Christianity and colonisation, Christian lines of thinking and Christian norms of social conduct grew increasingly dominant in those parts of Africa where Christian missions gained an effective foothold, gradually creating a Christian moral regime (Arnfred, 2005b:17). While the 'repression' of sexuality is characteristic of the history of Europe and Christianity, and prevented people from knowing much about sexuality or from talking much about it, it appears that in the African context

... the co-ordinate cultural moment to 'repression' in the West is 'respect' ... While these are not equivalent, they have a similar effect. 'Respect' is what younger people owe older people, especially their parents, their parent's siblings and cousins of the same generation ... and members of ascending generations. It is also what women owe men, especially in rural areas (Thornton, 2002:11–12).

For men, however, an idea of sexuality for pleasure and multiple sexual partners exists, and was naturalised as a part of male nature, whereas women's sexuality was perceived to be linked to procreation. Male/female double standards developed along with the idea of female sexual chastity and female sexuality under male control. Yet, which parts of tradition are traditional, which parts are Christian, and which parts not, is not always easy to unravel (cf. Arnfred, 2005b:14–17).

By the middle of the 20th century 59% of the total African population was a member of a Christian church. However, Christian communities were notably unsuccessful in controlling premarital or extra-marital sexual activity. While the system of migrant labour along with broader corrosive forms of rural society changed patterns of extra-marital sexuality, "it might be imagined that Christianity with its stress on monogamy, sexuality expressed only within marriage and its strong condemnation of adultery and sex before, or outside of, marriage, would have offered a powerful counterpoint" (Delius & Glaser,

2004:101). Yet, extra-marital relationships were commonplace being explained in terms of “taboos against sexual relations with women who were breastfeeding, men’s generally greater needs and the acceptability of relationships with unmarried women” (ibid:102).

In their essay on extra-marital and multi-partnership sex in South Africa Delius and Glaser (2004) “contest the popular appeal to a tradition of polygamous marriage as an explanation of promiscuous sexual behaviour in the present” (Reid & Walker, 2004:81) and trace shifting patterns of marriage and extra-marital sex from early colonial times to the present. They argue that polygamy was never designed to maintain fidelity nor that it did ensure that all women were absorbed into the marriage system. “Marriage was more about rights to offspring, transaction of cattle and the organisation of homestead labour than about the control of sexuality” (Delius & Glaser, 2004:85). Although polygamy was common, it was a minority activity in pre-colonial societies (ibid) which did not curb extra-marital sexual relations. Delius and Glaser conclude that the main impact of Christianity has been to stifle discussion on sexuality and force extra-marital affairs underground, but that neither polygamy nor Christian monogamy defined or contained sexuality in African communities in the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore, “a more plausible starting point for the discussion of sexual behaviour, and for campaigns which seek to influence sexual relationships in the light of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, is the recognition that there are long traditions of multi-partnership sexuality in this country [South Africa] that need to be acknowledged and accepted” (ibid:113).¹⁶ One special feature of pre-colonial African societies was a “category of mature women who had never

¹⁶ The discussion of multi-partnership and extra-marital sex could possibly be read as supporting a widespread European and colonial fantasy, namely the myth of the hyper-sexualised black human which related to a characterisation of Africa as the Dark Continent where humans have remained in a state of nature (Oyewùmi, 2003b:31). European imperialists regarded polygamy “as a sign of innate lust and sexual indiscipline on the part of the African man, and ... as proof of his primitivism ... The labeling of African women as primitive, and therefore more sexually intensive, was antithetical to the portrayal of the European woman as sexually passive” (ibid:37), that is the Victorian/Protestant ideal of female ‘passionlessness’ (Arnfred, 2005c:62). It is in relation to “his” woman that the African male was portrayed as a bestial savage and polygamy represented as a special evil (Oyewùmi, 2003:31). Arnfred (2005c) demonstrates quite vividly these colonial lines of thinking on sex in Africa and the ‘dark continent discourse’ with the example of an old novel (*Rider Haggard: King Solomon’s Mines 1895*) and an old tale (*The Sarah Bartman story*) in order to disclose the persistence of these lines of thinking in contemporary scholarly texts (Caldwell, Caldwell & Quiggin, 1989). Yet, I do not understand Delius and Glaser’s (2004) essay as supporting such a line of thinking nor do I intend to reproduce such ethnocentric views. See also Ratele (2001) on “Everyday makings of black masculinity”.

married or who were single as a result of divorce or widowhood. They constituted a stratum of partially independent women with whom both single and unmarried men might establish sexual relationships ...” (ibid:91).

From the beginning of the 19th century African black women began to flood into urban areas where they found occupation as washer-woman, liquor- and beer-brewer and seller, domestic servant, and as prostitute¹⁷ (Bozzoli, 1983:163–164). Delius & Glaser (2004:108) see “a clear thread of continuity between the *amankazana* class and independent urban women” and argue that sexually active unmarried women were not an innovation of city life. Furthermore, there is substantial evidence to suggest that there were extremely high rates of marital infidelity in African urban marriages from the 1930s onwards.¹⁸ Although husbands were probably more likely to have extra-marital affairs, it was very common for wives to have lovers too. From then on a large proportion of births in the townships were entirely out of wedlock. In fact, for (young) men there was a great deal of prestige attached to paternity and multiple sexual partners. Being an *isoka*¹⁹ is considered a natural, laudable and traditional part of African manhood; promiscuity is seen as distasteful and dirty and usually associated with women thought to have many sex partners; such women being known as *izifebe* or whores (Varga, 1997:56). However, responsibility for the child rested with the mother and her family and multi-generational, female-headed households have become a common feature in the townships since the late 1960s (a 1999 survey of Soweto revealed similar patterns of female-headed households; cf. Delius & Glaser, 2004:109–112). However, women’s power within the family is exercised strictly within the traditional patriarchal structures and is mainly limited to

¹⁷ In her essay on African women in Western feminist discourse Oyewùmi (2003b:37) notes that there have been few studies of prostitution as a distinct occupational category in African societies, whereas in the literature the impression is often created that African black women are always prostitutes. Bozzoli (1983:161–162) describes that in the beginning of the 20th century impoverished Afrikaner women in search for work took similar directions as their black counterparts, many became prostitutes or sought employment as domestic servants. However, by the 1930s poor Afrikaner women dominated in the garment, sweet-making, confectionary and textile industries.

¹⁸ For many urban black women a key to survival was to form an attachment to a man in order to get access to housing: so-called “vat en sit” marriages (women and men cohabit in domestic partnerships outside marriage but less for emotional than practical reasons; Delius & Glaser, 2004:107).

¹⁹ See Hunter (2002:105–110) on the changing meaning of *isoka*. In Xhosa *isoka* means a single man who has never been married.

senior women (Campbell, 1990).²⁰

2.2.2 Rituals and rules: shaping women's sexuality

Much of the literature on female sexuality in Africa derives from anthropological work. In his article on “Sexuality, culture and power in HIV/AIDS”, Parker (2001) examines the development of anthropological research in response to AIDS in the late 1980s and 1990s, when pioneering anthropological work began to shift from investigating behavioural frequencies and risks to the importance of socio-cultural systems and socio-cultural meanings in shaping sexual practices relevant to HIV transmission and prevention locally and cross-culturally. Parker highlights work from Farmer (1992), which demonstrates that political economic factors in all settings are intertwined with gender and sexuality and that those hierarchies make women, and low-income women in particular, especially vulnerable to HIV infection. In turning to issues of power, attention has focused not only on gender but also on poverty. “Ultimately, work casting the body as both a symbolic and a material product of social relations ... has provided an especially important way of reframing recent research on sexuality in relation to HIV and AIDS” (Parker, 2001:171).

New concepts developed that considered the interactive effects of social factors such as poverty and economic exploitation, gender power, sexual oppression, racism and social exclusion. The awareness of ways in which social orders structure the possibilities of

²⁰ Campbell (1990) conducted a study on the working class township family looking at the complexities of women's roles within the family in the context of economic deprivation and racial discrimination. Two central issues came to the fore: (1) the power of women within the family and the community and (2) the limits of this power and the implications of these limits for the fight for women's liberation from patriarchal domination. She found that patriarchal ideology perpetuates township ideology to date taking the subordination of women to men for granted. The impact of this ideology still undermines women's power and equality today. Despite all accomplishments of women and despite growing numbers of female-headed families township ideology tends to perpetuate patriarchal views: “In female households patriarchal ideals often dominate. In a community where the ideology of a dominant male still holds great weight, a woman might not be accorded the respect and authority that a male would receive in this role” (ibid:8). Thus, the increasing number of female-headed families and households would not lead to greater equality of women because changes in the status quo of family structures are not automatically accompanied by changes in expectations and beliefs about families. Instead, a great deal of energy is invested in trying to approximate an “old-fashioned blueprint of male head and breadwinner, subordinate mother and so on” (ibid:10).

sexual contact draw special attention to socially and culturally determined differentials in power, in particular between men and women (ibid:168–169; Schoepf, 1995; Parker, Easton & Klein, 2000).

Schoepf (2001) also reviews the international AIDS research in anthropology putting emphasis on global structures and processes and the way these are involved in spreading HIV. She mentions several studies that identify gender as a significant concern in the representation of AIDS and in vulnerability to infection and notes that social identities imparted with gender enculturation have been found to contribute to relative powerlessness even for women with some control over economic resources.

In most of Africa social norms and socio-cultural values encourage men to wield power over women and often promote violence and sexual coercion, including forced marriage. McFadden views African female sexuality as being played out within a dominant patriarchal milieu. “Existing cultures and traditions are clear expressions of the patriarchal and sexist nature of gender relations within all African societies ...” (McFadden, 1992:170). Commonly, though not universally, men’s sexual needs are acknowledged to a greater extent than women’s needs; many women and men define sex largely according to what they believe gives men pleasure, including a range of “dehumanising cultural practices” (Sakala, 1998:48; 48–51), such as dry sex,²¹ ritual sexual cleansing, wife inheritance, or female circumcision, which are said to exacerbate women's physiological risk of sexually transmitted infection (STI) and HIV infection (ibid; Thege, 2007:18–20).

²¹ Dry sex carries higher risks of HIV transmission because of frequent lesions through the insertion of herbs into the vagina so that all vaginal fluid is removed. In a short article on vaginal potions used for dry sex, Boikanyo (1992) shares the information she was given during information workshops in a women’s health project on cervical cancer and other aspects of women’s health held in South Africa. One group of participants were women who used vaginal potions, such as alumn in a powder or solution form, snuff as a powder or as an infusion, vinegar in water, methylated spirits in water, iced water, ice cubes, brown paper or other means which they obtained from traditional healers or herbalists (some men also use potions from the latter which they apply to their genitals or oils of oriental origin which they apply to the penis). Considering the discussions Boikanyo (ibid) found that many women are not aware of the normal functioning of their bodies and think that female secretions are perceived as unclean. “The ‘wetness problem’ is a natural response of one’s body to sexual activity ... When the woman is dry the whole process of sexual intercourse becomes painful, bruising and uncomfortable” (ibid:5).

It is often in these contexts that women actively promote a socio-cultural ethos and socio-cultural practices that violate women in terms of women's rights. They identify with the patriarchal belief system and advocate in the absence of men patriarchal principles and morals. With regard to the traditional ritual of female genital mutilation, for example, men are absent at the actual mutilation (Daly, 1978:159; see section 3.5.3).

Contemporary African communities in Southern Africa require silence on issues of sexuality: it is a taboo to talk openly about sex (Thornton, 2002; Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Reid & Walker, 2004; 2005). Material on earlier African communities, however, paints – as Delius and Glaser (2002) show – a very different picture that reveals high levels of sexual education, regulation and inter-generational communication on sexual issues. Sexual socialisation was transformed under the impact of Christianity, conquest, migrant labour and urbanisation (ibid:50). Colonial discourses entrenched, *inter alia*, the hegemony of heterosexual masculine regimes and homogenised the internal complexity and diversity of sexualities (Salo & Gqola, 2006:2). Christian values in particular shaped moral double standards for women and men, as well as the intergenerational silence on sexual matters.

In an article on “Sexuality, fertility and male power”, Mager (1996) explores some of the complex gender practices that shaped sexuality in the 1950s in the Eastern Cape. Women's sexuality was shaped alongside and in relation to male sexuality and also in relation to the dominant gender order. Rituals regulated adolescent sexual activity and engendered girls and boys in conformity with a common socio-cultural template: to be masculine was to assert male control over women. “Sexual aggression began with young boys, many of whom sought to establish their masculinity through control over young girls. Boys learned to demand obedience, labour and respect from girls, justified by gender. Youths who did not get their way with girls sometimes used force ...” (ibid:20). The gendering of girls was tightly tied to biology, their capacity to bear children. “Key moments of gendering were tied to girls' bodily changes, themselves carefully monitored by mothers and mothers-in-law” (ibid:15).

Biology also regulated women's status, fixed by ritual practices and mostly controlled by the mother-in law and/or patriarchal men. For the vast majority in the Eastern Cape reserves, customary marriage, a homestead and children constituted rites of passage into adulthood and social acceptability. Regulation of women's capacity to bear children underpinned their gendering across individual life cycles. It also created the basis for a hierarchy of women in this male-dominated society. Thus, wives acquired the status of *umfazana* (young wife) after the birth of the first child, but were required to work for their mothers-in-law until the birth of the second child when they might ascend the hierarchical scale, becoming *umfazi* (wife) and finally *umfazi omkhulu* (senior wife). Promotion to the various levels within adulthood was publicly indicated by changes in dress (*umfazi* meant independence from the mother-in-law). With a few exceptions, *lobola* underpinned all forms of marriage, a guarantee of good faith and good conduct in the marriage. The rituals did not, however, prevent the battery of women by husbands – instead wife-beating was the norm. Women could neither question a man's behaviour nor negotiate a relaxing of restrictions on their own; their lives and sexuality were controlled by patriarchal men whose authority was bolstered by customary law (cf. *ibid*:16–18). By calling on culture and tradition and in order to legitimise practices that are said to be central to African culture, the oppression of women by men is continuously reinforced.

Traditionally, customary laws have governed issues such as marriage, inheritance and land ownership. Traditional courts administer customary law in most rural villages (approximately 1 500 customary courts are operating in South Africa; Curran & Bonthuys, 2004:2) and traditional or customary law marriages are still common in South Africa, particularly in rural areas. In a survey on customary law and domestic violence, Curran and Bonthuys²² (2004) point out (in one of their footnotes) that different systems of customary law apply to different groups in South Africa, that the application and interpretation of these various systems varies locally, and that there are nonetheless also broad similarities, especially in the areas of marriage and inheritance (*ibid*:24). In the new

²² Their research investigated the rules of customary law in order to identify those which may protect women from domestic violence and those which could increase women's vulnerability or limit their ability to resist. They were particularly interested in investigating the likelihood that official customary rules around domestic violence may have been successfully challenged by women in rural communities.

South Africa, the 1999 Customary Marriages Act gives existing customary marriages, including polygynous marriages, full legal recognition (ibid:7).

According to Bennett there are five features which mark a customary marriage: (1) polygyny is not only tolerated but even approved, (2) the validity of the union depends on the payment of *lobolo*²³, (3) the relationship is between two families rather than two individuals, (4) the union is achieved gradually over time, not immediately with the performance of a particular ceremony and (5) marriage is a private affair requiring no intervention by civil or religious authorities to give it validity (Bennett, 2004:188 cited in Curran & Bonthuys, 2004:7). Central to the official rules regarding the formation of a customary marriage is the payment of *lobolo* by the husband's family to the family of the bride. Traditionally, families negotiated the *lobolo* that had to be paid in cattle and other livestock, but nowadays *lobolo* is generally paid in cash rather than cattle. If *lobolo* has been paid, a customary wife is absorbed into her husband's family. In case of matrimonial problems, including domestic violence, women should seek help from their husband's families, rather than bring the issue to 'public' attention by approaching the traditional leader. According to the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, customary divorces should be handled by High Courts or Family Courts and the rules that apply to civil divorces will also apply to the dissolution of customary marriages (cf. ibid:8–13).²⁴

Ramphele (1989:400) identifies in the system of bridewealth a “cornerstone of ‘traditional’ control of women by men” in South Africa, which is used to secure control of the reproductive power of women. Although money has replaced cattle as a symbolic practice, the symbolic transfer of patriarchal control over individual women remains an enduring idea (ibid). Recently Mugambe (2006) underscored Ramphele’s view:

... bride price historically did not carry any commercial implications. Today, however, men literally purchase their wives in a commercial transaction. Effectively, the husband’s payment entitles him to full ownership-rights over his

²³ Term *lobolo* used by Curran and Bonthuys (2004); otherwise in the text referred to as *lobola* which is the correct term.

²⁴ A very detailed description and comparative analysis of African marriages including patterns of bridewealth in Southern Africa was edited by Jensen Krige & Comaroff (1981).

acquisition, his property, his wife. It then becomes difficult for the woman (and an insult for the man) to refuse to sleep with her husband. Women usually fear the threat of being returned to their parents' home and the bride price being returned. They remain in the marriage and are vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. Despite all flaws, the practice is still rife (ibid:76).

There is a layered development of rules over the various stages of a South African black woman's life with regard to roles, rules and authority prior to marriage and in marriage. In sum, the reputation and integrity of a family stands or falls on the extent to which its members have educated their daughter to be a good, obedient and respectful wife. There is tremendous social pressure on women to fulfil the prescription for a 'good wife'. The extent to which a young woman observes these rules determines the likelihood of her being a good wife and thus her candidacy for marriage. Further rules are imposed on a woman entering into marriage. Women take sole responsibility for household chores and, once they have children, they take sole responsibility for rearing them. Men's responsibility is to work in order to provide for their family and to exercise authority over their wives and children. The key issue related to the authority of a husband over his wife is whether he is permitted to discipline (i.e. beat) her (cf. Hargreaves, Vetten, Schneider, Malepe & Fuller, 2006:15). "A central theme running through the research, and articulated by the female participants specifically, is that of the hardship of marriage" (ibid).

Major rules require women to treat and speak to their husbands with 'respect' (i.e. honour his position as head of household and take instruction from him), undertake their domestic duties (cook, clean, wash and iron and take care of the children), be sexually faithful to their husband/male partner (including the set of sub-rules concerning the regulation of her movements and interactions with other men) and "service" their husband sexually (ibid:22).

In terms of the status of women in customary law Curran and Bonthuys conclude:

While pre-colonial African societies were patriarchal in the sense that women's interests were considered to be subordinate to those of families and larger kin groups, it is difficult to assess women's status in these societies with absolute certainty. In the first place, the social and economic conditions which prevailed

when official customary law was first recorded were vastly different from capitalism, rapid urbanisation and the replacement of the extended customary family by nuclear, woman-headed and even child-headed families, which form the current context of women's lives. As a result, customary rules may not have had the same detrimental effects in pre-colonial societies as they do now (Curran & Bonthuys, 2004:5).

Curran and Bonthuys (ibid:6) assume that in contemporary customary societies, the likelihood of conflicting customary norms may have increased. In particular, women are more likely to point to changing social circumstances in order to argue that ancient customs are no longer relevant. Similarly, Hargreaves et al. (2006) suggest that women do not necessarily conform to the imposed rules:

Some women adhere to the rules on the surface, but subtly push the boundaries and manipulate the rules. Thus, the direct challenge to the rules may emerge from women's rebellion" (ibid:11).

To establish indications of transformation in gender ordered relations that may be linked to the rejection of guiding rules is one of this study's objectives.

2.2.3 South Africa's road to a rape culture: transformations of sexual violence

Under apartheid there was little empirical evidence of sexual violence against women to be found. Yet, some anthropological ethnographic research gives us an idea about processes of transformation in sexual violence in the 20th century. However, these findings are not representative of the general population. It is only since the late 1990s that increasing empirical quantitative research has been conducted into the issue of gender-based violence in South Africa.

To explain the increasing violence against women in the South African society Whisson (2004) makes the argument that the African traditional complex systems of order, belief and practice, which developed over centuries and possessed its own internal logic, were condemned by the missionaries. The imposition of western, Christian systems undermined the pre-colonial systems, but did not completely replace them; much of the old ways of understanding remained but were communicated privately. The old moral

system was not effectively replaced by the newly created contradictions and tensions and set the stage for the brutal exploitation of the weak by the powerful at every level of society (ibid:362–363). This exploitation played out in the form of sexualised violence against women and girls, a brutal reality often masked by religiosity and denial.

Changing economic and social circumstances influenced patterns of sexuality from the 1950s onwards.

While systems of meaning continued to centre on the ritual place of women in society, experience and attitudes often bore all the marks of a changing social order. Men struggling to ensure domination of women did so through the double standard of controlling the sexuality and marriage of their wives and daughters while doing as they pleased with other women. Individual women seeking to fulfil their own sexual, economic or social needs exploited the gaps created by this tension in patriarchal domination. Nevertheless, constructed as ... sexual objects or simply as inferior to men, many women were vulnerable to lovers, husbands and predatory men alike (Mager, 1996:22).

In the 1950s, courts and magistrates started to notice increasing sexual violence. Social respect for a woman's fertility and its place in the gendering of women was giving way to male abuse of female bodies. Women of all ages were vulnerable to predatory men. While adolescent girls were most vulnerable to rape, neither very young girls nor old women were spared. There was also an increase in child rape (cf. ibid:20–22).

Those who brutalised women were most often 'ordinary men' rather than a small lunatic fringe; they were men acting out their sexuality as a relation of dominance over women. They were, like rapists elsewhere, men who used violent sex as a means of establishing their own masculine self-esteem at the expense of women closest to them. They were often husbands, lovers or fathers (ibid:21).

Likewise Niehaus (2004) suggests that in the context of de-industrialisation marginal men increasingly perpetrated sexual violence to mimic masculine domination (ibid:371). His ethnographic research²⁵ conceptualises transformations of sexual violence at a local level by correlating political changes in South Africa with the collapse of the old domestic order and the experience of deindustrialisation. Although not generalisable, I

²⁵ Niehaus conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the village of Impalahoek in the Bushbuckridge district of the Lowveld (Limpopo Province).

will present some of his findings in more detail because of the rich description of transformations of sexual violence in reference to the domestic unit (i.e. *motse*).²⁶

Prior the 1960s there was a clear distinction between violence that occurred within the *motse* and violence perpetrated by outsiders against women of the *motse*. In the old order extremely coercive sexual relations were common. The father was the head of the *motse*, his wealth expressed in wives, children and cattle. Chiefs and fathers frequently entertained coercive sexual relations (arranged marriages). Yet, most rapes under legal purview of courts were perpetrated by single men against marginal women members of the *motse*. Changes occurred in 1960 when the *motse* was fragmented into smaller households²⁷ (relocations; fragmentation of agnatic clusters; chiefs lost influence). These changes had implications for the occurrence of sexual violence: subsequently, sexual violence became more individualised. The majority of rapists were marginal, disadvantaged men who raped women to mimic masculine domination. In the new context, where the formal positions men occupied in domestic units as fathers, sons, or husbands no longer effectively prescribed masculine identities, the demonstration of masculinity became crucial. In this context men frequently resorted to physical violence to overcome ‘masculine challenges’ and to assert their dominance over women (Niehaus, 2004).

The challenges to masculine identities were profoundly structured by age and different types of sexual violence tended to be perpetrated by different cohorts of men. Rape during courtship, rape as a form of revenge, rape as sexual socialisation, and gang rapes tended to be perpetrated by young men. According to Niehaus (ibid), (gang) rapes point to the increasingly important role of peer groups in male adolescent sexual socialisation. Gang rapes symbolised male bonding. “Through participating in gang rape young men

²⁶ According to Niehaus (2004:372) the “*motse* comprised the homesteads, fields, and ancestral graves of a co-resident agnatic cluster. Its inhabitants were typically a father, his wives, sons, unmarried daughters, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren”.

²⁷ Since 1960 polygyny has greatly declined. “Though the old social order had been destroyed, a model thereof has continued to exist as a ‘virtual reality’ ... Images of the *motse* were still celebrated in daily life. Kinship still bore important moral obligations ... Men were generally more committed to tradition. Men continued to perceive wealth in people as decisive to masculinity and invoked images of polygyny to justify extra-marital liaisons” (Niehaus, 2004:379–380).

overcame their anxiety of women, and displayed their heterosexual capacity to their peers” (ibid:384). Rapes perpetrated by adult men were often associated with robbery and unemployment. The rape confirmed masculinity otherwise denied. Sexual violence committed against kin or neighbours by elders aimed to assert patriarchy, men’s former position of authority and control of others. The most common pattern was that senior men raped young female relatives: daughters, granddaughters, stepdaughters, nieces – against a strict taboo of sexual intercourse between patrilineal relatives (exchange of the same blood). “In the cases I recorded fathers used incest to assert their dominance within the household. They combined physical coercion and financial persuasion to subdue their female kin” (ibid:390). Niehaus (ibid:392) concludes “that there are both ideological and social reasons that increased prevalence of rape. ... Rape now encompasses outsiders and insiders, violence and coercion, and elders as well as youth. ... In the 1980s and 1990s the emasculating experience of deindustrialisation also formed the context in which men raped”. With the fragmentation of domestic units, rape came to be seen solely as an attack on individual women. Thus, sexual violence today is an assertion of interpersonal power.

As already mentioned above, increasing empirical research has been conducted around the issue of gender-based violence since the late 1990s. In 2002, Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) provided a first overview of the epidemiology of the rape of women in South Africa. The available data showed that rape reported to the police represented the tip of the iceberg of sexual coercion (see p. 36). Non-consensual sex in marriage and dating relationships is believed to be very common but is usually not well reported in surveys. Forced sexual initiation is reported by almost a third of adolescent girls. Amongst 14–18 year olds, rape is very common (ibid:1234).²⁸ In the Reproductive Health Research Unit, University of Witwatersrand (RHRU) youth study (Pettifor et al., 2004b:41) 28% of women reported that their first sexual experience was unwanted compared with 1% of

²⁸ An exploratory study in some township areas of Cape Town investigated factors associated with teenage pregnancy amongst sexually active adolescents. Using a matched case control design, the study found that almost 32% of the pregnant teenagers and 18.1% of the comparison group had been forced to have sex the first time. Of all pregnant teenagers 72% and almost 60% of the comparison group had been forced to have sex against their wishes at some time and 11.1% respectively 9.4% of the comparison group have ever been raped (cf. Jewkes, Vundule, Maforah & Jordaan, 2001:738–739; tables 2 and 3).

young men. Furthermore, 6% reported having been forced to have sex, including 2% of men and 10% of women. Lesch and Kruger (2004) found in a sample of 25 adolescent women from low-income, coloured households in the Western Cape a very limited sense of sexual agency in their first experiences of sexual intercourse. Respondents perceived sex as something that was done to them, something they had to endure.

Today South Africa's rape figures are among the highest for any country not at war. "Over the past two decades sexual violence – including forced concubinage, rape and incest – has drastically escalated in South Africa" (Niehaus, 2004:368). Meanwhile, rape and sexual abuse even of small children are part of the media's daily news.²⁹ There are appalling rates of violence against women and children. Amnesty International (2008:19) gives an account of 117 reported rape cases per 100 000 of the population from April 2006 to March 2007; the total for that year was 52 617 cases and 9 327 indecent assaults (incidents of anal rape or other types of sexual assault which do not fall within the legal definition of rape). From April to September 2007, 22 887 rapes were reported as well as 4 249 indecent assaults. It is believed, however, "that the actual figures annually are much higher than those cases reported to the police, because of the social and economic pressures which discourage women from reporting rape" (ibid:19). It is assumed that only one in every twenty rapes is reported; if so, approximately one million rapes occur in South Africa annually (Walker, 2005:228). The high incidence of rape and violence against women raise many questions, such as: What's wrong with South African men?³⁰ Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) suggest that the experience of non-consensual sexual intercourse at some stage in a South African woman's life "is certainly the norm and may be little short of universal. The evidence points to a conclusion that women's right to give or withhold consent to sexual intercourse is one of the most commonly violated of all human rights in South Africa" (ibid:1240).

In the post-apartheid era rape and sexual violence have come to the forefront of public

²⁹ See ex-President Mbeki's fierce rejection of Charlene Smith's article in the *Sunday Independent* (26 September 2004) on the high rate of rape in South Africa saying that Smith allegedly makes every African man a potential rapist and defines the African people as barbaric savages.

³⁰ See: <http://csa.za.or./article/articleprint/243/-1/1> [25 September 2003].

debate (Niehaus, 2004:369; Reid & Walker, 2004:80). Posel (2004), who looks at ‘how sex is put into discourse’ in post-apartheid South Africa, found that rape receives mounting public awareness since more women are confessing publicly to having been raped. Hence, sexuality is fraught with menace, sex is dangerous rather than pleasurable and men are perceived as predatory rather than as protective partners. Posel (ibid:62) concludes: “Discursively, the imagery of sex as freedom, as the symbol of a virile new lease of life, jostles with that of sex as menace, sex as death”. HIV is seen as a signifier of bad sexuality, “sexuality is a locus of moral shame – the shame of ways of life which were fuelled by the old social order and which persist, hidden by refusals to talk openly about them” (ibid; cf. Ashforth, 2002; Delius & Glaser, 2005). According to Thornton (2002:12), respect and the expectations associated with it generally require the suppression of any direct, frank talk about sexuality, creating barriers between age classes and between generations.

However, the debate on sexual behaviour caused by the impact of HIV/AIDS takes place “against the social background of the widespread abuse of women and children and the socio-cultural background of denial and evasion” (Whisson, 2004:364). Jewkes and Abrahams (2002:1238) argue that the problem of rape in South Africa “has to be understood within the context of the very substantial gender power inequalities which pervade society”. As already stated the unprecedented extent of rape in South Africa can be explained as a means to sustain masculine domination in times of severe societal insecurities in times of tensions due to transition (Morrell, 2001b:28).³¹ Rape and domestic violence are manifestations of male dominance over women and both sexual and physical violence “form part of a repertoire of strategies of control” (ibid; cf. Wood & Jewkes, 2001). However, rape is not an aggressive manifestation of sexuality but rather

³¹ Recently Fox et al. (2007) alluded in a study on intimate partner violence and HIV in South Africa to the structural roots of violence in South Africa, including high levels of inequality, unemployment and the legacy of a violent state apparatus (ibid:586). In their 2008 report on human rights abuses of rural women living with HIV in South Africa, Amnesty International notes that the epidemic had begun “during a period of extreme state violence and political and racial oppression which included government imposed states of emergency from 1985 to 1990, and continued to develop while the country was largely preoccupied with the efforts to negotiate the end of the apartheid system and National Party rule and securing the transition to non-racial democracy in 1994” (Amnesty International, 2008:7).

a sexual manifestation of aggression, an act of extreme violence implemented by sexual means (Stetz, 2003:139) and “a weapon of destruction and suffering both in wartime and peacetime” (ibid:141; cf. Brownmiller, 1975; Barry, 1979).

Owing to the high HIV prevalence and high levels of sexual violence in South Africa, women are at risk of contracting HIV as a consequence of rape. In other words rape can lead to direct HIV transmission:

The likelihood of transmission during an incident of rape can be exacerbated by a number of factors. These include that perpetrators rarely use a condom, the “high rate of multiple perpetrator” rapes, the frequency of sexual assaults and the presence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). In a violent sexual assault a victim may also receive wounds in the genital area and associated bleeding which can further increase chances of transmission of the virus (Amnesty International, 2008:18–19).

Since, in encounters characterised by rape, sexual coercion or violence negotiation for safer sex is not an issue, there is very little if any space for women’s agency to be assumed.

The sexism embedded in South African traditional cultures, beliefs and values shapes notions surrounding masculinity, femininity and violence and provides the frame for continuing gender and sexual inequality. The subsequent question is how this translates into the private sphere.

2.3 Women as survivors³² in intimate partnerships – violence against women and non-agency

As already pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, a great deal of empirical research has been published on gender-based violence and its impact on the HIV/AIDS epidemic, particularly on women’s increased vulnerability to HIV infection. Given this background one of my research objectives is to explore to what extent women are able to

³² I use the term survivor, rather than victim, because of the active role a woman plays in surviving violence and rape.

devise HIV self-protecting strategies in their intimate relationships as one aspect of sexual agency. In this context I will discuss violence and non-agency.

Representative data show that intimate partner violence is indeed a ‘common occurrence’ in South Africa and give evidence of the society’s sexist nature. Partner violence can be understood as a form of control using methods such as physical, sexual or psychological abuse (also in combination) or as a form of objectification (cf. Ludsin & Vetten, 2005:17–19). The South African Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS), conducted in 1998 as a representative study of all women in South Africa, was based on interviews with 11 735 women aged between the ages of 15 and 49. The average prevalence for ever having been physically abused by an intimate partner was 12.5% for the whole country (with highest levels in Gauteng; South Africa. Department of Health, 1999). In their sample of pregnant women in the black township of Soweto, Dunkle et al. (2003) explored a very high lifetime prevalence of physical and sexual assault: 55.5% of 1 395 participants reported physical or sexual assault by a male partner at least once during their lives. Only 22.1% reported *no* abuse in their lifetime.³³ The study suggests that violent and controlling men place their female partners at increased risk of HIV infection and hypothesises that abusive men are both more likely to be HIV positive and more likely to impose risky sexual practices on female intimate partners (ibid:41; cf. Kalichman, Simbayi, Cain, Cherry, Henda & Cloete, 2007). Men with a history of sexual assault are significantly more likely to misuse alcohol, to have been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI), and to have exchanged money for sex. They are also more likely to engage in higher risk sexual practices and to have had multiple sex partners without consistent condom use (cf. Kalichman et al., 2007:23–24).

Intimate partner violence and HIV/AIDS intersect in the following ways: (1) direct transmission through sexual violence in the form of forced or coercive sexual intercourse with an HIV-infected partner; (2) indirect transmission through sexual risk-taking, that is, having multiple partners or engaging in transactional sex; and (3) indirect transmission

³³ The research describes an overlap between various types of abuse (emotional, financial, physical and sexual). Therefore numbers do not add up to 100%.

through the inability of women to negotiate condom use, facing the threat of violence if asking for condom use and indirect transmission by partnering with older men (cf. WHO, 2004:2–3).

Relationship power is an important component in the safer sex negotiation process (Amaro & Raj, 2000; Guitierrez, Joo Oh & Rogers Gillmore, 2000), and therefore a key factor in women's HIV/STI risk – it can cause a barrier to safer sex behaviours among women since it is men who decide about condom usage. Pulerwitz, Gortmaker & DeJong (2000) have introduced a theoretically based and validated measure of relationship power dynamics: the Sexual Relationship Power Scale (SRPS). The 23-item scale is comprised of two subscales that measure issues related to 'Relationship Control' and 'Decision-Making Dominance' within the relationship. These gender power measures were further adapted to women in South Africa by Jewkes, Nduna, Jama and Levin (2002b) and applied in the study on "Gender-based violence, relationship power, and risk of HIV infection in women attending antenatal clinics in South Africa" by Dunkle et al. (2003; 2004a; see p. 39).

Studies investigating women's decision-making and negotiation power – both can be comprehended as important aspects of agency – in sexual encounters in terms of safer sex behaviour/condom use in different contexts (cf. Varga, 1997; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Selikow, Zulu & Cedras, 2002; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; O'Sullivan, Harrison, Morrell, Monroe-Wise & Kubeka, 2006) show that gender roles differ substantially. Both men and women are victims of stereotypes and norms with regard to masculine behaviour which may lead to unsafe sex and/or non-consensual sex. Traditionally, men have greater influence over when, where and how sex will occur (cf. Jenkins, 2000). Females often choose not to refuse sex in order to avoid physical harm, as well as to maintain the relationship. According to rigid gender rules and socio-cultural norms women are not supposed to refuse sex, especially not to their husbands. Gender power roles are deeply inscribed into the socio-cultural systems assigning assertiveness to the men and submissiveness to the woman. This often prevents communication between the two partners as well as joint decision-making (cf. Quina, Harlow, Morokoff, Burkholder and

Deiter, 2000). The power of the male partner may be played out differently in different types of relationships and therefore offers different scopes of agency to the female partner.

Likewise, Baylies (2000) emphasises that relationship dynamics may differ fundamentally according to the type of intimate social system be it romantic, hedonistic, matrimonial or prostitutive. Any transgression of power relations makes protection difficult. Negotiation is not even an issue in those sexual encounters characterised by coercion or violence:

Women's ability to negotiate may be greater in casual encounters or in more straightforwardly commercial transactions than within 'trust' relationships, and particularly in marriage. However, whether in transactional sex or romantic or matrimonial relationships, any transgression of power relations may make protection difficult.

Negotiation is not even an issue in those sexual encounters characterised by coercion or violence. Coercion may be an element in all relations involving economic dependence, but overt violence is also a feature of many sexual relationships and of particular concern where HIV prevalence is high ... While applying within marriage, it is also characteristic of many relationships among adolescents (ibid:8).

Domestic violence is most strongly related to the status of women in a society and to the normative use of violence in conflict situations or as part of the exercise of power (Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana, 2002). In a non-representative study³⁴ on sexual violence against intimate partners in Cape Town, two types of conflict sources were significantly associated with this risk of sexual violence:

³⁴ The cross-sectional study was conducted between June 1998 and February 1999 on 1 368 randomly selected men working in three Cape Town municipalities. The men were interviewed with the aid of a structured questionnaire on current sexual partners in the preceding 10 years, personal and relationship characteristics and the use of violence against their partners. Sociodemographic variables included age, ethnicity, education, occupation and type of housing. The following childhood variables were used: the presence of a father during childhood; childhood discipline, including physical punishment, classified as frequent (daily/weekly) or infrequent; and witnessing abuse perpetrated against a mother. Perceptions on the acceptance of violence, and gender roles in relationships were measured on two composite scales. An 18-item scale measured the acceptance of violence by representing various scenarios, and an 11-item scale measured views on gender roles (cf. Abrahams et al., 2004).

1. conflict over sexual refusal
2. conflict when men perceived their authority to be undermined; that is, ideas of male sexual entitlement and dominance (cf. Abrahams et al., 2004:333–334; Jewkes, 2002:1425)

For the researchers it was not surprising to find that the perceived challenges to male authority were associated with sexual violence since South African men feel entitled to sexual access to partners whenever they want it. The act of forcing sex on a partner demonstrates superior strength and ultimately symbolises the gender dimension in inequalities of power in intimate relationships (Abrahams et al., 2004:334).

In investigating gender inequalities in relationships and sexual interactions, a great deal of ethnographic research has given evidence of power and constructions of dominant masculinity in heterosexual relationships, that is, notions of hegemonic masculinity, to which the control of women is central through male dominance and a tool to receive peer group status as a “real man” (Varga, 1997; Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998; Wood & Jewkes, 2001). Boys use violence in sex to assert their masculinity and men see sex as their right (Wood & Jewkes, 2001; Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana, 2002; Abrahams et al., 2004). There is a high prevalence of misconceptions about sexual violence and about risk of HIV infection among South African youth of both sexes (Andersson, Ho-Foster, Matthis, Marokoane, Mashiane, Mhatre, Mitchell, Mokoena, Monasta, Ngxowa, Salcedo & Sonnekus, 2004). Three factors shape the coercive and violent nature of black South African youths’ sexual dynamics:

1. Males do not view their sexual behaviour as violent or abusive.
2. Females bear such behaviour in a matter-of-fact manner.
3. Sexual violence takes place within more or less serious relationships because such behaviour is viewed as the norm (Varga, 1997:59–60).

Varga’s 1997 study confirmed that the dynamic within the relationship was guided by the preferences of male partners. There is a powerful belief among both black South African young women and men that intercourse is a woman’s means of demonstrating love and

commitment to the relationship which does not allow the women to refuse unwanted sex, as refusal results mostly in physical coercion (ibid:56). The level of condom use is generally low (ibid:57; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001:339) and teenage pregnancy is very common (Jewkes, Vundule, Maforah & Jordaan, 2001). In a recent study on condom usage in eight communities in the North West Province Versteeg and Murray (2008) found positive results regarding accessibility and awareness of condoms. However, the majority of respondents still resisted condom usage, used condoms inconsistently, or were not in a position to negotiate protected sexual intercourse. Condoms are avoided because they bring in an element of distrust and because they make sexual intercourse impersonal and less pleasant (ibid.; Varga, 1997:48). Communication on sexual matters is generally poor. It is very difficult for young black South African women to protect themselves against unwanted sexual intercourse, pregnancy, HIV infection, and other sexually transmitted diseases.³⁵ Lesch and Kruger (2004) found in their small sample of female adolescents in the Western Cape that the participants demonstrated limited sexual agency in their first experiences of sexual intercourse.

Many black African women and girls in South Africa still live under customary law. Customary law lacks specific rules dealing with domestic violence; instead there are many rules of official customary law which render women vulnerable to domestic violence. Husbands, for example, have a right to moderate chastisement (Curran & Bonthuys, 2004:12). In a case study of domestic violence in four villages of the Moretele District (the area of my own research), Hargreaves et al. (2006) attempt to situate women's use of the criminal justice system within the context of community beliefs around family, men's and women's intimate relationships with each other and masculine authority. Legally, the Domestic Violence Act (No. 116 of 1998) provides a civil remedy

³⁵ Not surprisingly, teenage pregnancy is extremely common in South Africa. An exploratory study with a matched case control design was undertaken to investigate factors associated with teenage pregnancy among sexually active adolescents in an urban and peri-urban context. Both groups of teenagers from the matched case control design had been dating for a mean of two and a half years and about half were still with their first sexual partner. The pregnant teenagers were significantly more likely to have experienced forced sexual initiation and were beaten more often. The partners of the pregnant teenagers were significantly older, less likely to be in school and less likely to have other girlfriends. Multiple modelling showed that both forced sexual initiation and unwillingness to confront an unfaithful partner are strongly associated with pregnancy and also related to each other (Jewkes et al., 2001).

for persons affected by domestic violence and allows a protection order to be granted to an applicant against the perpetrator of the abuse. Failure to comply with a protection order issued in terms of the Act is a criminal offence (ibid:5). The research³⁶ sought to uncover how people explain the abuse of women within intimate relationships. To this end the researchers explored views and perceptions of the gender roles assigned to men and women and the rules and practices that underpin these roles, and discussed the reported challenges to these rules (ibid:10).

Under certain circumstances physical violence may be regarded as a legitimate tool for disciplining women who overstep or challenge social rules and boundaries. There is a tendency to blame women for domestic violence. Some focus group participants in Hargreaves et al's. (ibid) study assumed that there must be a reason for the violence, and often attributed the problem to the woman: she must have provoked it in some way or asked for it or have done something wrong. Domestic violence may also be justified if a woman is having an affair, or if her husband or male partner suspects that she may be having an affair. The final major justification for domestic violence relates to the prescription that wives must service their husbands sexually. Where a woman refuses to perform this duty, she may be accused of having an affair, and is often beaten. Women are beaten for inquiring after men's sexual liaisons or affairs. Women who inquire after men's affairs are, therefore, violating a key rule underpinning marriage (ibid:18–22). However, women, married and single, tend not to disclose abuse.

..., the underlying rationale for domestic violence is that because women are the property of men (whether father or husband, and in some instances, male partner) and under the control of men, men's status and standing in society is closely tied to women's behaviour. A woman whose actual or perceived behaviour does not conform to established social rules is showing disrespect to herself, her husband and her family, and should be punished. 'Disciplining' a woman – restoring or ensuring her compliance to rules and prescriptions relating to women's role and conduct in a

³⁶ Twenty focus group discussions were conducted in four research sites (five focus groups per research site) in February and March 2005. The sites were Bollantlokwe village, Ratjiepane village, Little village, and Greenside village. A focus group discussion guide served as a guide to the facilitation of the focus group discussions. The following focus group discussions were conducted in each research site: traditional leaders; women organised by traditional leaders; mothers of children organised through a local school; women teachers; and representatives of local civil society structures (Hargreaves et al., 2006).

given social context – therefore establishes a woman's respectability and status, and by association that of her husband, male partner and family as a whole (ibid:23).

Participants in eleven of the focus groups indicated that married women confronting problems of domestic violence must follow the traditional mediation route. The prescribed route is for a woman to report cases of domestic violence to her in-laws, or alternatively to the uncles (or aunts) of her husband who negotiated the marriage (*maditsela*). After a woman has been married traditionally, she is no longer regarded as a member of her family. She is therefore required to address the problems with her 'new' family (ibid:27–28).

When attempting to leave abusive marriages, women face serious constraints. A major constraint is the prescription that women must make their marriages work by enduring hardship and difficulty. A failed marriage is a sign that 'you are not a real woman'. Another constraint confronting women is the dilemma of how they will support themselves and their children. Finally, some women fear that their husbands will kill them if they leave (ibid:32–33). That this fear is justified is illustrated by data from the first national study on female homicide in South Africa. The study discloses that "every six hours a woman is killed by her intimate partner" (Mathews, Abrahams, Martin, Vetten, van der Merwe & Jewkes, 2004), which is, according to the authors, the most extreme form and consequence of violence against women. Intimate partner killing is often linked to a history of domestic violence. The findings of the study show that, in South Africa, 8.8 per 100 000 women of 14 years and older were killed by an intimate partner in 1999. This amounts to four women killed per day or one woman killed every six hours. The rate for coloured women is more than double the rate for black African women and more than six times that of white women. Perpetrators are overwhelmingly male, cohabiting partners (50.1%), followed by boyfriends (29.9%) and husbands (18.4%).

2.4 Women as active agents in intimate partnerships – transactional and love relationships as spaces for agency

The focus of the previous sections was on gender power relations, gender-based violence, women's sexual subordination and its links to culture and tradition. Stated simply, many black African women, in particular poor rural black African women, could easily be classified as victims of a perpetuating patriarchal system and the constraints it places on their (sexual) lives. Yet, there are authors, for example Heise (1997), Leclerc-Madlala (2003) and Castle and Kiggundu (2007), who perceive women not as totally powerless even within the most constrained social conditions. Heise (1997:422) argues that within patriarchal structures "the possibility of agency" still exists.

... however, creativity and resourcefulness in the face of powerful social forces ... is important to acknowledge and affirm at all times. Failure to recognize the possibility of agency within patriarchal structures fuels fatalism and can undermine women's sense of self, with disempowering results (ibid).

Hence, the question arises as to what scope for agency black South African women have in intimate partnerships in the historical context of an HIV/AIDS pandemic. Both decision-making and negotiating power can be comprehended as important aspects of agency in this context. The circumstances in which sexual activity is shaped and constituted have become a major focus for contemporary research, and issues related to gender and power (Amaro & Raj, 2000; Gutierrez, Joo Oh & Gillmore, 2000; Jenkins, 2000; Dunkle et al., 2004a; Pettifor, Measham, Rees & Padian, 2004a) have been central to a better understanding of the importance of structural factors in organising sexual relations and HIV/AIDS-related vulnerability (Parker, 2001:170). Men have traditionally held greater influence over when, where and how sex will occur. Differences in women's and men's access to power influence decisions about intercourse, including the type and frequency of sexual practices (Jenkins, 2000). One function of women's sexual relationships has historically been to connect them with economic and social resources as an individual solution to structural disadvantage, which may weaken their ability to insist on safer sex and other protections (ibid). Transactional sexual relations are very common in South Africa and are often a means of survival. Agency in this type of relationship is

limited, but is seen from the perspective that women can choose the man or the number of partners they have and thereby have direct access to resources. However, transactional sex has been acknowledged as one of the major causes of the spread of HIV/AIDS on the African continent (cf. Luke & Kurz, 2002).

Transactional sex raises the issue of poverty. Poverty in South Africa has a gender dimension: women comprise the majority of the very poorest and most marginalised of South Africa's citizens (cf. Bentley, 2004:247–248; Kehler, 2001; Chant, 2004).

Not only are people losing their jobs, but also young people are finding it difficult to gain employment. Unemployment rates ... show a steady increase in the number of unemployed people. ... These rates include those who have never worked before and who are looking for jobs. Within this context of growing unemployment, the larger proportion of those unemployed are women (Benjamin, 2007:190).

Rural black women in South Africa are most likely to be poor and are the least likely to find employment. Most studies that address women's agency place it in the realm of sexual power³⁷ "thinking beyond 'prostitution'" (Hunter, 2002), while at the same time pointing out limits and constraints to women's agency mainly owing to economic deprivation.

Only a few studies examined the effects of socio-economic status on HIV risk and prevention behaviours among youth in South Africa. Therefore, Hallman (2004; 2005) undertook a quantitative study investigating how socio-economic disadvantage has influenced the sexual behaviour and experiences of 4 000 young women and men (aged 14–24) in KwaZulu-Natal province. She found – by using household survey data

³⁷ A particular example for agency is given by Tamale (2005) in her research on the institution of the *Ssenga* – a particular sexual initiation institution among the Baganda in Uganda. Tamale interpreted the *Ssenga*'s practices as of liberatory value since *Ssengas* do not necessarily conform to the normative script of gender and sexuality and might even carry emancipatory messages. One often heard message was that men can be controlled and manipulated through sex, "in other words, they encourage women to use sex to undermine patriarchal power from behind the facade of subservience" (ibid:24). What makes the *Ssenga* unique is its institutionalised form emphasising sexuality as a zone of pleasure ("the erotic as power"). "While the patriarchal agendas and discourses embedded within *Ssenga* are unmistakable, women's subversive and counterhegemonic "silent struggles" allowed them to negotiate agency, providing a neat example of how African women can inherit and shape traditions of their own that go beyond the discourse of rights imposed from above" (ibid:30); see also Muyinda, Nakuya, Pool & Whitwoth (2003).

collected in 2001 – that socio-economic disadvantage is associated with a variety of unsafe sex behaviours and experiences, particularly for females. Among young women low wealth is associated with earlier sexual debut, having had multiple sexual partners, and lower chances of condom use. It is also associated with increased chances that the first sexual experience is non-consensual, with higher odds of females having traded sex and having experienced physically coerced sex.

A range of studies all over Africa³⁸ gives evidence of the fact that poverty is a driving factor for women to engage in transactional sexual relationships in order to secure survival or to gain access to consumption goods when lacking employment opportunities and thus the chances of earning a regular income.³⁹ In this context, research found that young women who consciously engage in transactional sex do not see themselves as victims, rather they are acting in a calculating and exploitative way, seeking to assert themselves and further their own interests in the pursuit of modernity (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Hunter, 2002). Women's direct access to resources and the possibility of choosing partners is interpreted as a form of agency.

2.4.1 Agency in transactional relationships

A literature review by Luke and Kurz (2002) draws conclusions from over 45 quantitative and qualitative studies of cross-generational and transactional sexual relations in sub-Saharan Africa. Sizeable proportions of girls' partners were more than six or 10 years older and there was a widespread transactional component to sexual relations for adolescent girls. Several studies reveal significant relationships between unsafe sexual behaviours and the non-use of condoms; sex with older men increased the girls' risk of becoming infected with HIV.⁴⁰ Although the reasons for adolescent girls engaging in

³⁸ An overview of studies is given by Luke and Kurz (2002). Leclerc-Madlala cites studies conducted in Ghana, Lesotho, Mali, Namibia, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zaire and Zimbabwe (2003:215–216); for South Africa cf. Hunter (2002); Kaufman & Stavrou (2002); Selikow, Zulu & Cedras (2002); Thorpe (2002); Leclerc-Madlala (2003); Dunkle et al. (2004b); Dunkle et al. (2007).

³⁹ This is further discussed in chapter 5.

⁴⁰ Langen (2005) investigates women's capacity to negotiate self-protection against HIV infection as well as men's response to condom use. The study shows that men are more likely to refuse to use a condom

sexual relationships with older men are varied and overlapping, gifts and other financial benefits was the major theme found. The motivations for financial rewards tended to be complex, ranging from economic survival to a desire for status and possessions. Gifts were symbolic of a girl's worth and a man's interest. Because of the limited negotiating power of adolescent girls with respect to sexuality and reproduction, sexual partnerships between adolescent girls and older men were fundamentally imbalanced, with the men having more power. Girls appeared to be able to negotiate relationship formation and continuance; for example, they could choose the types and number of partners they have, and could discontinue a relationship if gift-giving ceased. However, once in a sexual partnership, adolescent girls were less able to control sexual practices. Men appeared to control the conditions of sexual intercourse, including condom and contraceptive use and the use of violence. Girls were not likely to insist on condom use for many reasons, including social norms and lack of self-perceived risk of HIV. On the whole, they suggested that condom use jeopardised their goals for the relationship, including the receipt of money and gifts (ibid:3–4).

Hunter (2002) highlights the vital role that gifts play in fuelling everyday sexual relations between South African black men and women (and eventually high rates of HIV infection; see section 2.4.3). Sexual partners function both to support the household economy and to provide consumption goods (ibid:112). Hunter highlights three factors that lead to transactional sex:

1. the privileged economic position of men and women's economic marginalisation as the material basis for transactional sex and men's dislike of condoms;
2. masculinities placing a high value on men having multiple sexual partners; and
3. as a central argument in his paper – the agency of women themselves: women approach transactional relations not as passive victims, but in order to access power and resources in ways that can both challenge and reproduce patriarchal structures (ibid:101).

when (a) the age difference between them and their female partners is wide, (b) if they are in a married relationship, and (c) where there is no communication about HIV/AIDS between the two partners. Langen's finding that men with multiple partners are significantly more likely to refuse to use a condom is, however, highly alarming.

Hunter compares different forms of transactional sex in an informal settlement and in a township near Mandeni, 100 km north of Durban. While in the informal settlement sex is linked to subsistence, sex linked to consumption was more prominent in the township (ibid). Although predominantly materially oriented, it is important to notice that these relationships are not seen as prostitution: women will *qoma*⁴¹ a lover, whereas a prostitute sells her body (ibid:108). Indeed, women see multiple boyfriends as a means to gaining control over their lives (ibid:112), providing them with things like money, cell-phones and clothes. Hunter (ibid:116) concludes that “[w]hether using sex for subsistence ... or for consumption, ... women sew themselves into the very fabric of masculinity through their own agency. Women actively *qoma* men – while operating through patriarchal structures they rarely see themselves as ‘victims’” He suggests that women’s motivation for engaging in transactional sex is that resources go directly to the woman herself – unlike the *lobola* system that is based on male-to-male transactions. Yet, men’s privileged economic position allows them considerable control over women’s bodies (ibid:109).

The very vocabulary of sex – centred, for women, around the verb *qoma* (to choose a man) – is suggestive of women’s agency. ... That women see themselves as having some sense of choice, although within often brutal and economically coercive relationships ... (ibid:112).

Similarly Selikow, Zulu and Cedras (2002) and Leclerc-Madlala (2003) found that young black women gain power and agency by exploiting sexual relationships in the interests of consumption:

Women’s power and agency within the confines of current economic and gender inequities must be clearly understood if we are to develop more effective HIV prevention interventions. Women who consciously choose multiple partners and engage in transactional sex are seeking to assert themselves and further their own interests. They are fully aware that they are acting in a calculating and exploitative way. Using their sexuality to access goods and services is construed as a pragmatic adaptation to modern and costly urban life (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003:228).

⁴¹ Hunter (2002:99) interprets *qoma* with “choosing a lover”. In Zulu it means to accept or to agree to a relationship.

However, as also pointed out by Selikow, Zulu and Cedras (2002), in the face of a growing HIV/AIDS epidemic transactional sex is contributing to women's increased risk of HIV infection.

Compion and Cook (2006) make use of Bozzoli's (1991) investigation of "Women of Phokeng" in researching the lives of young black women of Phokeng (North West Province). Their article focuses on the nexus between formal education and socio-economic prospects. Compion and Cook (2006:96) perceive women as not simply passive recipients of a set of structural constraints. Instead, young black women expose agency by using their bodies, their boyfriends and their access to social welfare grants to ensure their economic and social survival. In an environment with high unemployment rates (among young women) the young women showed mistrust and cynicism about the benefits of tertiary education – rather they use other resources to strengthen themselves and their chances of surviving, such as intense social networking. They "appear to be combining their networks with their youthful, feminine sexuality to build long-term security, in both an economic and a relational/social sense" (ibid:97). Young women "cash in" through transactional sex, often actively initiating these relationships in order to access resources. Sex becomes linked to subsistence or, where not essential for survival, provides them with status-enhancing commodities. In Phokeng, 'boyfriends' are the foundations of girls' social networks (ibid:98–99). However, limits to agency were based on

... poverty, lack of information and the very institutions in which they are embedded including the family, patriarchy and the traditional values of their community. They may not always be fully aware of how their choices are limited by traditional ideologies and socially constructed notions of patriarchy, but they do consciously recognise that the options available to them are limited by economic constraints (ibid:100).

Young women in Phokeng are staking their survival on other means than higher education. For most of them, investing in social networks yields greater socio-economic security and returns than investing in higher education. "The irony, of course, is that obtaining a tertiary degree is probably still the most effective route to achieving upward

mobility in South Africa” (ibid:102).

2.4.2 Agency in love relationships

Several studies validated the idea that in sexual interactions condoms were only used until “trust” had been established in the relationship. Condoms were also avoided because they made sexual intercourse an impersonal experience. None of the male participants in Varga’s (1997) study said they had used condoms with any regularity, and only one female participant had experienced sex with a condom. Generally, condoms played a minor role in male participants’ contraceptive practices, and were not a topic of discussion between partners. Condoms were associated primarily with prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), not with contraception (ibid:57).

Parikh (2004) analysed 100 love letters gathered from males and females aged 12 to 25 in a village in Uganda to investigate girls’ ability to negotiate condom use within the context of romantic liaisons that are consensual relationships. Parikh found that condomless sex played an important role in courtship practices. For many, it signified that the relationship had shifted from the distrusting early stages to the mature commitment of monogamy. Thus romantic love, based on the modernist idea of selecting your own partner, decreased the perceived need for condoms. Monogamy and condoms represented two mutually exclusive options for safer sex. Since the burden of monogamy fell on females, young women suggested that they could cease using condoms as a strategy to demonstrate their commitment. Yet modern romance puts females at risk. Females who imagine themselves in a romantic relationship easily deny their sexual risk in order to preserve the ideal of romance and monogamy. Parikh thereby pays close attention to processes through which patriarchy becomes subtly diffused and masked in the negotiations of sexual relationships.

Clark (2006) explores the way young urban and older rural black women posited themselves to constructions of culture in relation to different temporalities (now and then). Clark observes that the heterosexual relationships of the younger generation were

termed positively. Younger ‘modern’ women had the power to define the terms of love, converging on the notion of choice and agency, setting into opposition “love as an expression of choice” to “love as duty” (cf. *ibid*:12–13).

Younger urban women are positioned as more ‘powerful agents’ than their older rural counterparts ... Their distance from ‘original traditions’ is seen as allowing them a greater agency to act on the kinds of love they feel they need to receive. ... The ... liberal rights discourse of the agency of the individual reframes ‘love’ ... via the realm of duty ... Within the ‘love-as-duty’ discourse mobilised by the rural participants to represent their relationships with their male partners, love is a constraining love, another domain within which women’s autonomy and agency is limited (*ibid*:13).

Yet, the women’s life narratives revealed the centrality of the dominant patriarchal continuity of gender violence and sexual coercion that endure to define women’s subjectivities and shape their experiences.

Through constructions of culture, ‘the rural woman’ comes to represent and embody an opposition to a particular structure of Western subjectivity and the young black urban women set up as an embodiment of it – as a ‘new’ African subjectivity. ... The most stark continuities articulated are those around gender-violence and the patriarchal power out of which it emerges ... The central aspect of gendered relationships is held together by a continuum of violence, one that traverses spatiality and temporality, public and private, and one that is at the core of ‘the new nation’ (*ibid*:14–15).

“Marriage is a context of considerable vulnerability for women in respect of HIV, because they can be infected, not through ‘improper’ behaviour, but in consequence of complying with norms of fidelity, if their husband has unprotected sex outside of marriage” (Baylies, 2000:11). Yet, unmarried women may be at still greater risk. In general, however, it is men who bring HIV into a marriage (*ibid*:12). Condom use by married or cohabiting couples is generally low. In a study in a rural and an urban area of KwaZulu-Natal province, partners in 238 marital or cohabiting relationships were independently interviewed about condom use and attitudes toward condoms, knowledge of HIV/AIDS risk and self-efficacy in preventing HIV infection. Although couples’ knowledge of condoms and where to obtain them was very high, only 15% of men and 18% of women reported consistent or occasional use. A majority of urban women had

favourable attitudes toward condoms, and they also reported higher self-efficacy regarding HIV prevention than did rural women (Maharaj & Cleland, 2005a:25–26). Yet, condom use within marriage is generally uncommon and men in particular remain rather negative toward condom use, while more women than men feel vulnerable to HIV infection from their partners (ibid:27).

In her study published as “Letting them die: Why HIV/AIDS prevention programmes fail”, Campbell (2003) sought to answer why it is that people continue to knowingly dice with death by taking sexual health risks, and why it is so difficult to alter this situation. She conducted three different case studies among mine workers, commercial sex workers and youth in the community of Summertown⁴² in order to exemplify the social construction of sexuality. Campbell confirms gender as a key determinant of sexuality. The study highlights the way in which people’s working and living conditions may undermine the likelihood of safer sex and analyses multilevel processes that hamper the most well-meaning efforts, ranging from the intra-psychological to the macro-social, that is, needs for trust and intimacy, denial and fatalism, acting out masculinity, and the fact that women hold far less economic power than men. Moreover, the African concept of sexuality as outlined by Thornton (2002) was well reflected in Campbell’s (2003) case studies: For instance, mine workers

made a strong link between sex and masculinity in relation to their general physical and mental health and well-being. Particularly important for health was what was referred to as the maintenance of a balanced supply of blood in the body. Several people commented that sex played a key role in the regulation of a balanced supply of blood and sperm, and that regular sex was essential for a man’s good health (ibid:33).

⁴² “The Summertown-Project was a local community initiative that sought to implement such short- and medium-term measures, through treating other STIs, educating people about sexual health risks and distributing condoms. ... the Project sought to mobilize the participation of a wide range of local community representatives in the achievement of Project goals. Furthermore, ... the Project sought to target the whole local *community* as the locus of change – in the interests of creating local contexts that would enable and support the use of condoms and STI clinics, through the strategies of community-led peer education and multi-stakeholder partnership” (Campbell, 2003:185; emphasis in the original). Summertown is a pseudonym for the research area.

Secondly, the interactional context of commercial sex workers and their clients was investigated in order to understand the low level of condom use. Condoms were used in less than 10% of the encounters. Factors that make sex workers particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS were the clients' reluctance to use condoms although the women would prefer it (flesh-to-flesh, pleasure, health), and the lack of unity among sex workers. What unexpectedly came to the fore and what programme planning had simply forgotten was that not one woman attempted to use condoms with her regular boyfriend: "... symbolically, non-use of condoms was seen as a valued and positive affirmation of trust and faithfulness, and played a key role in maintaining comforting myths of fidelity in a community where there was, in reality, very little fidelity" (ibid:115). Likewise, young people saw condoms as unnecessary in steady relationships, and trust as a key reason for not using condoms. Condoms should be used only in casual encounters.

Among the youth, peer pressure means that young women are expected to have a steady boyfriend, and young men to have multiple sexual encounters. Great pressure is put on young women to portray themselves as the passive objects of male desire who do not themselves want sex or enjoy sex.

Young people's talk about the act of sex invariably prioritized the penetration of the vagina by the penis, with an exclusive focus on the achievement of male pleasure. No reference was made to female sexual desire, or to the possibility that women might also experience pleasure from the sexual encounter (ibid:124).

The pressure on young men to have as many partners as possible often translated into a degree of force or coercion of young women in sexual encounters.

2.4.3 The importance of gift-giving

Gifts are an important part of relationships in Africa/South Africa. At the beginning of the chapter I briefly outlined the concept of a South African construction of sex and the person as explored by Thornton (2002). It is characterised by the flow of sexual substances between the two partners and in its social context means that the flow of sexual substances is accompanied by flows of gifts and money. I believe that this

conception provides a very useful explanation for both the importance of gift-giving in sexual relationships, as well as the reluctance to use condoms, and gives a frame for studying findings in the context of gift-giving. However, it is the economical component of gift-giving that permits women a form of agency, as argued in the studies of Hunter (2002), Selikow, Zulu and Cedras (2002) and Leclerc-Madlala (2003). They all illustrate that women do not perceive themselves as victims, the main reason being that they are actively choosing their partners and have direct access to resources. The benefits and pressures of gift-giving have been documented in detail by Kaufman and Stavrou (2002). By looking beyond sugar-daddy relationships Kaufman and Stavrou (ibid) explore the economic context of gift-giving or receiving and its relationship to patterns of risky sexual behaviour, such as unsafe sex practices, and reports of sexual coercion or force. The study⁴³ addresses the everyday nature of the gift-giving and dating experience, seeking to understand where gift-giving may lead to risky behaviour and gives very good insights into behavioural and partnership dynamics: it was found that gift-giving among same-age adolescents is common and important to shaping sexual relationships. Adolescents associate money or cash with prostitution, but do not consider gifts per se as such. Types of gifts and their meaning varied considerably by racial group and by gender. The concept of what constituted a gift varied among participants. Most frequently mentioned were flowers, chocolate, jewellery, clothes, lingerie, CDs, drugs, meals in a restaurant, drinks at a club, tickets to concerts, entrance fees to clubs, vacations, accommodation and books. For young African women coming from a poor township family offering food for the family home is an acceptable gift. A number of black African participants claimed that money in the form of a gift given for the purpose of paying for education or the purchase of educational materials was perfectly acceptable. Some felt pressure to return the favour by having sex. Essentially female students would accept free lodging at campus residences from older male students (or lecturers) in return for being in a “resident relationship” with the man. Sex was an integral component of that relationship. Some girls even shared male partners, calling them “Minister of Transport”, “Minister of Finance”, “Minister of Education” and

⁴³ Data collection: 10 focus groups November – December 1999 in Durban, each with 7 participants, tape recorded; in addition: individual in-depth interviews with local community youth leaders and adolescents (aged 14–22).

“Minister of Foreign Affairs and Tourism”. There is also a “Straight Minister”, the one who is regarded as the lover and who does not have to exchange favours. While monetary gifts were seen as degrading, as prostitution, other types of gift were the means to the same end – as a symbol of imminent sex they connote physical obligation (ibid:12–15). Gift-giving leads to a particular sexual path. Kissing, petting, and oral sex were exchanged for gifts as signs of appreciation. The “worth” of the gift often determined the type of “sex” that was given. “Almost all focus group participants agreed that when large and costly gifts were given or expected, such as gold jewellery and ‘overseas trips’, full penetrative sex was given and accepted” (ibid:16) However, force and abuse were not uncommon in relationships and females in particular acknowledged a link to gifts (ibid:20).

In terms of the link between condom use and gift-giving, many black African female respondents maintained that it was neither usual nor easy to discuss sex and sexual issues; if they wanted to see the man again, then the issue of condoms became a non-issue. However, until they really knew the guy they would insist on the use of condoms. Men felt that if a girl accepted a gift just before lovemaking or agreed to a gift afterwards, then she was denying herself the right to ask a man to use a condom. Black African and white males would prefer sex without a condom and would expect the woman to agree and drop the demand to use condoms after a few “sessions” or not date her again. Older men in particular seek sex with young girls without using a condom expecting consent if they are offered a large “bus fare” (ibid:19). An important conclusion of the study was that in many cases the expectation is that after just two or three sexual encounters, neither men nor women expect condom use: “... the discussion about condom use revealed a frightful level of ignorance, denial, and, often for females, a sense of helplessness or defeat. The evidence suggests that gifts are likely to reduce the ability of girls to demand condom use” (ibid:20).

In contrast, in a qualitative study conducted in Malawi among 15–24-year-old women and men, Poulin (2007) found that gift transfers in sexual partnerships are as much an expression of love and commitment as of meeting women’s financial needs, whereas the

material exchange need not preclude women's ability to negotiate safer sex.

In examining studies that investigate different types of relationship, it can be summarised that condom use is highly unlikely to occur, not only in violent sexual encounters, but also in non-violent sexual encounters: cross-generational and transactional sexual relationships are characterised by the material dependency of the woman on the man and socio-economic disadvantage is associated with a variety of unsafe sexual behaviours. Furthermore, gifts reduce women's ability to demand condom use. Romantic love relationships decrease the perceived need for condoms since non-condom use is seen as a positive affirmation of love, trust and faithfulness. Marriage puts wives at risk by their complying with the norm of fidelity in a reality characterised by very little fidelity. Thus, women in different types of relationship in a non-violent context have little or no power or agency to negotiate safer sex or HIV-protection in the long run for both economic reasons and reasons such as love and commitment.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the manifest gender inequality in South Africa which continues to exist despite a progressive and outspoken gender equity policy in the public domain. I presented manifold evidence that HIV/AIDS has escalated into a pandemic because inequality between women and men continues to be pervasive and persistent. This is particularly true for rural African black women who still live under customary law. Customary law overall places men as naturally superior over women and has found a strong ally in Christianity – the largest religion in South Africa – which defines men in the creation myth as superior. In such a socio-cultural context women's choices, and in particular women's sexual autonomy, is limited and under male control. Instead, there exists an environment that is conducive to violence against women, where tolerance is surrounded by a culture of silence. One main body of literature and data presented in this context comes from anthropological research examining the interplay of patriarchy, culture and religion and its impact on African male and female sexualities. Although not representative, these studies give rich descriptions and understanding of the determinants

of gender power relations in intimate partnerships in South Africa. The work highlights the importance of the socio-cultural system in shaping women's (and men's) sexualities as well as interrelations of socio-economic and socio-cultural factors and its interrelation with HIV and AIDS. There is proof of a direct correlation between women's low status, the violation of their human rights and HIV transmission.

Hence I looked at another body of literature dealing with various aspects of gender-based violence. For many women the threat of violence that permeates their everyday lives exacerbates their vulnerability to HIV. Increasing representative quantitative research/survey data validated the intersection between sexual violence against women and HIV/AIDS risk as well as the unprecedentedly high level of rape in the country. These mainly descriptive studies are backed up by a great number of various ethnographic research/case studies exploring dynamics of a hegemonic masculinity in heterosexual relationships. Baylies and Burja with the Gender and AIDS Group (2000:xii-xiii) interpret casual unprotected sex as an assertion of masculinity which is in practice a death wish and lack of protection within marriage can bring about mutual demise.

It is our contention that the threat of AIDS has added a new dimension to gender relations in a context where the predominant mode of transmission is through heterosexual contact. ... Both men and women see their lives in danger from 'normal sexual relations', but if the 'solution' is greater mutuality and equality within intimate relations, this necessarily threatens men's power to define sexual practice ... (ibid:xiii).

Qualitative research in some South African local communities illuminates the particular vulnerability of women living under customary law to violence in marital relations and the discrepancy with legal provisions in post-apartheid South Africa.

However, I have rejected perceiving black African women as helpless victims, an issue also brought up by Reddy (2004:7) in his *Agenda* editorial: "To what extent does our insistence on female sexual victimhood not only overlook female agency but also blind us to the ways that females appropriate, subvert, and co-opted into wider patriarchal ideologies". Women are, in many instances, active agents in promoting socio-cultural

practices that perpetuate gender imbalances and are often willing and active agents in the transmission of socio-cultural ethos (ibid:9), as for example male supremacy.

I therefore presented research findings regarding women as active agents in sexual relationships in the light of women's decision-making and negotiating powers for safer sex, that is, condom use. A growing body of literature investigating transactional sexual relations gives evidence that poverty is a driving factor for women to engage in transactional sexual relationships in order to secure survival or to gain access to consumption goods. Adolescent girls and young women have their own sets of motivation for entering into sexual relationships that maximise personal benefit, often with money and gifts as the major incentive. Women knowingly have older men as partners because they can offer the greatest financial rewards (cf. Luke & Kurz, 2002:28). Agency lies in the control over partnership formation and continuance: women are able to choose the numbers and types of partner with whom they are involved. To gain access to resources often overrides considerations of pregnancy or HIV risk. There is a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research studying the relationship between women's low economic status and cross-generational sex along with the intersection of HIV/AIDS, the importance of gift-giving and unsafe sex.

While the research I reviewed addresses various aspects of socio-cultural constructions of sexuality, (sexual) violence against women and the link between poverty, transactional sex and HIV risk, there is still little research which investigates more closely the issue of socio-cultural constraints, agency and HIV risk in different types of relationships (in particular marital relations) as well as gender power dynamics in non-violent and non-transactional relationships. As pointed out in the introductory chapter, women may have different spaces for agency depending on the quality of a relationship. Yet, the issue of sexual agency has been barely addressed in the South African context, particularly within context of rural black women's intimate partnerships. Another neglected aspect in this regard is the impact of the socio-cultural system and the issue of women's compliance with patriarchal rule. Thus far, women's compliance with patriarchal rule has been

acknowledged as no more than a side aspect of research studies⁴⁴ in the context of gender, sexuality and HIV/AIDS. Therefore I was particularly interested in exploring the aspect of compliance in my study within the examination of socio-cultural constraints.

Most of the data I presented in the literature review stems from qualitative research and is therefore not generalisable. It allows, however, in-depth examination of complex social phenomena which I assume is essential for the study of sensitive topics such as sexuality, violence and HIV/AIDS.

The literature review aimed to set up parameters for the theoretical framework. In the following chapter I will attempt to contextualise the tenor of the literature review and my research within a feminist conceptual framework which I believe can account for the massive gender disparities in the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

⁴⁴ For example girls were restricted in their ability to resist violent boys for fear of losing a relationship of 'status' and were eager to increase their power and position within the female peer group (cf. Wood & Jewkes, 2001). Moreover, the legitimacy of coercive sexual experiences was reinforced by female peers who indicated that silence and submission was the appropriate response (cf. Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998).

Chapter 3: Conceptual framework of the study: setting a feminist agenda

3.1 Introduction

The meaning of feminism has never been historically stable or fixed and today there is a plurality and heterogeneity of many feminisms, theoretically and politically. For McCann and Kim (2003:1), “the term nonetheless signals an emancipatory politics on behalf of women”; however, with the paradigm shift from modern to postmodern feminism, emancipatory politics or feminist politics have lost some ground.

My entire research, that is, the research question, objectives, methodology and analysis, is based on the feminist paradigm of modern feminism. I consider the oppressive gender arrangements in the specific circumstances of an HIV/AIDS epidemic under which many South African black women live to be discriminatory and unjust in sociological terms of differentiated power relations constitutive of the social realm (McNay, 2000:14). I follow the idea that knowledge comes from experiences of gendered realities. I am less interested in the analyses of symbolic practices that determine identity and difference and in the ways linguistic frameworks shape what we know and who we are.

HIV/AIDS has added a new dimension to gender relations in a context where the predominant mode of transmission is through heterosexual contact (Baylies & Burja with the Gender and AIDS Group, 2000:xiii). In terms of safer sex many men display irresponsible sexual behaviour putting not only their own but also their female partner’s health at serious risk. This fact raised the important question of women’s capacity for sexual agency in their intimate partnerships. The interplay between victimhood and agency in the realm of intimate partnerships in the current historical context of an HIV/AIDS pandemic is of great importance, since exercising some sort of power could mean the difference between living and dying.

My main questions for this investigation were the following: Are there spaces for

women's agency? What are the constraints? How do they intersect? And are there any indications of gender transformation? Age was considered a critical variable because it is linked to different experiences owing to the changing dynamics linked to time figurations in gender practice. Many African black women, in particular poor rural black women, could easily be classified as victims of a perpetuating patriarchal system and the constraints it puts on their sexuality. However as Heise (1997:422) and others suggest, even within patriarchal structures and the most constrained social conditions women are not totally powerless and still have the possibility of agency. The literature review gave a number of different examples of women's agency under constraint. Furthermore, I discussed the impact of violence, in particular intimate partner violence, as an important factor for women's non-agency and a major risk factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS.

It has been argued that HIV/AIDS research and feminist theory share conceptual interests with regard to challenging stereotypes or discussions on power and control (cf. Jungar & Oinas, 2005:101) and that "... theorising on both sexuality and the pervasiveness of violence are key development issues in countries ravaged by conflict and the HIV/AIDS pandemic" (Mama, 2004:123). However, Western feminists have remained for the most part mute about HIV/AIDS as a key feminist issue whereas African feminists have been silent about sexuality (Jungar & Oinas, 2005:101; Arnfred, 2005c:59). The question is why?

I assume that the long feminist silence around HIV/AIDS and related gender issues such as sexuality may at least be partly linked to the following two reasons:

1. Prior to the new millennium few African feminists engaged with issues of sexuality. Arnfred (2005c:59; emphasis put B.T.) deplores "the *general* absence of sexuality as an issue in African feminists' writings" – yet she acknowledges contributions of Amina Mama on the issue – and asks for the causes of this absence. In this context Arnfred (ibid:73; emphasis in the original) identifies "*different types* of silences": firstly, an existence of embodied knowledge without precise linguistic referents; secondly, discretion on extra-marital sexual relations particularly on the part of the woman. She concludes that for a long time there was no adequate "language in which to talk about

sexuality” (ibid:74); nonetheless, she notices a push in South Africa for opening up the debate on female and male sexualities (cf. Posel, 2004).

2. For Western feminists HIV/AIDS is not an issue on the agenda of major social and health problems. In Europe HIV/AIDS concerns a minority of people, and women as a minority of the minority. Furthermore, Western feminism underwent a depoliticisation of women’s critical analyses of patriarchy through the shift from modernist to postmodernist paradigms. The ‘linguistic turn’ in postmodernism is at the expense of material power relations of oppression. Thus Western feminism may lack the theoretical and political impulses to deal with a crisis like the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

So for me the question was which feminist framework would help account adequately for my research. My own feminist position is influenced by and sympathises with radical feminist thought, notably the works of MacKinnon and Daly. I support agency with the radical feminist’s argument that male dominance is sexual and that all women live to varying degrees under conditions of sexual “terrorism”: “All women live in sexual objectification the way fish live in water. Given the statistical realities, all women live all the time under the shadow of the threat of sexual abuse” (MacKinnon, 1989:149). Statistics worldwide prove that being survivors of male violence occurs in nearly all racial, ethnic and socio-cultural groups and classes, and represents an almost universal female historical socio-cultural experience (cf. WHO, 2005).

Nevertheless, I acknowledge the criticism of difference and intersectionality theorists and the suggestions for models of a matrix of domination (Collins, 1990) which recognise gender, race and class as interlocking systems of oppression (and that also include a shift in thinking about other oppressions, such as age, sexual orientation, religion and ethnicity). And yet, although race and economic disadvantage and poverty have a significant impact on its spread, HIV/AIDS cuts across class; middle-class women find it as hard to negotiate safer sex as any other woman – a fact that supports my view that women’s primary oppression is sexual. However, I have never been convinced by postmodern feminist approaches that celebrate the plurality of differences, the fragmentation of identities and the abandonment of the category ‘woman’, which leads to

the removal of the grounds for feminist politics. Authors like Faludi (1991) even interpret postfeminism as a backlash. Many feminist critics of postmodern theory claim that the Western Enlightenment discourse of emancipation with its ideas of representation is essential to the feminist project and argue that criticism of the Enlightenment emancipatory project is a luxury available only to those – white Western men – who no longer need it (cf. Weedon, 1999:110; Di Stefano, 1990:75). I argue from a position that regards the symbolic as being situated within material relations and gender difference as material. Given the fact that today most young South Africans living with HIV/AIDS are women and that the underlying causes, for example the impact of male-dominated sexuality and gender-based violence, all reflect male and female differences and vulnerability on a very material level, I see the “feminist project” as still being underway and in need of a unified notion of the category ‘woman’.

Before I present my conceptual framework in this chapter, I briefly review some of the major developments in African and Western feminism to flesh out the above two points. Then I will outline the key conceptual framework I have applied in this research and look at some supplementing theoretical concepts which constitute my own feminist theoretical position. The research question, with its focus on agency, the private domain, sexuality and finally the aspect of gender transformation, contains highly political categories, categories that have been extensively theorised in radical feminist theory in particular. Although radical feminism seems to be outdated in current academic debates and has been criticised primarily for being essentialist, universal and too simplistic, I contend that radical feminism still offers useful analytical concepts for the analysis of gender power dynamics in more traditional societies, such as the theorisation of heterosexuality and male sex-right and women’s compliance in male dominance, if these concepts are refined with successional theories and some poststructuralist inflection such as Haraway’s (1988) idea of situated knowledge and theories of difference. I will consider in particular Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity and Bourdieu’s (2001) analysis of male domination.

Furthermore, these approaches all entail a theorisation of agency grounded in embodied

practice which is important for my theoretical position. Finally, a major theoretical contribution in support of this argument has recently come from Miriam (2007). Her theorisation of agency, by adopting radical feminist claims with a phenomenological perspective, distinguishes the extent to which an agent is living through her or his situation and has the freedom to co-create or even to transform her/his situation. In line with this, I probe whether the rural women's sexual agency is defined through negotiating the terms of their subordination or their ability to transform existing gender relations.

3.2 Review of debates in African feminism

Although African socio-cultural traditions legitimate female organisations, as well as women's collaboration between different classes, there were relatively few African women who used the term 'feminism' prior to the 1990s. Many African women felt anger "toward what they perceived as attempts by Western academics and activists to co-opt them into a movement defined by extreme individualism, by militant opposition to patriarchy, and, ultimately, by hostility to males" (Mikell, 2003:103). Hence, African women often kept a critical distance from the notion of feminism and were not generally concerned with debates about female essentialism or the discourse of patriarchy (Mikell, 1997). To separate from 'Western' feminism African women were looking for their own terminologies and concepts, for example womanism (Walker, 1983; Ogunyemi, 1985),⁴⁵ motherism (Achonulu, 1995; Oyewùmi, 2003a) or STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa; Ogunyemi-Leslie, 1994). Feminism is still a very controversial subject in scholarship today especially among young African female scholars, since it is often confused with "man-hating" (cf. Machera, 2005:163–165).

From the mid-1970s, women of colour and aboriginal women began challenging publicly the universalism inherent in liberal, radical, and socialist feminism, all of which ignored – or at best sidelined – the histories of colonialism and imperialism, the legacies of slavery and genocide, and the systemic racism that produced lives of

⁴⁵ Womanism, a term coined by Walker (1983), means a black feminist or feminist of colour who loves other women as well as outrageous behaviour, appreciates women's culture, is committed to survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female. Ogunyemi (1985) defines womanism as a philosophy that celebrates black roots and the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom.

brutality and exclusion for some and lives of unearned and unrecognized privilege for others (Hamilton, 2007:50).

A lot of effort is still put into the debate concerning the compatibility or incompatibility of black and white feminism.⁴⁶ While views on the matter differ considerably, a debate is certainly of interest, and consent desirable. Oyewùmi (2003b), for example, objects to the fact that feminist scholarship “has not provided any serious departures from the ‘Othering’ of Africa, which has characterized Western writings on Africa” (ibid:26) and projecting Africans as subhumans, savage, primitive and hyper-sexed.⁴⁷ Thus, Western feminist discourse is characterised by racism and ethnocentrism: “... feminist scholarship has created its very own African woman” (ibid:27). From their point of view white feminists wanted to rescue “the exploited, helpless, brutalized, and downtrodden African woman from the savagery of the African male and from a primitive culture symbolized by barbaric customs” (ibid:28).

In the process of constituting African women as objects of discourse, some feminists focus on the most downtrodden groups among women, leaving the impression that African women are all the same – equally oppressed, equally wretched, and equally in need of deliverance. In creating this homogenous, downtrodden mass, differences and distinctions of age, class, rank, kinship, affiliation, marital status, and seniority, are ignored as if they do not exist (ibid:35).

African feminists thus took up a considerable critique from women of colour,⁴⁸ Third-World women,⁴⁹ socialist feminists and lesbian feminists which was directed at the Eurocentrism of much mainstream Western modern feminism and its tendency to reproduce colonial modes of representation and the criticism that the sex/gender concept instituted a normative (hegemonic) feminist subject of white, Western feminism that denies differences of history, culture and location (cf. section 3.5.4).

A conciliatory view comes from Mama (2001), one of the leading African black feminists

⁴⁶ In 1993 a controversial debate on difference and representation was lead. It centred around the question whether white women can speak for black women (see Funani, 1992; 1993; Fouché, 1993; Gouws, 1993); see p. 127–128 in this thesis.

⁴⁷ Same arguments used by Mbeki when he attacked Charlene Smith; see footnote 29, chapter 2.

⁴⁸ Women of colour: term highlights race as the grounds of common oppression and political solidarity.

⁴⁹ Third-World women: term highlights imperialism as the grounds of oppression.

in South Africa. She argues in an interview in the feminist journal *Agenda* that African societies are clearly demarcated by gender divisions and that it would be “strategically suicidal to deny this and pretend that gender does not exist, or worse still, that gender struggles are a thing of the past” (Mama, 2001:63). She dismisses

constant tirades against ‘white feminists’ [which] do not have the same strategic relevance as they might have had 20 years ago when we first subjected feminism to anti-racist scrutiny. ... Western feminists have agreed with much of what we have told them about different women being oppressed differently, and the importance of class and race and culture in configuring gender relations (ibid:61).

So for Mama (ibid:59) “[f]eminism remains a positive, movement-based term, with which I am happy to be identified. It signals a refusal of oppression, and a commitment to struggling for women’s liberation from all forms of oppression – internal, external, psychological and emotional, socio-economic, political and philosophical”.

When *Agenda* published three volumes on *African feminisms*,⁵⁰ the South African debate on feminism was given a forum. Today African feminism embraces different perspectives and a heterogeneity that include the Africa/Diaspora divide, differences in naming themselves as ‘womanists’, ‘black feminists’, ‘African feminists’ or ‘postcolonial feminists’, as well as varying forms of engagement with Western feminism (Lewis, 2001). African feminists do not necessarily want to exclude men; instead they want a change in the gender relations that takes place only together with men. “Any black woman who has sons, nephews, brothers or husbands will have some concern for how our oppression as a people affects our men. Regardless of the oppressions meted out to us by Black men (and they are many), it is simply not a solution to walk away from them altogether ...” (Abrahams, 2001:74). However, as early as 1992, McFadden (1992:158–159) reminded us that “an overemphasis of our Africanness, especially in relation to sexuality, could play easily into the hands of the dominant male sexist ideology”.

As noted in chapter 2, sexuality in Africa has been widely investigated by anthropologists

⁵⁰ Issue 50: African feminisms I (2001); Issue 54: African feminisms II (2002); Issue 58: African feminisms III (2003).

but has been barely addressed by African female scholars. Even the African women's movement "has preferred to shelve the issue of sexuality, treating it as a non-political issue, and thereby stifling the richness of the feminist discourse thus far" (ibid:181). Mama argues in a similar way in an editorial of *Feminist Africa* (2005):

... the deeply heteronormative character of most women's movements in Africa has effectively constrained our engagement with sexuality and sexual politics, and that this has prevented the emergence of more radically transformative politics (Mama, 2005:no page number).

Still in 2005, Arnfred notes a specific silence in "the general absence of 'sexuality' as an issue in African feminists' writings" (Arnfred, 2005c:59). An early exception among African feminists in broaching the issue of sexuality in Africa was McFadden (1992; 2003), later Machera (2005) and Mama, Pereira and Manuh (2005). Coordinated by Amina Mama (African Gender Institute/University of Cape Town) and Takyiwaa Manuh (Institute of African Studies/University of Ghana), the Mapping Sexualities Project (Mama, Pereira & Manuh, 2005) is the first project in the transnational field of sexuality research carried out by African researchers rooted in feminist praxis. The project brought together a small group of local feminist researchers who studied sexualities in selected African urban and rural settings. Later, *Agenda* strived to open the discourse on sexuality with two volumes: *Issue 62: Sexuality in Africa* (2004) and *Issue 63: Sexuality and Body Image* (2005). Also in 2005, the African Gender Institute (University of Cape Town) published an issue on *Sexual Cultures* (Issue 5) in its online-journal *Feminist Africa*.

However, the need to give positive acknowledgement of women as sexual agents is an important consideration in terms of my research question and has been articulated by Arnfred (2005c):

In South Africa there has been, for the last few years, a push for opening up a debate on female and male sexualities, a debate which is not developed on the terrain of mainstream AIDS/'African sexuality' discourse, but which is struggling to find a voice reflecting *female sexual agency*, while at the same time resisting hegemonic male power (ibid:74; emphasis in the original).

3.3 Review of Western feminism: the modern/postmodern controversy and its implications for feminist gender theory

The concept of gender is widely debated and conceptualised in various theories and approaches. Epoch-making for feminist theory building was de Beauvoir's (1953) work, *The second sex*,⁵¹ which in the tradition of existentialism analysed the biological, social, societal and historical discourses that determine in the sense of construction the "otherness" of the woman in a clearly historical frame of reference. De Beauvoir was the first to introduce the idea of the social construction of gender. The notion that male supremacy is not biologically determined but historically and socio-culturally constructed was captured with a dualistic notion of "sex" and "gender" which was in a sense revolutionary. Some 25 years later in the 70s, early feminist theorists began to use the concept more and more to support their argument that biology/sex is defined in historically specific ways through culture. *Sex, gender and society* by Oakley (1972) was the initial articulation of the concept of gender. Oakley describes gender as the end product of the social process of learning and internalising appropriate behaviours, roles and personality traits for one's sex; as the socio-cultural practice inscribed in social institutions. Oakley gives the following definition of sex and gender: "'Sex' is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. 'Gender' however is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Oakley, 1985[1972]:16).

Subsequently, Rubin (1975) provides a systematic theory of the processes that produce and reproduce gender relations, the sex/gender system. Rubin theorised biological sex as the raw material that cultures mould into genders and sexualities (cf. McCann & Kim, 2003:14). From then on gender emerged as *the* central category in feminist and masculinity theory and academic debate. "The concept of gender has made it possible for feminists to simultaneously explain and delegitimize the presumed homology

⁵¹ French original published in 1949; English edition published in 1953.

between biological and social sex differences” (Di Stefano, 1990:64):

But gender itself has come under critical scrutiny from new intellectual and political quarters, which charge that gender and its cohort of core assumptions and terms are guilty of the same totalization with which humanism was previously charged. On this view, gender is implicated in a disastrous and oppressive fiction, the fiction of “woman,” which runs roughshod over multiple differences among and within women who are ill-served by a conception of gender as basic (ibid:65).

In the quote, Di Stefano alludes to the paradigm shift between feminist theories of the 1970s – modernist or traditional feminist theories – and those associated with the 1990s – postmodernist/contemporary and poststructural theories – a shift from political to more sophisticated rationales, favouring approaches that focus on the symbolic-cultural production of gender. The sex and gender dichotomy has been called into question; furthermore the question of sameness or difference became more and more obsolete when deconstructive feminism developed. Postmodernist feminism shifted the focus from the analysis and critique of patriarchy to more self-reflexive premises of feminist thinking and tried to reconfigure gender. Zalewski (2000), for example, asks what the nature of this shift is and whether there is evidence of an unbridgeable gulf between modernist and postmodernist feminisms. She illustrates this gulf in terms of three key areas of difference: the subject, epistemology and politics. What is significant is the issue of the destabilisation of the category of woman:

It appears that the metatheoretical commitments of modernist and postmodernist feminisms are radically different. Modernism’s commitment to certain epistemological foundations, the distinction between subject and object, the value and necessity of social scientific methods, and the explanatory and practical purpose of theory fundamentally structures the way modernist feminists understand and approach issues of gender, women and the feminine/female. These commitments lead to beliefs about the nature of the ‘political’ and the ‘subject’ which further structure how each of these theories understand the world (ibid:73).

Yet, for modernist feminists the central subject of concern is woman, the rejection of the subject would have negative implications for feminist politics – instead feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or ‘subject’ that is women. They claim the identity of women in order to demand rights on their behalf, known as identity politics. A foundation for any such rights is truth – the truth of unjust treatment of women and

inequality as a result. This all leads to feminist politics aiming at liberation from oppression by men, resulting in women having control and agency in their lives (ibid:32–33). In other words, the category woman lies at the heart of most feminist analysis, albeit in different ways (Hamilton, 2007:52).

On the other hand, postmodernist feminists question all the concepts used by the 1970s feminists and aim to destabilise the assumptions of modernist feminisms. Instead of asking ‘why?’ postmodernists prefer to ask ‘how?’ Postmodernists do not doubt that real women exist or that the category of woman is important, but they question the idea that there is an essential subject and that this has a political effectiveness. They rather attempt to show how the category of woman is represented; there is no original woman fully represented through history and there are infinite possibilities of women (cf. Zalewski, 2000:41–42).

The idea that we cannot assume in advance what the meaning of the categories ‘woman’ and ‘women’ mean has become the site of serious opposition to poststructuralist feminism (Weedon, 1999:107).

Another source of controversy among feminists who want to maintain a unified concept of women and women’s experience is the assumption that subjectivity is an effect of discourse; “the move away from any fixed qualities of women or femininity, which unite all women and ground politics, disturbs many feminists who are sceptical towards postmodernism” (ibid:126–127). The idea that identity is temporary, without grounding in gender difference (being a woman) is also controversial, especially among those who see identity as the precondition for effective political action. The postmodern deconstruction of the subject means that claims for rights on behalf of subjects cannot be made. However, the basis for a shared identity in poststructuralist approaches tends to be shared forms of social oppression rather than shared identities. Postmodern feminists propose a theory of identity which sees identity as discursively produced, necessary but always contingent and strategic (ibid:104–107; 129).

Internationally, the best-known author in this field is probably Butler (1990) and her

pioneering book *Gender trouble* offers a theory of gender construction through performative acts. In commonsense thinking, the body is the obvious and transparent sign of a person's gender and race, guaranteeing the meanings and values attributed to them. Butler (ibid), however, introduces the idea that all gender and all sexual identities are performed. According to her concept of performativity, gendered subjectivity is acquired through the repeated performance of discourses of gender by the individual. Gender is not a fact, "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts there would be no gender at all" (ibid:140). "Sex" itself is a gendered category. The "production of sex as the prediscursive ought to be understood as the effect of the apparatus of socio-cultural construction designated by *gender*" (ibid:7; emphasis in the original). Gender is understood as a contingent concept; consequently the polarity male-female is being eradicated. Male- and femaleness occur in different mixtures in so-called male and female bodies. Butler questions "subject" and "identity" – instead identity is seen as a process of permanent performance reflecting complex structures, process and discourse. Normative behaviour involves what she calls reiterations, and reiteration is always contingent, thereby creating space for altered meanings, including resistance (Hamilton, 2007:51).

3.4 Critique: the feminist case against postmodernism

Not surprisingly, Butler provoked strong criticism from radical feminists, who attested postmodernism as a dangerous depoliticisation. Jeffreys (1996:359 cited in Weedon, 1999:123), for example, considers Butler's ideas of performative gender as "depoliticised, sanitised and something difficult to associate with sexual violence, economic inequality [and] women dying from backstreet abortions". For modernist feminists it has been vital to see women as a group with interests and inequalities or oppressions in common and to demand rights and justices on behalf of the group. Their critiques of poststructuralism and postmodernism therefore concern *inter alia* the disengagement from the self, the denial of women's shared experience and the disengagement from political practice (Zalewski, 2000:63–64; Weedon, 1999:124).

‘Doing politics’ for modernist feminists is therefore centrally about constructing theories on behalf of *women* in order to make women’s lives better. It follows therefore that the identity of woman and women is a necessary foundation. Losing this foundation would be a luxury feminists cannot politically afford (Zalewski, 2000:66; emphasis in the original).

In the context of an HIV/AIDS epidemic that affects so many African women and is related to a large extent to sexual violence against women, the modernist feminists’ stance provides a solid basis for sexual politics and the goal of achieving fuller sexual agency in women.

Standpoint theorists, notably Hartsock (1990), respond that poststructural feminist theories provide a poor basis for political resistance.⁵² They criticise poststructural theorists for proposing so contingent and contradictory a sense of subjectivity of dominant power relations that they remove the ground for feminist agency: poststructuralist theory that defines one’s identity as an artefact of dominant power relations exercised in discursive fields disempowers political struggle against the dominant culture. Standpoint theorists argue that experience may be the best strategic basis on which feminists can ground demands for autonomy and freedom (cf. McCann & Kim, 2003:287).

Because postmodernist approaches lack important categories to explain persistent gender inequality, male power and dominance appear as “endlessly fractured and shifting” (Schoepf, 2001:345); I agree with Hartsock and Bordo (cited in Nicholson, 1990:8) that “theorising needs some stopping points and that for feminists an important theoretical stopping point is gender”. The political counterpart to this epistemology of “permanent partiality” is a “politics of solidarity”, of “fragmented selves and oppositional consciousness”, enacting “a refusal of the delusion of return to an ‘original unity’ (Di Stefano, 1990:74). What happens if, as Di Stefano notes, “she dissolves into a perplexing

⁵² Butler’s (1990; 1993) theory involves a decentred notion of the subject and agency. She locates resistance and the possibilities of transforming the status quo within the discursive field, which produces both existing power relations and forms of subjectivity. Agency can transform aspects of material discursive practice and the power relations inherent in them (Weedon, 1999:123). The possibility of agency is located “as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power” (Butler, 1993:15).

plurality of differences, none of which can be theoretically or politically privileged over others” (ibid:77)? Di Stefano (ibid:76) suspects that the postmodernist project, if seriously adopted by feminists, would make any semblance of a feminist politics impossible. Or, in the words of Sunde and Bozalek (1993:33), “[i]f we deconstruct the category ‘women’, what are we left with?”.

It is my personal conviction that in view of the high level of factual gender inequality in South Africa – which coexists with the gender progressive Constitution – women need a shared category ‘woman’ and a general theory of oppression and liberation. As depicted by the literature review, there is evidence that the experience of non-consensual sexual intercourse is almost the norm in a South African woman’s life (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002:1240), in other words many women share experiences of violation and of a lack of autonomy.

3.5 The relevance of radical feminist arguments in the South African HIV/AIDS epidemic

Indeed, the question arises as to which feminist approach/es is/are useful to account for the gender disparities in intimate partnerships brought to light by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Considering the causes for African black women’s overproportional HIV-infection rates and vulnerability I contend that radical feminist arguments are most useful to account for the analysis and understanding of the gender aspects which fuel the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. Radical feminism is a core theory of modern feminism focusing on the personal as a key site for political action (Weedon, 1999:27). My research question puts a strong focus on the private domain (intimate partnership) and the realm of sexuality. Women’s oppression in the private sphere was highlighted by radical feminism (Millet, 1970; Firestone, 1971; Dworkin, 1974; Brownmiller, 1975; Daly, 1978; MacKinnon, 1989) and it centred their discussions on factors such as violence, sexuality and culture and how they maintain patriarchy. Radical feminism was a direct answer to

the limitations inherent in liberal feminism.

Indeed the tendency within liberal feminism to perpetuate the definition of the private sphere as an area of individual choice led to a failure to politicize specific areas of women's oppressions within the family and sexual relations (Weedon, 1999:15–16).

I therefore suggest revisiting the radical feminist claim that the 'personal is political', meaning that the system of male domination is deeply entrenched in intimate relationships between women and men, firstly by the use of violence and coercion and secondly by the enculturation of the heterosexual norm and male sex-right (Daly, 1978; Rich, 1986a; Barry, 1979; MacKinnon, 1989; Miriam, 2007).

However, the public/private divide is a Euro-American concept distinguishing the public world of paid employment and public life and the private world of the family. This concept underlies a great deal of liberal thought. Radical feminists breached this divide in so far as they focused on the personal as a key site for political action. Radical feminists breached this divide in so far as they focused on the personal as a key site for political action (Weedon, 1999:27). Whereas radical feminists see women exploited by patriarchy *inter alia* for their unpaid work in childcare and housework and mainly excluded from public arenas such as employment and politics, Marxist feminists consider capitalism as the principal source of exploitation including women's exploitation in paid employment. They challenge the public/private divide in terms of regarding female domestic labour as an aspect of production (or reproduction) (ibid:49; see below Bozzoli, 1983). Furthermore and as just stated for radical feminists sexual oppression and male violence are the most fundamental forms of oppression while liberal feminists offer less clear theories of gender inequalities and rather engage in gradual changes of the existing system and claims of equal rights (cf. Haralambos & Holborn, 2000:136–150).

African feminist scholars, such as Oyewùmi, claim that the Euro-American public/private concept has been uncritically applied to Africa despite the fact that the gender division of labour in Africa is not organised according to any public/private divide (Oyewùmi, 2003b:38). Oyewùmi (ibid) for instance claims that the public/private conceptualisation

lacks any clear definition and is shifted around at will, “defining the women’s sphere, wherever it deemed to exist, as private” and men’s location as public. In this context she particularly denounces the *Women in Development* literature, a development approach which has been blamed for holding an uncritical attitude to modernisation theory and its assumptions (cf. Serote, Mager & Butlender, 2001:159–160).

Earlier Bozzoli (1983:143) criticised the appropriateness of the ‘reproduction’ and ‘production’ concept in the South African context, concluding that, at the time she wrote the article, “the system of female oppression in South Africa has not been successfully explained” (ibid:144). Bozzoli therefore offers an approach based on the notion of struggle (i.e. struggle *within* the domestic system; struggle *between* the domestic sphere and the capitalist one; ibid:146; emphasis in the original) which analyses the relationship between particular social systems and particular forms of female subordination (ibid:168). For Bozzoli domestic struggles are the key to unraveling the subordination of women and she finally develops the notion of “the ‘*patriarchal quilt*’ of patriarchies” (ibid:149–155; emphasis in the original; cf. p. 21 in this thesis) which considers issues of gender, race and class. In the African context she describes the struggle as a struggle between women and patriarchal chiefs (ibid:151). However, Bozzoli’s fruitful analysis, which merges a feminist and a Marxist view, totally neglects an analysis of women’s sexual oppression.

To counter the criticism of radical feminists’ conceptualisation of patriarchy Walby (1990) developed a distinctive theory of patriarchy. In order to explain gender inequalities she identifies six structures of patriarchy that are independent but interact with one another: (1) paid work; (2) patriarchal relations within the household; (3) patriarchal culture; (4) sexuality; (5) male violence towards women; (6) the state. She claims a shift away from 19th century private patriarchy (where an individual patriarch controls women directly in the private sphere of the home) to 20th century public patriarchy. In public patriarchy women have access to both private and public spheres but are still subordinated and collectively exploited by men within the public arena (e.g. women are segregated into certain jobs and are lower-paid; cf. Haralambos & Holborn,

2000:150–156). Walby’s theory strives to avoid weaknesses of the main modern feminist approaches and instead integrates their strong points. It raises the question whether her notion of public patriarchy is pertinent for the African context.

Hence, in my data analysis it will be necessary taking into account the African experience because concepts such as public/private or marriage, family, wife, and husband can be – as Oyewùmi (2003b:38) notes – “alien” to the cultures to which they are applied (ibid) because all bear “the taint of “Westocentricity” in their usage” (ibid:39) and should therefore be defined when applied.

Before explicating this framework I will briefly discuss some tenets of liberal feminism because South Africa’s Constitution is liberal; gender policies and legislation reflect, in important ways, a liberal feminist position.

3.5.1 Calling for a radical response: the liberal paradigm

Liberal feminism is the oldest feminist theory.⁵³ It stands in the tradition of Western liberal philosophy/humanism and the Enlightenment project, which both claim that humans have the capacity for reasoning and rationality, which are closely related to the growth of modern science. Liberal ethics centre on freedom, rights and legal equality as well as rights to personhood, individual autonomy and self-determination. Modern feminism is a product of liberalism – all feminist positions derived inspiration from liberal feminism – so that “this tradition lies at the heart of feminist knowledge” (Whelehan, 1995:34). Historically, liberal feminism and the Marxist perspective on the woman question share a time line throughout the nineteenth century. However, they not only had different explanations for, and solutions to, the subordination of women, “but also occupied different, and sometimes hostile, political territory” (Hamilton, 2007:45). Whelehan (1995:35) attributes liberal feminism with a “bourgeois bias”.⁵⁴

⁵³ Early female writers were for example Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouge in the course of the era of Enlightenment. Their liberal feminism followed the humanistic idea of the equality of women and men.

⁵⁴ With *The feminine mystique* Friedan (1963) gave new impetus to modern liberal feminism taking up de

Liberal feminism follows the basic idea of the equality of women and men, where inequality is interpreted as the result of unequal access to resources and the sexual division of labour. It focused on equal rights for women, battled for inclusion and put emphasis on sameness. “Liberal feminism in the West today has achieved the extension of most civil rights and duties to women” (Weedon, 1999:15). Until today liberal feminism strives to create equal opportunities for both women and men in the different spheres of society – for instance in the workplace, in the family, or in the realm of education – through the law, relevant legislation, or even affirmative action. However, it focuses almost exclusively on the public domain and one of the main criticisms is that it left the private sphere untouched (ibid). The “tendency within liberal feminism to perpetuate the definition of the private sphere as an area of individual choice led to a failure to politicize specific areas of women’s oppressions within the family and sexual relations” (ibid:15–16), for example issues such as marital rape and domestic violence. This gave way to the development of more radical forms of feminism focusing on the personal lives of women.

At present, Gender Mainstreaming is the leading concept worldwide for bringing about change in gender relations within the public domain. Legal frameworks promoting gender equality have been put in place all over the world, for example by the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU) and South African Development Community (SADC). In the tradition of liberal feminism Gender Mainstreaming favours the idea of the sameness of women and men, but acknowledges at the same time their different situations and living conditions. If implemented with commitment Gender Mainstreaming brings a new quality into government policies (cf. Thege, 2004; Schoeman, 2004).⁵⁵

Beauvoir’s argument of the working woman. Friedan analysed the situation of middle-class housewives in American suburbs, their repressed discontent at being confined solely to the domestic sphere owing to the “feminine mystique”. Friedan believed that returning to professional life would lead to change in the women’s situation. Whelehan (1995:38), however, takes Friedan’s work as an example that illustrates how liberal feminism is centred on the needs of middle-class women and assumes that liberal feminists would not consider class or racial difference as a significant obstacle to self-advancement.

⁵⁵ The translation of the scientific gender concept into the political sphere as a new strategy of action took more than twenty years: the Gender Mainstreaming concept was broadly introduced and popularised at the 4th World Conference of Women in Beijing in 1995 (UN, EU, AU, cf. Schoeman 2004). Ideally, Gender Mainstreaming incorporates equal opportunity in all political decision-making, assuming that no policy is gender-neutral. In practical terms, Gender Mainstreaming takes the respective situations of men and women

The South African post-apartheid government applied the Gender Mainstreaming strategy for the advancement of gender equity and equality in the country and focused on broad institutional change processes. It institutionalised a comprehensive National Gender Machinery (cf. its structure and components: Office for the Status of Women, no year:vii) and installed “The South African National Policy Framework for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality” (ibid). The latter outlined three main goals: equal (political) representation of women, overcoming women’s disadvantages resulting from the system of apartheid; and mainstreaming issues of women’s gender equality into all national, provincial and local institutions. Critical voices, such as for example Sheila Meintjes, have called the effectiveness of Gender Mainstreaming in South Africa into question and challenge whether the ‘mainstream’ in government and in politics really will be able to deliver gender equality (Meintjes, 2004:214). Reservations relate to the inherent danger of mainstreaming gender: if only managed as a formality which is politically correct, no real benefit will follow from it. As discussed at the beginning of the literature review, it is particularly the level of local government which remains rooted in the politics of traditionalism (Serote, Mager & Budlender, 2001:169). In a paper on the changing form of women's political mobilisation in post-apartheid South Africa, Hassim (2005) urges for a women’s movement willing to engage directly with issues of socio-cultural power.

Gender Mainstreaming as a tool has also been recognised in order to engage the HIV/AIDS pandemic: a gender perspective should be mainstreamed into all policies, plans and programmes. Therefore manifold gender analyses have been conducted which consider the different situations of women and men and look at the different risks as well as the role of gender-based violence (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2002). As suggested above, however, mainstreaming has been criticised for neither providing an explanation beyond the description of different behaviours nor for why prevention programmes and

into account by assessing their different conditions, situations and needs and examines measures and policies by considering possible effects on gender differences when defining and implementing such measures and policies. Gender Mainstreaming addresses both equality and diversity and aims at improving the systems, structures and interactive conditions that produce and reproduce unequal treatment of women and men to date. Hence, the concept contains an effective potential for change (Thege, 2002).

empowerment programmes are not as successful as they are supposed to be (Campbell, 2003).

It would seem that liberal feminism has succeeded in launching and implementing changes at an institutional and governmental level. And yet tension between feminist theory and political practice and social change persists. A look at the statistics reveals the fact that men continue to dominate in every public sphere of society. An inherent risk and repeated critique of the Gender Mainstreaming approach, backed up by experiences of implementing processes, is that since mainstreaming involves structures that are created by and for men, women are simply adjusted to men and hence ‘malestreamed’ (Thege, 2004:161). This approach favours gradual changes within the existing system – what makes it quite “smart” and acceptable – while on the other hand it fails to address power relations. Tools such as Gender Mainstreaming raise a range of questions including: what is the quality of the changes? What about androcentrism, what about the specific experiences of women that make them different to men such as physical events or the exposure to male violence? Questions of this kind address critical issues that radical feminism holds against liberal feminism.

From a radical feminist perspective, patriarchal oppression is the primary form of oppression (Firestone, 1971; Millett, 1970; Daly, 1973; 1978; Barry, 1979; Lerner, 1986). It privileges gender relations as sources of all domination, prior to, for example, class.⁵⁶ “In radical feminist analysis patriarchy itself is founded on a fundamental polarisation between men and women in which men exploit women for their own interests” (MacKann & Kim, 2003:26–27).

Radical feminism rejects the theoretical frameworks and political practice of both liberalism and traditional Marxism. It argues ... against liberalism, that women’s liberation cannot be achieved by a theory and practice which make provisions for the rights of abstract individuals irrespective of social class, race and gender

⁵⁶ From a historian’s perspective, Lerner (1993:240) accounts for the fact that “the difference between men and women was the first, most easily notable difference and therefore dominance by men could first be acted out on that terrain. But class and race dominance (in the form of the enslavement of conquered foreign people) developed almost immediately upon this first human “discovery” of how to use power so as to benefit people unequally. ... Which system of oppression came first and which second is insignificant, if we understand that we are dealing with one, inseparable system with different manifestations”.

relations. On the other hand, radical feminists argue that women's oppression cannot be reduced to class oppression and made an epiphenomenon of the economic and social structures of the capitalist mode of production. In opposition to Marxism, radical feminism regards women's oppression as the primary and fundamental form of oppression. Gender is seen as an elaborate system of male domination of women's minds and bodies which is at the basis of social organisation. The term used to signify this universal system of oppression is *patriarchy* (Weedon, 1999:19–20; emphasis in the original).⁵⁷

While all forms of second-wave feminism use the term *patriarchy*, in radical feminism it refers to a system of domination which pervades all aspects of social life and which is to be found in all cultures and at all moments of history (Millett, 1970; Daly, 1978; Lerner, 1986); the institution of patriarchy is both cross-cultural and trans-historical (Daly, 1978; MacKinnon, 1989:130). Radical feminists claimed the universality of female oppression and posited a universalising notion of patriarchy, a tenet that was heavily criticised by a number of difference theorists (cf. section 3.5.4).

In turning its attention to the body as the site of women's difference and oppression, radical feminism reinstated the importance of the body in sexual politics (Weedon, 1999:19). As Parsons (1991:22) notes, for radical feminists sexuality indeed becomes the central factor in women's subordination, for it is the means by which biological differences are both realised and reinforced. Through the interactions of their gendered bodies, men and women live through the tensions and pressures that characterise their differences. Sexual relations are “by their very nature intrinsically oppressive and a battlefield for dominance and submission” (ibid).

Radical feminism introduced a new epistemology, feminist standpoint theory, which sees women with privileged access to understanding embodiment. Feminist standpoint theories emphasise the role of women's experience in social life and practice, and claim

⁵⁷ Probably the most famous early radical feminist work was *Sexual politics* by Millett (1970). She analyses the “perfect system of socialisation” (ibid:43), which assigns women to domestic services and child raising and “the rest of human achievement” (ibid:26) to men and how such an ideological perspective on gender polarises the sexes in having two distinct gender roles within the social formation. Millett's (ibid:25) classic definition of patriarchy was given in *Sexual politics*: “Our society ... is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political offices, finances – in short, every avenue of power within society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands”.

epistemological privilege for those at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchies, arguing that they are better starting points than others for seeking knowledge (Hartsock, 1983; Harding, 1986; 1987a; 1991; Smith, 1987).⁵⁸ Embodiment is the necessary unique context for certain knowledge, a knowledge formed in the midst of praxis. Therefore women need to find their own voice for expressing knowledge since it is often in the gap between ideology or prevailing value systems and one's lived experience that the best insights emerge (Parsons, 1991:21).

Standpoint theories have not gone uncriticised but have been continually revised. Such criticism of standpoint feminism has come from postmodern feminists, who argue that there is no concrete 'women's experience' from which to construct knowledge and that the lives of women are too diverse to generalise about their experiences. Collins (1990), in particular, challenged white feminist standpoint definitions. She rejects a commonality among women and promotes an "afrocentric" feminist standpoint that takes other forms of difference such as race, class and gender into account. Haraway (2003[1988]:393; emphasis in the original) argues for an embodied, situated, and partial feminist knowledge, thus giving feminist standpoint theory a postmodern inflection: "Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*". It is in the partial and located position that she wanted to locate a new conception of objectivity. Haraway argues against the assumption in earlier feminist standpoint theory that oppression facilitates privileged access to truth, seeing a serious danger in romanticising the vision of the less powerful, and argues instead for the idea of critical positioning which she equates with objectivity. She favours both "the concrete 'real' aspect and the aspect of semiosis and production in what we call scientific knowledge" (ibid:398), thus arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situating to make rational claims. The notion of situated knowledges will be very useful for my data analysis.

In the following sections I will present concepts of radical feminist analysis which stand

⁵⁸ Marxism offers the classic model of a standpoint theory, claiming an epistemic privilege on behalf of the standpoint of the proletariat, while feminist standpoint theory claims an epistemic privilege on behalf of the standpoint of women. A feminist standpoint demands an examination of the way knowledge and power are connected in order to make visible the power relations of knowledge production, as well as the underpinnings of gender.

out as pertinent for elucidating factors that fuel the present HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa and its over-proportional impact on women. In my view these include the concept of *normative heterosexuality*, that is, ‘male sex-right’ and theories that explain women’s compliance with patriarchal rule. Furthermore, I will address the theorisation of difference locating gender as one, among many, axes of inequality such as race, class, sexuality, culture and ethnicity.

3.5.2 *Theorising heterosexuality and male domination*

In chapter 2 I discussed the sexist nature of traditional South African cultures and the interplay of Christianity and African tradition in shaping and constraining African black women’s sexuality with regard to sexual agency. One powerful socio-cultural template which inhibits the development of women’s fuller agency and undermines their equal social status is the socio-cultural construction of two very distinct gender roles teaching women to be submissive and men to be assertive (cf. Varga, 1997; MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; Selikow, Zulu & Cedras, 2002; Lesch & Kruger, 2004; O’Sullivan et al., 2006). Sexual inequality is reproduced in a male/female sexual double standard putting female sexuality under male control. It is reflected in an internationally unprecedented high level of rape and alarmingly high levels of intimate partner violence. As noted earlier, sexual violence has been identified as a key issue in the HIV/AIDS epidemic (cf. Vetten & Bhana, 2001; Dunkle et al., 2004a; Jewkes, Dunkle, Koss, Levin, Nduna, Jama & Sikweyiya, 2006a; Jewkes et al., 2006b; Fox et al., 2007; Amnesty International, 2008) and Mama (2004:123) reminds of the need to theorise both sexuality and violence.

In *Toward a feminist theory of the state*, MacKinnon (1989) sketches a theory of sexuality, which presupposes that male dominance is sexual and suggests the convergence of sexuality and violence. She locates sexuality within a theory of gender inequality, implying the social hierarchy of men over women.

Sexuality, in feminist light, is not a discrete sphere of interaction or feeling or sensation or behavior in which preexisting social divisions may or may not be played out. It is a pervasive dimension of social life, one that permeates the whole, a

dimension along which gender occurs and through which gender is socially constituted; it is a dimension along with other social divisions, like race and class, ... Dominance eroticized defines the imperatives of its masculinity, submission eroticized defines its femininity (ibid:130).

Sexuality itself is the dynamic of the inequality of the sexes and women exist in a context of sexual terror:

If sexuality is central to women's definition and forced sex is central to sexuality, rape is indigenous, not exceptional, to women's social condition. In feminist analysis, a rape is not an isolated event or moral transgression or individual interchange gone wrong but an act of terrorism and torture within a systemic context of group subjection, like lynching (ibid:172).

Radical feminists give preference to issues of women's sexuality, control of fertility, violence against women and sexual exploitation (cf. Barry, 1979). Sex, sexuality and reproduction were 'political' matters. "The personal for women under patriarchy was inevitably bound up with the meaning, status and control of their bodies, issues which soon became the unifying focuses in radical feminist analyses" (Weedon, 1999:27). MacKinnon (1989:138), for instance, sees in men women's "material condition". Sexual meaning is not made only, or even primarily, by words and in texts; it is in the social relations of power that sex is embodied and practised (ibid:129).

For many radical feminists patriarchy is centred on the reproduction of the patriarchal family and the institution of heterosexuality (cf. Greer, 1970, Firestone, 1971, Rich, 1986a). Millett (1970:33) recognises the family as patriarchy's "chief institution", granting the father nearly total ownership of wives and children including powers of physical abuse. This notion was well illustrated in Niehaus's (2004) depiction of the *motse* where the father exerted power over his wives and children including power in sexual relations and sexual decision-making.

A central claim of radical feminism is that patriarchy has profoundly undermined women in their achievement of sexual agency. Rich (1986a) introduces the concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" to encapsulate the social and socio-cultural imperatives that close off all sexual options for women except monogamous, heterosexual marriage

(cf. Hamilton, 2007:51; Rich, 1986a). In the previous chapter I outlined the central importance attached to customary marriage and the payment of *lobola*, which gives the man ownership and control over his wife (cf. Ramphele, 1989:400; Mugambe, 2006:76), including the right to have sex with her at any time. Rich exposes heterosexuality as a cornerstone of patriarchy. In her analysis of the political institution of heterosexuality, “women’s bodies, sexuality and minds are shaped by physical coercion, brutality and restriction of access to knowledge and experience so as to ensure their compliance with and endorsement of heterosexuality” (Weedon, 1999:43). Rich (1986a) sets out a framework of eight characteristics of male power, one being how male sexuality is forced on women. This occurs by means of rape, wife-beating, incest, the socialisation of women to feel that the male sexual ‘drive’ amounts to a right, idealisation of heterosexual romance, arranged marriage, prostitution and the like. All of these are very factual forces in a South African woman’s life as shown by empirical studies focussing on customary law, domestic violence and transactional sexual relations.

Similarly to Rich (1986a), MacKinnon (1989) argues that what is called sexuality is the dynamic of control by which male dominance eroticises and thus defines man and woman, gender identity and sexual pleasure; penetration and intercourse defines the paradigmatic sexual encounter. “To be clear: what is sexual is what gives a man an erection” (ibid:137).

Thus, in radical feminist thought women’s bodies were both the focus of women’s oppression and the basis for women’s positive difference from men (Weedon, 1999:29). Men were seen as the enemy and women as morally supreme to men. Radical feminists in particular sought alternative positive images of women and celebrated women’s bodies as a site of female difference and power (ibid:101–102). They focused on the development of a ‘woman’s culture’ (cultural feminism) and promoted the transformation of women’s lifestyles and social transformation (Whelehan, 1995:73).⁵⁹ A women-centred feminist cultural politics advocated separatism as the short-term answer to patriarchy. “All radical feminists seemed to agree upon the need for separatism, ... ranging from political

⁵⁹ See in detail: Donovan (2001:183–197); Evans (1995:77–90).

separatism ... to complete separatism ... – or as complete as was economically or practically viable” (ibid:73–74). Moreover, a heterosexual lifestyle was often regarded as incompatible with feminism and “political lesbianism” advocated lesbianism as a positive alternative and conscious choice to heterosexuality for women.

Most common criticisms of radical feminism concerned an uninterrogated view of patriarchy, a biologically essentialist assertion of many arguments (biologism), the focus on women’s personal experience, lesbian sexuality as a paradigm for female sexuality and a notion of patriarchy as the central system of female subordination (ibid:84). It was argued “that early radical feminism ... over-simplified the causes of female oppression in its assertion that gender difference had arisen as a universal and ahistorical system of male domination” (ibid). At issue was the question of difference among women, which I will address below and discuss more widely in the chapter conclusion.

Recently, Miriam (2007) revisited the radical/lesbian feminist claim that normative heterosexuality is crucial for the maintenance of female subordination and defended the concept of sex-right on new theoretical grounds by arguing that the radical feminist theory of compulsory heterosexuality and sex-right has to be expanded from a phenomenological-hermeneutic perspective. Therefore Miriam turns her attention to the work of Merleau-Ponty, Martin Alcoff and Bartky in order to engage a phenomenological-hermeneutic re-reading of MacKinnon's (1989) and Pateman's (1988; 2002) works. Miriam contends that without a radical analysis of compulsory heterosexuality, we cannot adequately understand contemporary heterosexualism, the new forms of bigotry it has spawned, and the entrenchment of heterosexual entitlement in our norms and laws. Sex-right becomes the invisible background of power presupposed by women's choice to negotiate sex.

I remain convinced (with my back against the current of the postmodern theoretical zeitgeist) of a central radical feminist claim, namely, that the heterosexual norm has deep roots in a male-supremacist gender order (Miriam, 2007:224).

In modern, liberal social orders, the lived experience of subordination for women is also the lived experience of individual choice. The lived contradiction of choice and subordination is central to women's agency in these social orders, and to the persisting (tacit) assumption – by both men and women – of men's sex-right

(ibid:219).

Like me, Miriam sees this as arguing against the zeitgeist, and yet it accounts for the topicality of radical feminist analysis. Whereas her line of argument is related to US society, I see radical feminist concepts as appropriate for analysing sexual aspects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the South African context. The argument of *male* sex-right is of major importance in the context of my research question.

3.5.3 *Theorising women's compliance to male domination*

Women are not only victims of male domination, in many cases they co-opt patriarchal rules and defend patriarchal values. Culture and religion are of particular importance for securing people's compliance with an existing social order. As already noted in the preceding chapter it has been argued that South African patriarchs have both Christianity and African tradition available to legitimate the perpetuation of the existing patriarchal system (Ramphela, 1989:414; Bozzoli, 1983) and that the prevalence of domestic violence in South Africa reflects links between patriarchy, violence and Christianity (Rakoczy, 2004) as well as with other faith communities (Nadar, 2005). In second-wave feminism it is in particular Daly (1973; 1978)⁶⁰ who challenges the image of the male-gendered God and deconstructs patriarchal religion, myth and imagery. Daly deconstructs patriarchal religion, myth and imagery while establishing a female subject position to counter the objectivation of women – not in an essentialist sense as Korte (2000:4) argues.

In the second passage of her best known book, *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly shows

how women in various cultures – which for her are merely multi-manifestations of the overall culture of androcracy – are lulled by the myths and habits of their particular social context. Drugged by the prevailing local dogmas and disabled physically, they have not always seen the intent behind the vicious circle of

⁶⁰ Hoagland and Frye (2000) edited an anthology on *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*, which values Daly's philosophy with different contributions since "European and American elite intellectual canon-makers have failed to acknowledge Mary Daly without even the minimal notice implied by contempt" (ibid:1).

maiming and murder of mothers and daughters ... (Daly, 1978:223–224).

Daly compares different “atrocities” committed by patriarchy in different societies in different epochs and in different ways, thus disguising patriarchy’s transhistorical and transcultural nature. She discloses the common pattern of such atrocities in the so-called *Sado-Ritual*, a pattern of analysis which, in my view, has not lost any of its relevance today.⁶¹

In the following chapters I will analyze a number of barbarous rituals, ancient and modern, in order to unmask the very real, existential meaning of Goddess murder in the concrete lives of women. I will focus upon five specific righteous rites which massacre women: Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African female genital mutilation, European witchburning, American gynecology. In examining these I will seek out basic patterns which they have in common, and which comprise the Sado-Ritual Syndrome. Those who claim to see racism and/or imperialism in my indictment of these atrocities can do so only by blinding themselves to the fact that the oppression of women knows no ethnic, national, or religious bounds. There are variations on the theme of oppression, but the phenomenon is planetary (ibid:111).

Her pattern unmasks the Sado-Rituals in the lives of women and demonstrates the lethal intent of patriarchy “to reenact the murder of the Goddess in women at all levels so that the social system will be maintained, and so that women will be convinced that the social system is meant to be because, after all, the cultural mythology says it is so” (Mogford, 2000:139).

One central aspect in Daly’s pattern is the compliance of women with their oppression/oppressors: “Women are used as scapegoats and token torturers” (Daly 1978:132) to mask the male-centeredness of the ritualised atrocity which turns women against each other. Deceptive (male) myth creations condition the psyches of the victims as well as the victimisers who become carriers of the patriarchal myth. Through this mind rape that accompanies male myth creation (cf. ibid:109–110) women are emotionally

⁶¹ For instance when applied to the present mania for unnecessary cosmetic surgeries. The framework can be applied to both large-scale religious and cultural rituals as well as to “smaller, often isolated battles lived out each day by real women” (Greene, 1997:19). The framework has been applied for instance by Greene (1997) in order to analyse a harsh dispute in a rural community in Mississippi: some lesbian feminists and the community of Ovetta clashed over the establishment of a feminist educational retreat. Another example is Mogford (2000) who used the Sado-Ritual Syndrome for viewing Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* linking it up to modern US society.

compliant. In the analysis of each ritual Daly gives an example of women's (often the mother or mother-in-law) complicity noting the "male absence at the execution of the mutilation" (ibid:159) "to do the dirty work" (ibid:165). In case of the traditional ritual of female genital mutilation, she gives the example of women "holding down the victim, intoning prayers to drown her screams" (ibid:163). The ritual is usually executed by women while mothers "insist that this mutilation be done to their own daughters" (ibid:165). The killing of female creativity is the ultimate goal of patriarchy. Daly reclaims women's lost heritage in a gynocentric context through *re-membering*.

Radical feminist analyses, such as Daly's model, were heavily criticised for a universal and a-historic interpretation of gender relations overarching all other forms of power. A widely recognised critique of *Gyn/Ecology* came from Lorde (1984) expressing her dismay in "An open letter to Mary Daly" and accusing her of racism. Particular critique followed from difference theorists. Daly was accused of a colonial stance (Narayan, 1997:43–61), her comparison seen as problematic since it ignored differences of class and religion among women (Mohanty, 2004:24; 256).

In postmodern feminist thinking, there is a totally different understanding of the body which has been taken up in the work of African feminists such as Oyewùmí (1997). These works highlight the relativity and historicity of embodiment and the influence of the socio-cultural context. In postmodern thought "biology does not precede either logically or historically its particular culturally defined manifestations. Embodiment in this type of feminism is a *unique nexus of social information and historical possibilities*" (Parsons, 1991:24; emphasis in the original). What is conceptualised as male and female are constructions of the symbolic order (language) and therefore relative, fluid and shifting depending on the historical and socio-cultural context. As argued throughout this chapter, such an approach of "relativity" cannot take gender-based power relations between women and men into account that, for example, facilitate the vulnerability of women to HIV/AIDS in sexual relationships.

3.5.3 *The question of difference*

Influenced by postmodernist thought, difference became a key concept in feminist theory. After the considerable critique of theoretical frameworks based solely on the concept of gender which came from women of colour, Third-World women, socialist feminists and lesbian feminists, the examination of significant differences among women became a

generative engine for feminist theory in the 1980s. Through this concept, feminist theorists have grappled with questions of how race, nationality, class, and sexuality shape women's lives. Theorizing difference has generated invaluable insights into gender power relations and how those power relations interact with domination of race, nationality, class, and sexuality ... (McCann & Kim, 2003:19–20).

To neglect differences among women as well as different groups of men and women is seen as one of the dangers of some forms of Western feminism. Third-World feminism, therefore, is better positioned for an understanding of complex political issues than “simplistic and dangerous analyses” (Narayan, 1997:80) that focus on women's interests only. If certain political agendas (e.g. nationalism, religious fundamentalism) marginalise groups of people, “they marginalize substantial numbers of men as well as women, even though women might be specifically affected within these class, caste, and ethnic groups” (ibid:79). What is frowned upon is the notion of all women being victims of male control and of discriminating traditional practices. Gender is no more as basic as poverty, class or ethnicity, and women feel less divided from men as a group than, for example, from white or bourgeois or heterosexual men and women (Di Stefano, 1990:65).

The discourses reflect strongly on differences between women, promoting diversity and fragmentation, and analyses of differences that emerge contextually and situationally (Oyewùmi, 2003b). For instance, in her book, *The invention of women*, Oyewùmi (1997) traces the meaning of gender in an African context and shows that gender was not constructed in old Yoruba society, and that social organisation was determined by relative age. “The need to continually specify time and location in all feminist theorizing is one key insight that has resulted from feminist theorizing about differences” (McCann & Kim, 2003:19). The interconnections of gender with other axes of inequality raised the

question of whether there is a hierarchy of oppressions (Spelman, 1988; Minh-ha, 1989; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1992; Narayan, 1997; Mohanty, 2004). Models around the simultaneity of oppression (Spelman, 1988) were elaborated, locating gender as *one* axis of the matrix of domination (Collins, 1990). Approaches to gender difference became more complex once other social factors were taken into account, most centrally class, race, imperialism, ethnicity and sexuality. Each produced hierarchically structured forms of difference in historically, socially and culturally specific ways (Weedon, 1999:180). Feminist scholars began to join a new analysis of racism with the Marxist focus on class and the radical feminist focus on the sexual hierarchy under the rubric of what has been called intersectionality (Hamilton, 2007:50). Intersectionality theorists seek to explain oppression and inequality across a variety of variables. In this way, theoretical challenges of feminism from women of colour, women with disabilities, lesbians, bisexuals, and older women to “historicize differences” appeared to converge with those of poststructuralism (ibid:51). Focus was laid on socio-cultural and historical specificity (cf. Weedon, 1999: 109) and what Rich (1986b) has called “the politics of location”.⁶²

What do these theoretical implications mean for the study of South African rural black women? While I sympathise with the argument that women’s experiences of discrimination are not based solely on gender, the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa cannot be looked at without an understanding of the context of social inequality in terms of gender, race and class. In my study, these intersections will not only be addressed and considered in the interpretation of the data, but also in terms of my own location and that of the participants. I maintain that the advent of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and its impact on African black women highlight a particular vulnerability resulting from the category of gender and the fact of being female. It revives the question asked by Di Stefano (1990:74) as to whether differences between women on the basis of race, class, sexuality,

⁶² Rich (1986b) describes in her essay *Notes toward a politics of location* how she was located by color and sex *and* being an American *and* Jewish. “To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It meant recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go” (Rich, 2003[1986b]:450). She calls for paying attention to recognise our location, that is the ground and conditions where we are coming from (ibid:451).

culture and ethnicity are sufficient to override feminine commonalities of experience and interest. I will discuss further implications related to the issue of difference in the chapter conclusion.

Further refinement of modernist feminist thinking came from the newly emerging study of masculinities. In the following sections I will discuss two major contributions, namely Connell's concepts of hegemonic masculinity and Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence. Both these concepts have significance for my study.

3.6 Expanding feminist theories: the concepts of hegemonic masculinity and symbolic violence

Research on women and gender has mainly been developed by women; the impulse to develop gender studies has come mainly from contemporary feminism, and women have therefore mainly been the ones to make gender visible in contemporary scholarship and in public forums. Today, we also find growing numbers of studies on masculinities which complete the spectrum of research on gender. Approaches to men and masculinities are very diverse in terms of disciplines, theoretical perspectives, methodologies and conceptualisations (cf. Connell, Hearn & Kimmel, 2005).

Revealing the dynamics of gender, however, also makes masculinity visible and problematizes the position of men. Both women and men have addressed this problem. Where men's outlooks and culturally defined characteristics were formerly the unexamined norm for science, and religion, the specificity of different masculinities is now recognized, and their origins, structures, and dynamics are investigated. This investigation has now been active for more than 20 years and has produced a large and interesting body of research (ibid:1).

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is outstanding in this respect. It has provided a link between the growing research field of men's studies, feminist accounts of patriarchy, and sociological models of gender (cf. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:829–830). In terms of formulating a conceptual framework to account for the gender aspects in the HIV/AIDS pandemic it gives valuable insights into the interplay between hegemony, subordination and compliance. Furthermore, it also raises issues of agency.

3.6.1 Theorising hegemonic masculinity

Connell's concept of *hegemonic masculinity* complements modern feminists' accounts of the overall subordination of women and dominance of men.

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees ... the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995:77).

In fact, the concept's sources were feminist theories of patriarchy and the related debates over the roles of men in transforming patriarchy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:831). It expands feminist theories with the conceptualisation of a combination of the plurality and the hierarchy of masculinities, a fundamental feature of the concept which Connell and Messerschmidt still retain in the revision of the concept (ibid:846).

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men (ibid:832).

The number of men rigorously practising the hegemonic pattern in its entirety may be quite small, yet the majority of men gain from hegemony, since they benefit from the *patriarchal dividend* in terms of honour, prestige and the right to command (Connell, 1995:82). They also gain a material dividend and are much more likely to hold state power. "A structure of inequality on this scale, involving a massive dispossession of social resources, is hard to imagine without violence" (ibid:83). Two patterns of violence follow from this: firstly the use of violence to sustain male dominance (e.g. harassment, rape, physical attacks), and secondly, violence among men (military combat, homicide, armed assault).

One of the concept's strengths is that it sees gender as relational and gender relations as historical. Gender is social practice, referring to what bodies do but not reducible to the body (ibid:71).

Gender exists precisely to the extent that biology does *not* determine the social. It marks one of those points of transition where historical process supersedes biological evolution as the form of change (ibid:71–72; emphasis in the original).

Gender hierarchies can be subject to change, which implies collective as well as the subject's agency. "... everything about gender is historical" (Connell, 2002:68). This deeply historical character of gender implies that it can go out of existence, in other words may have an end (ibid:69). Change can occur if "structures develop *crisis tendencies*, that is, internal contradictions or tendencies that undermine current patterns and force change in the structure itself" (ibid:71; emphasis in the original). Women as the main group subordinated in patriarchal power structures have a structural interest in change (ibid:72). Crisis tendencies in gender emerge on the large scale and on the small, that is, in personal life and in intimate relationships (ibid:75).

This concept has been widely applied in the South African context to explore men and masculinity in times of transition (Morrell, 2001a; 2001b). As previously mentioned, the transformation of South African society has coincided with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and sexuality and gender-based violence have been identified as key issues in the spread of the epidemic and in the increasing HIV infection rates in women. Increased (sexual) violence against women, on the other hand, has been interpreted as a masculine response to transition (Morrell, 2001b:28; Niehaus, 2004:392; Posel, 2004:62; Walker, 2005); men's conformity to hegemonic masculine values and behaviours puts women's health at serious risk (cf. Silberschmidt, 2005:246).

In 2005, Connell and Messerschmidt reviewed the concept of hegemonic masculinity suggesting the reformulation of the concept in four areas: (1) a more complex model of gender hierarchy, emphasising the agency of women; (2) explicit recognition of the geography of masculinities, emphasising the interplay between local, regional, and global

levels; (3) a more specific treatment of embodiment in contexts of privilege and power; and (4) a stronger emphasis on the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity, recognising internal contradictions and the possibility of movement toward gender democracy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:847–853). What is retained from its early formulation is the concept’s fundamental feature, that is, the combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities. Secondly, the idea that the hierarchy of masculinities is hegemonic, and not a pattern of simple domination based on force, is retained, as well as the idea that a dominant pattern of masculinity is open to challenge and thus to the possibility for change in gender relations (ibid:846).

The reformulated concept puts greater emphasis on the practices of women and the historical interplay between femininities and masculinities.

We suggest, therefore, that our understanding of hegemonic masculinity needs to incorporate a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, recognizing the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics (ibid:848).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was originally formulated together with a concept of “emphasized femininity” to acknowledge the asymmetrical relationship of men/masculinities and women/femininities in a patriarchal gender order. The reformulated concept takes up again the important but neglected aspect of “emphasized femininity” and change on the micro-level by focusing more on women’s compliance with patriarchy: women’s practices are central to many of the processes that construct masculinities – as mothers, girlfriends, sexual partners, wives and so forth. However, new configurations of women’s identity and practice, especially among younger women, have to be considered as well (ibid).

3.6.2 Theorising symbolic violence

South African customary communities are based on the assumption of the naturalness of the two genders and the natural superiority of the men over the woman. Their social formation is characterised by hegemonic masculinity and a permanence of sexual

structure perpetuated by a range of gendered (ritual) practices (often tied to biology as Mager (1996) has illustrated). To understand how the imposition of such arbitrary constructions is continuously sustained, Bourdieu offers the concept of symbolic violence. This concept shifts the focus to the effects of dominant socio-cultural practices on those who are dominated in order to secure their compliance.

In his analysis of *Masculine domination*⁶³ Bourdieu (2001:1–2) conceptualises gender with symbolic violence, “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition, recognition, or even feeling”. His analysis concludes that there is a relative permanence of sexual structures, which are difficult to change. He analyses the historical mechanisms responsible for the relative dehistoricisation and eternalisation of the sexual division (*eternalising the arbitrary* relationship of domination of men over women), which appear as natural and are present in the habitus⁶⁴ of the agents as schemes for perception, thought and action.

... thoughts and perceptions are structured in accordance with the very structures of the relation of domination that is imposed on them [the dominated], their acts of *cognition* are, inevitably, acts of *recognition*, submission” (ibid:13; emphasis in the original).

The particular strength of the masculine domination derives from two operations: *it legitimates a relationship of domination by embedding it in a biological nature that is itself a naturalized social construction* (ibid:2; emphasis in the original).

The effect of symbolic domination is exerted through habitus, below the level of the decisions of consciousness, and secures the victim’s complicity; its efficacy is durably and deeply embedded in the body in the form of dispositions.

⁶³ First published in France in 1998.

⁶⁴ Bourdieu’s definition of habitus is given on p. 102.

[W]omen comprehend all reality, and in particular power relations in which they are held, through schemes of thought that are the product of embodiment of those power relations and which are expressed in the founding oppositions of the symbolic order. It follows that their acts of cognition are acts of practical recognition, doxic acceptance, a belief that does not need to be thought and affirmed as such, and which in a sense ‘makes’ the symbolic violence which it undergoes (ibid:33–34).

Women learn self-denial, resignation and silence. Only a radical transformation of the social conditions for producing the dispositions that lead the dominated to take the points of view of the dominant can break the relation of complicity. For Bourdieu, only political action that takes account of all the effects of domination that are wielded through the interplay between the structures embodied in both women and men and the structures of the major social institutions will be able to overcome masculine domination (ibid:117).

Chambers (2005) argues that Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of masculine domination and MacKinnon’s radical feminist analysis have much in common, and that, in fact, Bourdieu’s analysis of gender echoes the work of earlier radical feminists, particularly MacKinnon:

Both thinkers deny the naturalness of sexual difference and its accompanying hierarchies. Both conceptualize gender in terms of the power that infiltrates people’s minds and bodies, operating through their everyday experiences and desires, and both identify embodied phenomena such as sexuality and the habitus as the connection between the individual and the social structures in which she operates and is dominated (ibid:343).

The concept of embodiment is central for both MacKinnon and Bourdieu. In MacKinnon’s theory it is the central role that sexuality plays in women’s incorporated experience of the world; in Bourdieu’s theory it is the notion of habitus that captures the way power relations inscribe upon the bodies and dispositions of individuals (cf. McNay, 1999:99). McNay (1999; 2000; 2003) became particularly attracted by Bourdieu’s concept of habitus and the field for conceptualising the tension between structure and agency and the issue of change within gender relations. Although she attaches value to the poststructural problematisation of identity and rejects accounts of agency that rely on a dualism of male dominance and female subordination, she criticises – by alluding to

Butler's work – theories “which overestimate the extent to which individuals living in post-traditional order are able to reshape identity ... and understand gender identity as a form of symbolic identification rather than as a deeply entrenched form of embodied existence” (McNay, 1999:113).⁶⁵ For McNay, contextualising agency within power relations remains necessary.⁶⁶ I will follow her assumption in my analysis and therefore omit postmodern approaches such as, for instance, Butler's idea of performative agency. However, agency has been an essential theme in social and much feminist theory and in the following section I will outline certain conceptualisations of agency which I assume as central for my study.

3.7 Conceptualisations of agency

The issue of women's sexual agency is the central object of investigation in my research. To have power and agency in a context of a widespread HIV/AIDS epidemic can mean the difference between living and dying. It was radical feminism in particular that conceptualised the patriarchal impact on women's sexual agency arguing that patriarchy has profoundly undermined women in their achievement of sexual agency and their right to enjoy the full potential of one's body for health, procreation and sexuality (see for instance MacKinnon, 1987; Daly, 1978). In other words, a woman has an irreducible right to the integrity of her physical person and a right not to be alienated from her sexual

⁶⁵ For Butler (1990:144–145) the question of agency is reformulated as a question of how signification and resignification work. Signification in this sense refers to a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules. “... ‘agency’, then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition. If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, i.e., new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (ibid:145; emphasis in the original). Butler's (ibid:147) notion of identity as generated “opens up possibilities of ‘agency’ that are insidiously foreclosed by positions that take identity categories as foundational and fixed”. But deconstruction and so represented infinite possibilities (Zalewski, 2000:44) of female subjectivity are at the same time the point of critique.

⁶⁶ In her book on *Gender and Agency* McNay (2000) discusses and brings together the work of leading feminist theorists (i.e. Butler, Fraser) with the work of key social theorists (i.e. Bourdieu, Ricoeur) in order to reformulate theories of agency in feminist thinking. She advocates a more generative account of agency, arguing that much work on the formation of the modern subject had offered a primarily negative account of agency (for example in the works of Foucault and Lacan). The paradigm of subjectification thought agency/action mainly through residual categories of resistance to or dislocation of dominant norms which left the capabilities of individuals to respond to difference in a more creative fashion unexplored. McNay outlines a broader and more creative notion of agency.

and reproductive capacity (Correa & Petchesky, 2003:94).⁶⁷

It is the interconnection between structure and agency that defines an agent's choices. As discussed in chapter 2, in sexist customary communities constraints to women's sexual agency are manifold. As decisive factors in determining women's scope of and capacity for sexual agency in intimate partnerships, I defined firstly the presence or absence of intimate partner violence and, secondly, economic and socio-cultural constraints. Yet, throughout this research I maintain that even under most constrained conditions there is still the potential for agency even though this may be minimal. Also, the issue of agency raises the issue of resistance and change. In my research context this is related to the exploration of the question as to whether the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had transformative effects within gender relations on the micro-level in the context of South Africa's social transformation. Woman (and men) may – in order to avoid HIV infection – resist the traditional gender arrangements if they are paired with irresponsible sexual behaviour and thus destabilise old notions of femininity and masculinity.

3.7.1 Agency, structure and practice

Agency has long been a concern for feminist research devoted to “uncovering of the marginalized experiences of women. These experiences attest to the capacity for autonomous action in the face of often overwhelming cultural sanctions and structural inequalities” (McNay, 2000:10). My study therefore contextualises agency within power relations since it is guided by approaches that conceptualise gender in terms of unequal power relations and that view phenomena of embodiment (e.g. sexuality) as the connection between social structure and the individual.

⁶⁷ Correa and Petchesky (2003:94; emphasis in the original) understood bodily integrity as “a woman's right *not to be alienated from her sexual and reproductive capacity* (e.g., through coerced sex or marriage, ...[genital mutilation], denial of access to birth control, sterilization without informed consent, prohibition on homosexuality) and ... her right to the *integrity of her physical person* (e.g., freedom from sexual violence, from false imprisonment from the home, from unsafe contraceptive methods, from unwanted pregnancies or coerced childbearing, from unwanted medical inventions).

I will present theories that comprehend a concept of agency through the idea of embodiment and as being inseparable from social practice. Giddens and Bourdieu in particular tie structure and practice together, that is, the presence of structure in practice and the constitution of structure by practice. In radical feminist theory the focus is on the possibility for change in the underlying social structures through consciousness-raising.

In his *structuration theory* Giddens (1986)⁶⁸ develops the idea of the ‘duality of structure’; structure is both the medium and the outcome of the practices that constitute and reproduce structures. Agency and structure stand in a relationship; agency cannot exist or be analysed separately from structure:

One of the main propositions of structuration theory is that the rules and resources drawn upon in the production and reproduction of social action are at the same time the means of system reproduction (the duality of structure) (ibid:19).

The constitution of agents and structures are not independent phenomena but represent duality. Structure, as a set of rules, is not external to individuals and in a certain sense more internal than exterior to their activities. One of Giddens’s main questions is in what manner the conduct of individual actors reproduces the structural properties of a larger collective (ibid:24). Giddens (ibid:10) applied agency not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place which is why agency implies power. What an agent ‘does’ has to be separated from what is ‘intended’; agency refers to doing. “Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently” (ibid:9). The consequences of what actors do, intentionally or unintentionally, are events which would not have happened if that actor had behaved differently, but which are not within the scope of the agent’s power to have brought about. “In most spheres of life, and in most forms of activity, the scope of control is limited to the immediate contexts of action or interaction” (ibid:11). However, the social system, that is, bounded social practices that link people across time and space, is

⁶⁸ First published in 1984.

reproduced by means of knowledgeable individual agency. For Giddens it is very important to notice that circumstances of social constraint in which individuals have ‘no choice’ are not to be equated with the dissolution of action as such (cf. *ibid*:14–15).

Complementary to Giddens, Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus to explain the way in which social norms become embedded in individuals.

The structures constitutive of a particular environment ... produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without any way being the product of obedience of rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends ... (Bourdieu, 1977:72; emphasis in the original).

Habitus connects the individual and the social structure and constrains the individual’s actions. An individual’s habitus develops in response to the social sphere in which the individual lives and acts, that is, the field. The agent is socialised in a field, he or she accommodates to the roles in the context of his/her position in the field. Thus, a field is a sphere of action that places certain limits on those who act within it, according to their status within the field. That status in turn is determined by the capital, or the collection of resources, the individual has (Chambers, 2005:330–331). For Bourdieu, each agent produces and reproduces objective meaning. Because the agent’s actions and works are the product of a “*modus operandi*” (Bourdieu, 1977:79; emphasis in the original) of which he or she is not the producer and has no conscious control of, they contain “objective intention” (*ibid*) which always outruns his or her conscious intentions.

The more stable the objective structures are and the more they reproduce themselves in the agent’s dispositions, “the greater the extent of the field of the doxa, of that what is taken for granted” (*ibid*:166). In other words people become accustomed to the circumstances under which they live and repeat them more or less unquestioningly.

The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective

structures, destroys self-evidence practically. It is when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon that the question of the natural or conventional character (*phusei* or *nomos*) of social facts can be raised. ... Crisis is a necessary condition for questioning of doxa but is not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of critical discourse (ibid:168–169; emphasis in the original).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus and the social field offers useful insights for feminists on the issue of power and agency (McNay, 1999; Chambers, 2005). For McNay, the force of Bourdieu's idea of the field is that it locates agency in the context of material and social forces but, in so far as it expresses a principle of differentiation, it replaces an uni-directional determinism with a generative logic:

It is the idea of the practical anticipation of the immanent tendencies of a social field that generates Bourdieu's concept of agency. Praxis, or the living through of the embodied potentialities of the *habitus*, is a temporal activity where time is understood in radically historicist terms as engendered through social being (McNay, 2000:162; emphasis in the original).

The practical activity of an agent thus involves present, past and future. Praxis is conditioned by the 'structuring structures' from which they emerge, and, as generative process, produce habitus. In other words, practice is the result of habitus, whereby habitus incorporates the temporality of structures into the body.

While the fit between habitus and the field reinforces a person's position in the hierarchy, the disjunction between field and habitus offers opportunities for change (Chambers, 2005:340). Yet, by stressing the pervasiveness of male domination across fields, Bourdieu sees the gendered habitus as being less susceptible to change than is the habitus more generally (ibid:343).

In contrast, Connell's gender theory (1987, 1995; 2002) comprehends agency as the cause for transformations in gender relations and embeds a historical view of gender. This claims the interconnection of agency–body–social practice, that is, the significance of the materiality of the body, a relationship between agency and body (as an activity of the body) and body and social practice (they construct social structure). Connell

(1995:61) sees bodies as “both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined”, and terms it *body-reflexive practice*.

Through body-reflexive practices, bodies are addressed by social process and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies. They do not turn into symbols, signs or positions in discourse. Their materiality (including material capacities to engender, to give birth, to give milk, to menstruate, to open, to penetrate, to ejaculate) is not erased, it continues to matter. The *social* process of gender includes childbirth and child care, youth and ageing, the pleasures of sport and sex, labour, injury, death from AIDS (ibid:64–65; emphasis in the original).

Through body-reflexive practices, more than individual lives are formed because they involve social relations and symbolism; they form a social world (ibid:64). However, the relationships between different practices and the larger social structure are not elaborated coherently. In the reformulated concept it has been suggested that greater emphasis should be placed on women’s agency as well as recognising the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:848).

3.7.2 Reflexivity and resistance

Radical feminists argued that all men profit from patriarchal systems of oppression and therefore all men are accountable for their continuance. For this reason, the policy of individual acts of resistance by women in their personal lives was seen as an important precursor to collective activism. Radical feminism, perhaps more than any other strand, has tried to define feminist politics as a complete way of life, from sharing experiences in consciousness-raising sessions, to living under degrees of separatism in communes and collectives (cf. Whelehan, 1995:85–87).

One specific practice of knowledge-building especially in the 1970s ... was ‘consciousness-raising groups’. This simply meant groups of women got together in informal settings to talk about their lives in a supportive environment ... the specific idea behind conscious-raising (CR) was that theory grows out of feelings and experience, and that women speaking together can generate political change (ibid:50).

For MacKinnon (1989), in particular, consciousness-raising is a fundamental feminist

method used to unpack gender hierarchies – a form of political practice that induces the transformation of women’s experience from silence to voice. “As Marxist method is dialectical materialism, feminist method is consciousness raising: the *collective* critical reconstitution of the meaning of women’s social experience, as women live through it” (ibid:83; emphasis put B.T.). MacKinnon (ibid:87) acknowledges that a first step in the process is to connect and learn to trust, as well as to create a respectful context for interchange “within which women can articulate the inarticulate ...”. One effect of consciousness-raising is that “[r]ealities hidden under layers of valued myth were unmasked simply by talking about what happens every day” (ibid:89), and thus constituting a lived knowing of the social reality of being female. Consciousness-raising discovers that male power is internalised by women, reaffirmed and reinforced, “necessary compliance” to avoid punishment (ibid:100).

“Consciousness raising is a face-to-face social experience that strikes at the fabric of meaning social of social relations between and among women and men by calling their givenness into question and reconstituting their meaning in a transformed and critical way” (ibid:95).

Consciousness-raising offered women the opportunity to share and analyse experiences and to develop strategies for countering oppression, and thus added a new dimension to the growth of feminist politics (cf. Whelehan, 1995:71–72).

In a study on “Peer education, gender and the development of critical consciousness: participatory HIV prevention by South African youth” Campbell and McPhail (2002:333) argue – by adopting ideas of Freire – that a precondition for positive behaviour change by marginalised social groups is the development of a “critical consciousness”, for example an intellectual understanding of the way in which factors such as poverty and gender shape experiences.

According to Freire, the development of critical consciousness involves people moving through a series of stages. The first of these is ‘intransitive thought’, characterized by naive rather than critical consciousness. At this stage people lack insight into the way in which their social conditions undermine their well-being, and do not see their own actions as capable of changing their conditions. The final stage is that of ‘critical transitivity’. This stage is characterized by the dynamic interaction

between critical thought and critical action triggered by the ability to think holistically and critically about one's condition. A critically transitive thinker is empowered to critically reflect on the conditions that shape his or her life, and to work collectively to change these conditions on the basis of such critical insight (ibid:334).

In consequence this may lead to an insight that existing norms can be changed, as well as scenarios for alternative ways of being. And it may promote a context within which people can collectively develop the belief and confidence in their power to resist dominant gender norms in the interests of being able to assert their sexual health (ibid).

According to Freire, life situations characterised by exploitation and oppression lead to the development of adapted consciousness rather than critical consciousness. Adapted consciousness refers to a state where “a person accommodates to conditions imposed on them, and acquires an authoritarian and a-critical frame of mind” (Freire, 1993:23 cited in Campbell & MacPhail, 2002:334). Therefore, on the one hand, sexual non-agency can become evident through women's limited ability to reflect critically on their life conditions and instead show conformity with the patriarchal modes of oppression, such as, for instance, patriarchal codes of sexual conduct. On the other hand, sexual non-agency can be linked to what Carole Sheffield calls – following the tradition of radical feminism – *sexual terrorism*:

Violence and the threat of violence against females represent the need of patriarchy to deny that a woman's body is her own property and that no one should have access to it without her consent. Violence and its corollary, fear, serve to terrorise females and to maintain the patriarchal definition of woman's place. ... But there is a different kind of terrorism, one that so pervades our culture that we have learned to live with it as though it were the natural order of things. Its target is females - of all ages, races, and classes. It is the common characteristic of rape, wife battery, incest, pornography, harassment, and all forms of sexual violence. I call it *sexual terrorism* because it is a system by which males frighten, and by frightening, control and dominate females (Sheffield, 2004:409–410; emphasis in the original).

As already mentioned, a recent impulse to revisit the radical feminist claim that normative heterosexuality is crucial for the maintenance of female subordination came from Miriam (2007). To ground her argument, she engages a phenomenological description of women's lived experience of sexual agency within hetero-relations.

Miriam views agency from a perspective that distinguishes it in the ontological sense of how a human subject lives through her or his situation from freedom as a capacity to co-create (and transform) one's situation. From this perspective, there is no paradox in the idea of a female agency that reproduces or re-entrenches rather than overcomes domination, coercion, or victimisation. In order to elaborate this concept of agency, she argues that feminism needs to revive rather than “jettison” (ibid:213) the concept of sex-right. Miriam maintains that women's sexual agency within hetero-relations today presupposes men's sex-right. As women and girls are increasingly positioned as the autonomous negotiators of or decision makers in heterosexual relations, men's sex-right becomes less intelligible at an explicit level. Sex-right becomes an invisible background of power presupposed by women's choice to negotiate sex. Only by critically describing this reality can we truly distinguish an agency defined by choosing the terms of a given historical/sexual situation (defined by women's subordination) from a freedom defined by women's ability to co-create and transform this historical/sexual situation. In my research context and in terms of my research question, Miriam's view of agency is of central importance.

3.8 Conclusion – defining my position

In this conclusion I spell out the theoretical framework which I will use to analyse my data. It is a hybrid of concepts from different theoretical perspectives which I deem pertinent for exploring women's agency in private intimate relationships in the context of an HIV/AIDS pandemic. The HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa is gendered, posing a crisis for women who are more vulnerable. To address this gendered vulnerability to HIV infection I work from a framework that reflects on gender inequality between women and men. My theoretical position is guided by modern feminist theories that focus on the gender system, gender power dynamics and sexual politics (Millett, 1970; Rubin, 1975). I follow in the tradition of radical feminists, focusing on the personal as a key site for political action who theorise male sex-right, heterosexuality and women's compliance in male dominance (Daly, 1978; Rich, 1986a; MacKinnon, 1989). I view these notions as important aspects in intimate partnership and as crucial for understanding the partnership

experiences of the women in the study. MacKinnon's (1989) theory of sexuality is of particular value for my analysis. She positions sexuality within the social hierarchy of men over women, thus alluding to the key role gender inequality plays in shaping sexuality. However, to avoid radical feminisms' weaknesses and shortcomings I incorporate concepts from other theoretical positions. The issue of women's compliance with patriarchal values and male dominance and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus (i.e. schemes for perception, thought and action) and symbolic violence (violence below the level of consciousness) are of particular significance to my study, as they form a link between social structure and the individual. To account for the relational and historical context of gender, that is, differences of socio-culture, time and location and the plurality of identities, I consider insights of difference theory and Connell's gender theory. Finally based on these conceptualisations, I contextualise agency as being located within power relations and as being inseparable from social practice.

In the chapter I discussed main tenets of modernist and postmodernist theories and implications of the paradigm shift from inequality to difference. Both strands of theories contain a variety of views. I favoured modern feminist approaches for the purpose of this study, particularly concepts developed by radical feminists. Because of the relevance of liberal feminism as a kind of mainstream feminism in many parts of the political world I outlined distinctions between liberal and radical feminist theory to substantiate why I view radical feminist ideas as useful for this study. Liberal feminism aims to achieve the equality of men and women through political and legal reforms without changing the structure of society putting emphasis on equal rights and individual choices. On the other hand, radical feminism focuses on the personal lives of women, on areas such as sexuality, male violence and reproduction claiming that 'the personal is political'. As expressed by Whelehan (1995:76), radical feminists politicised "sacred spheres of liberal individualism", and it is in this regard that I see the particular value of this theory. Such feminists comprehend the body as the site of women's difference, oppression and exploitation; and argue for separatism of the sexes and revolutionary change. Consciousness raising is seen as an important means for developing strategies to encounter women's oppression. In the data analysis, I will consider these notions of

radical feminism particularly.

The main critique levelled against radical feminist thought referred to its a-historical (mainly by Marxist/socialist feminists who specifically consider the importance of economic inequality under capitalism) and essentialist tendencies and the universalising notion that *all* women are victims of *all* men in terms of male power (mainly by women of colour and third-world feminists). The discourses reflected on differences between women that emerge in specific (local) contexts including intersections of gender with other axes of inequality. For example, Marxist and socialist feminists postulate that women of the working class have more in common with working class men than with women from the ruling class, whereas women of colour and third-world feminists may postulate that black women have more in common with black men than with white (middle-class) women. To counter the critique of over-simplification directed at radical feminism, I am careful to recognise the relational and historical context in which gender emerges. The work of difference theorists (Spelman, 1988; Minh-ha, 1989; Collins, 1990; Narayan, 1997; Mohanty, 2004), in particular, is useful in avoiding the trap of essentialism as well as the work of Connell (1987; 1995; 2002), Bourdieu (2001) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) which complement feminist theories bringing in the roles of men and consider also the historicity of gender relations. In terms of my data analysis it means firstly, to incorporate the impact of the specific South African historical context of the transition from apartheid to a liberal democratic state amidst an HIV/AIDS pandemic on the lives of the participants in their local context. Secondly it means to reflect on my own location in relation to the participants.

Working as a white Western European woman on the experiences of rural South African black women not only requires reflection on privilege and power in the research process (cf. chapter 4.2.2) but also reflection on both the category 'race' as discussed in black feminist thought (e.g. Spelman, 1988; Davis, 1981; Collins, 1990) and the reproduction of colonial modes of representation and cultural reductionism as reflected by difference theorists such as Narayan (1997) and Mohanty (1991; 2004). A basic critique in this respect is the representation of Third-World women as equally oppressed, as powerless

and as “victims of”. African scholar Oyewùmi (cf. 2003b:27–28), for instance, blames Western feminist scholarship for creating its very own “downtrodden” African woman. Furthermore, in difference theory the assumption that envisages women as a coherent group with identical interests, as a stable category that can be applied universally and cross-culturally, is strongly rejected. Instead, there is a focus on the variety of women’s statuses and roles according to class and culture and the particular local context – feminist analysis can only study a historically specific reality of particular *groups* of women. Secondly, black feminist scholars discard white Western feminists’ (e.g. Firestone, 1971; Millett, 1970; Daly, 1973; Lerner, 1993) claim that sexism is more fundamental than racism because such a notion totally fails to describe black women’s experiences. Being female and *black* is comprehended as a qualitatively different experience to being female and *white*.

In sum, according to an additive analysis of sexism and racism, all women are oppressed by sexism; some women are further oppressed by racism. Such an analysis distorts Black women’s experiences of oppression by failing to note important differences between the contexts in which Black women and white women experience sexism (Spelman, 2001[1988]:81).

In other words, the impact of ‘race’ makes experiences of oppression different for black and white women. I agree with such a view and I do not. Indeed, on the matrix of domination, South African rural black women experience multiple forms of oppression in terms of gender, class and race – particularly in relation to the apartheid legacy and the colonial legacy (imperialism). Yet, as I contend at the beginning of this chapter, I regard gender as the primary form of oppression, and in utilising a framework of modernist thought with regard to concepts of radical feminism, I seem to have fallen back into ‘white solipsism’. It would seem that this is a dilemma that cannot be resolved, as I feel confronted with “the paradox at the heart of feminism”:

With a variety of experiences shaped along axes of domination that intertwine with gender, then, as Elisabeth Spelman has so eloquently noted, ‘the paradox at the heart of feminism’ is how to weigh the things that women have in common with the differences among us (McCann & Kim, 2003:21).

However, I find support for my position and congruence of thinking in Maynard’s

(2001[1994]) line of argumentation grappling with the “dangers of difference” (ibid:128). Like gender, ‘race’ is not a coherent category and entails diversity and differentiation. A strong argument Maynard makes in this context is that if so many forms of difference are created it becomes impossible to analyse them in terms of inequality or power (ibid:129). As a result, there is “the danger of being unable to offer any interpretations that reach beyond the circumstances of the peculiar” (ibid). Furthermore, pluralistic assumptions of difference tend “to emphasize what divides women, at the expense of those experiences that they might possibly share or have in common” (ibid). For Maynard it is evident that women share experiences across cultures – such as sexual “terrorism” I would argue – and she rejects the abandonment of categories, such as woman or ‘race’, in order to recognise that they are internally differentiated (ibid).

While it is clear that universalizations, with their implications for the whole world, are untenable, it is possible to talk in qualified terms about general properties, and through comparison to highlight differences and similarities, where these clearly arise from substantive material (ibid:131).

Maynard in conclusion agrees with approaches that concentrate on culturally and historically specific circumstances and discards grand abstract theorising, an idea with which I concur, although I have conceptualised and developed my own research from a position influenced by modern feminist thought, by radical feminism in particular.

In the tradition of modernist feminism I reject the omission of the category ‘woman’ and instead see women’s (shared) experience as a starting point for my analysis. I argue that I view gender inequality as a material social relation of power and women’s liberation from male domination as a persisting aim of feminist politics. HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa has brought such shared experiences to light and some African feminists have called for a theorisation of sexuality and violence in this respect. Such concepts have been provided by radical feminists and the concept of male sex-right is of particular importance for a problematisation of sexual agency in intimate partnerships. Notwithstanding, I have attempted to integrate some insights of the postcolonial critics into my research. Firstly, I will use a case study research design to investigate a particular local context which is characterised by the important role played by tradition and

religion, the concomitance of African traditional and Christian worldview notions. Further, I will study women of a particular social class and ethnicity (poor South African rural black women) in a specifically historical situation, namely the transition to a democratic state and the concurrent occurrence of a ravaging HIV/AIDS pandemic. Haraway's concept of situated knowledges will be important for my understanding and interpretation of the study informants' experiences.

Given such a specific context, postfeminists would argue that we cannot assume in advance what the meaning of the category 'woman' ('women') is. They would enquire about shared forms of social oppression rather than shared identities and see identity as a process of permanent performance reflecting complex structures, process, and discourse, and gender as a contingent concept (cf. Butler, 1990). I would argue that only if gender refers to some social classification like 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Oakley, 1985[1972]:16) can we understand persistent gender inequality and male dominance. On the matrix of domination I see women's primary oppression in terms of gender and conform to the radical feminist's argument which claims that male dominance is sexual and that all women live under the condition of sexual "terrorism" across class, across culture and even across time. MacKinnon uses the compelling image of a fish in the water to describe her belief that all women live under the threat of sexual abuse (MacKinnon, 1989:149). It is my personal conviction that the experience of male sexual domination (in the widest sense) is the foundation for vindicating the retention of a unified notion of the category woman, and that the latter is indispensable in an analysis dealing in the context of HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, since the pandemic has brought women's shared harmful experiences in the sexual realm cutting across class to the fore (notwithstanding that low-income women appear more vulnerable). Notwithstanding, I reject the notion of women as totally powerless and presume that even within pervasive patriarchal structures and most constrained social conditions, women are not mere victims – they most definitely resist, challenge, or subvert in relations of domination. Furthermore, women's compliance in relations of domination was discussed as a significant aspect for perpetuating patriarchal rule and, in this context, I considered theories of masculinities to refine my position.

This chapter also explored conceptualisations of agency in relation to the research question. Guided by my theoretical framework I contextualised agency within power relations and presented conceptualisations of agency through the idea of embodiment and as being inseparable from social practice (Connell, 1995; Giddens, 1986; Bourdieu, 2001). According to radical feminist theory, sexual “terrorism” constitutes one aspect of women’s reality in a patriarchal social order and a major constraint to women’s sexual agency on the level of embodied practice.

Full sexual agency means enjoying the full potential of one’s body – while the violation of sexual rights undermines a person’s agency considerably. Agency in intimate partnerships in a context of a sexually transmitted lethal disease is of enormous relevance in terms of, firstly, sexual consent and, secondly, negotiating safer sex. However, the scope within which individuals have to make choices is limited by structural constraints, for instance social norms and traditional values that are embedded in individuals (habitus) or constraints such as severe poverty. And yet, structure and action exist as a result of each other (duality of structure), and structures can be modified by the agency of individuals. The more stable structures are and the more reproduced in the agent’s disposition, however, the greater the extent of the field of doxa, of that what is taken for granted. In a traditional culture the ‘naturalisation’ of the two genders and the natural superiority of the men over the women is taken for granted. In terms of sexuality this is translated into male sex-right oppressing women’s sexual autonomy. The scope for agency is thus strictly determined by sex. It is in this context that Miriam (2007:213) suggests viewing agency from a perspective that distinguishes the extent to which an agent lives through her situation from freedom to co-create or even to transform one’s situation, an idea I will follow up in my study. If norms that undermine women’s sexual health are to be transformed the development of a critical consciousness is essential (Freire, 1993). One method for raising critical thinking and enhancing women’s agency is consciousness-raising groups which enable women to share and analyse their experiences and which constitute a form of collective political practice (MacKinnon, 1989). I conclude with a question inspired by Armas (2007:19): If sexuality is an issue that enables people to work with politics at a very personal level, can it make space for a

transformative process of self-reflection that leads to social action in an environment imbued by traditional beliefs and practices?

Chapter 4: Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

My study as a whole follows a feminist research approach, which is guided by feminist theory. As gender is common to the various feminist approaches, I view it as a fundamental category of social order and thus object of research, informed by social scientific theories. Since feminist approaches “could align themselves with a range of critical traditions within science” (Gildemeister, 2004:124), feminism and feminist research can be subsumed under the critical social science approach.⁶⁹ Critical social science embraces all theories and approaches that are critical of society and have as their aim social change. Critique of women’s oppression is inseparable from feminism and provides the basis of my own feminist stance. For many years now my vision has been to change oppressive gender relations.

One of the reasons for conducting my research study stems from observations I made after having visited and worked in a South African black township and a rural community over the years. During that time, I recognised the key role that gender power relations and poverty play in the HIV/AIDS epidemic. During conversations with a number of women, they articulated a kind of helplessness about protecting themselves from HIV infection and many disclosed their experiences of coerced sex. These discussions aroused my interest in investigating issues of power and oppression, agency and compliance in intimate partnerships within a feminist framework.

In this chapter, I will firstly reflect on the theoretical paradigm of feminist research that shapes this study because feminist research has some characteristics that differ from traditional research and that are not uncontested. Secondly, I will discuss epistemological issues and the theory that informed the research, as well as my own role in the research

⁶⁹ “Gorelick criticised the affinity of many feminist researchers for interpretive social science. She feels that ISS becomes limited to the consciousness of those being studied and fails to reveal hidden structures. Gorelick wants feminist researchers to adopt a more critical approach and to advocate social change more assertively” (Neuman, 2000:83; cf. Gorelick, 1991).

and issues of representation, as epistemological positions influence the questions we ask and the decisions we make about method. Thirdly, I will present the research methodology and the decision-making processes that shaped the research design. The chapter also includes a description of the specific context of the geographical area chosen for the case study.

4.2 Theoretical paradigm: feminist research and epistemological reflections

4.2.1 What makes feminist research feminist?

According to Harding, the defining features of feminist research are studying women from their perspectives, recognising the researcher as part of the research subject and acknowledging that the beliefs of the researcher shape the research (Harding, 1987b; 1991). While the first aspect is the point of origin of this study, the other two are epistemological questions that I will address in this chapter, namely issues concerning the relationship between the researcher and the researched regarding knowledge production and representation.

Methodologically, feminist research differs from traditional research in so far as women's research often applies qualitative research methods, arguing that they are more adequate for comprehending women's complex realities. One important point of critique of quantitative methods for feminist sociologists concerns the objectification of the research subjects. Ann Oakley, for example, challenges masculine assumptions about 'proper interviews' and instead favours a non-hierarchical and friendly relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, the researcher and the researched (Oakley, 1981; Doucet & Mauthner, 2007:39). Later, and in critique of this position, feminists made a considerable contribution to qualitative research methods by highlighting the inevitability of power dynamics between the researcher and the research participant in the research process and in the production of research data. One way of producing ethical feminist research, therefore, is through the use of reflexivity techniques (cf. Ramazanoglu & Holland,

2002), that is, locating the self within the research process, acknowledging the values of the researcher and reflecting on feminist principles.

However, a controversial debate revolves around the question of whether there is a feminist methodology at all. A symposium on “Feminist Theory Construction and Research Methodology”, held in 2002, debated the wide-ranging perspectives of feminist epistemology and methodology with the aim of questioning what bridges the interests of both gender theory and research methods.

The position held by Saltzman Chafetz, one of the key speakers, was primarily positivist. While social theory and, in particular, philosophy were not designed to be explicitly tested against data, social science uses systematic approaches with regard to the empirical world and its methodologies include issues of research design and techniques of data collection and analysis. Thus, social scientific methodology is a “tool kit of techniques” for accessing the empirical world, and the idea of feminist methodology in the social sciences and behavioural sciences is “fundamentally untenable” (Saltzman Chafetz, 2004:971). In her view, “there is no one way to do theory or research that is feminist”, that is “essential nonsense” (ibid:976).

Baber (2004:981–982) articulates a contrasting position, highlighting the political component of feminist research. Baber believes that feminism is a perspective, not a method per se, and that there is a feminist methodology. For Baber, feminist research is distinguishable from other perspectives not by the methods it uses but rather by the underlying assumptions, the questions asked, the investigations of the antecedents and the consequences of gender, and a commitment to using knowledge to improve women’s lives. Furthermore, in order to put emphasis on women’s everyday experiences, feminist research has used new kinds of enquiry like discourse analysis, concept mapping, life narratives, case studies, focus groups, and the collective drama approach (ibid:979). Baber’s view is supported by Allen (2004), who sketches three main features of feminist scholarship that have transformed social science in the past decades:

First, feminist approaches to social science have brought new empirical and theoretical resources by bringing women's voices and experiences into the center of analysis, often for the first time. Second, feminist enquiry is designed and conducted to meet the needs and concerns of women, in contrast to traditional social science and medical research, which has been, and often continues to be, for the needs and concerns of men. Third, feminist inquiry has exposed the falsity of the sanitized research report so that now the role of researcher as an invisible, distanced observer, whose subjectivity is not even noticed, is no longer tolerable (ibid:986).

My own position is congruent with that of Baber and Allen. The argumentation of Saltzman Chafetz is for me "untenable" because it does not consider the political component nor the innovative contributions of feminist research. I believe that a major tenet of feminist methodology is that, by starting with women's everyday experiences, it gives women a voice and corrects the male-oriented perspective that has predominated in the development of social science (Neuman, 2000:82).

A good overview, reflecting my own position of what constitutes feminist research, is given in an essay by Brayton (1997): What makes feminist research uniquely feminist are the motives, concerns and knowledge brought to the research process, and the fact that feminist beliefs are the guiding framework for the research process. Feminism takes women as its starting point, seeking to explore and uncover patriarchal social dynamics and relationships from the perspective of women. Feminism addresses the power imbalances between women and men and between women as active agents in the world. Feminist research seeks to include feminism in the process, to focus on the meaning women give to their world while recognising that research as a process is contained in the same patriarchal relations. Feminist research is research that uses feminist principles throughout all stages of research, from the choice of topic to the presentation of data (cf. ibid:no page number).

These feminist principles guided my research and the decisions I made during the research process. In addition, as postmodernist feminist epistemologies have drawn attention to the concept of reflexivity and to the role of the researcher in constructing knowledge (Doucet & Mautner, 2007:37–38), I am aware of the importance of reflexivity with regard to my own role in the research process in terms of (1) the relationship with

the research subjects and (2) the influence I have on shaping the research process, the interpretation of data and the research outcomes.

However, Millen (1997:no page number) suggests that too orthodox a definition of feminist research might inhibit rather than facilitate research and draws attention to the fact that “notions of conducting ‘feminist research’ may contain some unchallenged assumptions about who should be researched and which methodologies are used”. She therefore interrogated two key concepts in feminist research, that is, the empowerment of women and the equality of the research relationship in a population of women unsympathetic to feminism and constructions of gender. These elaborations were important for my study since I acted on the assumption that my informants would be unsympathetic to feminist views/feminism.

4.2.2 Epistemological reflections

Historically, social scientific research was conducted from the positivist epistemological position. A feminist response to positivism and androcentrism was initially feminist empiricism, basically adding women into research samples. The fact that feminist empiricism still relies on traditional methods and does not challenge the norms of science themselves is viewed by Harding (1991:113) as a strength since it leaves “intact much of scientists’ and philosophers’ conventional understanding of the principles of adequate research”. Feminist empiricists continue to work with the conventional methodology and thus gain acceptance in mainstream academia.

Harding (1986) proposes a classification of three types of feminist epistemology/enquiry resting on how these modes of enquiry relate to traditional science and the problem of objectivity: empiricism, standpoint theory and postmodernism. All three approaches to feminist epistemology embrace pluralism and reject totalising theories. *Empiricism* seeks standards, within a naturalised framework, for differentiating the circumstances in which situatedness generates error and in which it constitutes a resource that can be harnessed to

advance knowledge.⁷⁰ *Standpoint theory* identifies one particular social situation as epistemically privileged. *Postmodernism* rejects claims of epistemic privilege, emphasising instead the contingency and instability of the social identity of knowers, and consequently of their representations. The differences that remain among empiricists, feminist postmodernists and standpoint theorists partially reflect different choices of tools. Other differences reflect different attitudes towards and conceptions of objectivity (cf. Anderson, 2004).

Objectivity is linked to particular values, which enter the research process at every stage; research cannot be value-free (cf. Longino, 1990; 2002). The interpretations, values and interests of the researcher are central to the research process – values shape the enquiry. Researchers should therefore be reflexive in their work and document the research process, including the values that have guided the research and the impact of their role in the enquiry. I will address these issues below.

For standpoint feminists, poststructuralists and postmodernists, objectivity is not simply a value, but a concept linked to a particular historical doctrine of rationalism associated with the Enlightenment project (Williams & May, 1996:133). Feminist critique of objectivity has not been directed at objectivity per se, but against particular conceptions of objectivity, that is, errors and illegitimate biases in enquiry.⁷¹ In the context of feminist

⁷⁰ Empiricism assumes that experience provides the primary justification for all knowledge. Feminist empiricists are engaged in considering how feminist values can legitimately inform empirical inquiry, and how scientific methods can be improved in the light of feminist demonstrations of sex bias in currently accepted methods. Feminist empiricists are concerned with the impact of social practices relating to gender, race, class and other bases of inequality on enquiry. Most advocate a socialised epistemology, in which inquiry is treated as a fundamentally social process and the basic subjects of knowledge may even be communities or networks of individuals. The central problems of feminist empiricism can be captured in two apparent paradoxes: the paradoxes of bias and social construction (Anderson, 2004).

⁷¹ The conceptions of objectivity considered problematic by feminists include the following: (a) Subject-object dichotomy: what is really (“objectively”) real exists independently of knowers. (b) Perspectivity: “objective” knowledge is ascertained through “the view from nowhere”, a view that transcends or abstracts from our particular locations. (c) Detachment: knowers have an “objective” stance toward what is known when they are emotionally detached from it. (d) Value-neutrality: knowers have an “objective” stance toward what is known when they adopt a neutral attitude toward it, declining to judge it either good or bad. (e) Control: “objective” knowledge of an object (the way it “really” is) is attained by controlling it, especially by experimental manipulation, and observing the regularities it manifests under control. (f) External guidance: “objective” knowledge consists of representations whose content is dictated by the way things really are, not by the knower (Anderson, 2004).

knowledge, standpoint feminists formulated a different concept of objectivity instead: the role of experience in social life and scientific practice. Feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science have avoided ontological accounts (such as subject–object dichotomy), which define objectivity in terms of an a priori idea of what counts as really real, preferring to leave open to enquiry what sorts of entity exist. Instead, feminist conceptions of objectivity are procedural (cf. Anderson, 2004).

Feminist standpoint epistemologies were developed mainly by Hartsock (1983), Harding (1986), Smith (1987), Collins (1990) and MacKinnon (1993). “Building on a loosely related set of theoretical positions by feminist scholars from several disciplines, standpoint research ... took up the feminist criticism of the absence of women from or marginalized women in research accounts and foregrounded women’s knowledge as emergent from women’s situated experiences” (Olesen, 2005:245). Feminist standpoint epistemologies claim that “knowledge is born out of experience” and construct knowledge from the insights of women’s lives and experiences. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) state, knowledge can be produced from a feminist standpoint wherever women live in unequal gendered social relationships, and can develop a feminist political consciousness.⁷² The notion of an essentialist, universalised woman – a major critique of second-wave feminism – was replaced by the

... ideas of a situated woman with experiences and knowledge specific to her place in the material division of labor and the racial stratification systems. This implies that knowledge claims are socially located and that some locations, especially those at the bottom of social and economic hierarchies, are better than others as starting points for seeking knowledge not only about those particular women but others as well (Olesen, 2005:243–244).

For my research I adopt a ‘moderate’ feminist standpoint position because I believe in the claims that knowledge comes from experience, that women’s experiences differ from those of men and that women’s experiences are shaped by experiences of oppression.

⁷² Various different standpoint theories base the claim to epistemic privilege in different features of women’s social situation. Marxist feminists such as Hartsock (1987) see women as central to the system of reproduction. Collins (1990) grounded black feminist epistemology in black women’s personal experiences of racism and sexism.

However, I do not pursue a romanticised vision of the less powerful (cf. Haraway, 2003[1988]:395). My particular concern in this study was constructing knowledge from the insights into women's experiences; to research the lived experience of a group of African black women living in a rural South African community within the frame of standpoint epistemology. The focus of the research was rural African black women's capacity for sexual agency in their intimate partnerships and possible indications of change in the gender relations. By implying that knowledge claims are socially located, women's knowledge within such a frame is understood as coming from their position as the subject of domination; in this context the domination of a specific traditional patriarchal social order where men dominate women both in the public and the private spheres of life. To escape essentialism I adhere to the idea of a partial and located position for the knowing subject, of situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988), that is, referring to a specific time in history as well as a specific physical location. I wished to bring the women's voices and experiences into the centre of analysis. To my knowledge the women I interviewed had never before the opportunity to speak about their experiences.

Thus, this raises the important question of representation. As mentioned above, to reflect on power is a key feature of feminist research, particularly the question of *how* power influences knowledge production, construction processes and representation (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007:40). Critical questions – among others – which I will address one by one are: (1) who produces knowledge? (2) Can feminists in dominant cultures ever know subaltern cultures? (3) What is the role and representation of subordinate “others” in the production of knowledge (ibid)?

Even being an insider is not a straightforward route to knowing. Thus “the politics of speaking for, about, and on behalf of other women is one of the most contested areas in present day feminist activism and research” (Code, 1995:30 cited in Doucet & Mauthner, 2007:41).

4.2.2.1 Who produces knowledge? The insider–outsider position

There has been a long debate on the question of whether qualitative interviewing generates richer and more valid findings when it is conducted by “insiders” (i.e. researchers who belong to the same social or cultural group as the people being studied) or by “outsiders”, and this has been an important issue in feminist research for the past two decades. Increasing recognition has been given to the partiality of the researcher’s knowledge, which exists because of her/his “positionality”⁷³ relative to the research questions and relative to the subjects of the research (Rose, 2001:23).

Early feminist research highlighted the merits of the insider perspective:

For instance, it has been shown that the gender of the interviewer (the same or different from that of the interviewee) makes a difference to the content of the completed interview ... both parties may gain from the non-neutrality of the interviewer-interviewee interaction when the interviewer is a member of the same group as the interviewee and represents herself as such in the interview process, that is to say, when she is an “insider” (ibid:24).

However, as the debate advanced, the insider–outsider perspective also raised questions such as, for example, those raised succinctly by Acker:

When is [being an insider or an outsider] a key to insightful analysis? When does it stand in the way of clear thinking? How do we even know when we are inside or outside or somewhere in between? (Acker, 2000:190 cited in Rose, 2001:24).

Rose (2001:23) discusses the “‘insider–outsider’ conundrum in feminist interviewing”, and concludes that “strict prescriptions about method based on a rigid distinction between ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ are not all that helpful in developing research strategies on the ground”. Rose refers to Miles and Crush (1993), who show that the personal relations of the interviewee–interviewer dynamic are not reducible to the insider–outsider dimension. Even in the same interview, the degree of empathetic connection between researcher and researched can vary depending on the topic being discussed at that moment. Experience

⁷³ Positionality refers to the shaping of perspective by identifiers such as class, occupation, gender, race, sexual orientation etc. (or several of these in interaction with each other) as well as location in time and space; it affects the interviewer’s perspective and also that of the person being interviewed (Rose, 2001:23).

has made clear that neither gender nor skin colour (for instance) may be enough to establish an open exchange; rather researchers' identities can appear multidimensional to those whom they study, for instance, the researcher may represent the 'expert' knowledge of an academic institution, or a woman with some common interests like, for example, children, or a person with whom concerns can be talked about in a safe environment beyond the networks of local knowledge (Dyck, 1997 cited in Rose, 2001).⁷⁴ Hence, attempts have been made to move from a dualistic perspective to a more nuanced one such as the "outsider within" (Collins, 1991), where the researcher comes from the group being studied but has had experiences which set her apart from it in certain ways.

The only obvious commonalty I had with the interviewees was my gender, a fact which might become meaningful in the interview situation, where the sex of the interviewer and that of the participant possibly make a difference: "For a woman to be understood in a social research project, it may be necessary for her to be interviewed by a woman" (Reinharz, 1992:23).

In weighing up commonalities (gender) and differences (class, race, nationality), I define my role as researcher as that of an outsider. There has been substantial criticism of outsider research, which I had to consider. Bridges (2001:372) groups the critique into three kinds of arguments, namely epistemological, ethical and ethico-political arguments. Epistemological arguments highlight the fact that only insiders can properly represent the experiences of a community, ethical arguments emphasise that outsiders exploit participants in the communities they research for their own purposes and, finally, ethico-political arguments stress that outsider research disempowers participants since others articulate their views. What keeps the possibility of outsider research open is that it might enhance the understanding of (1) the researcher, (2) the community itself and (3) the wider public (ibid:381). Furthermore, a good argument Bridges makes and which pertains to my research is that "knowledge is not a competitive good ... it can be infinitely distributed without loss to any of those who are sharing it. Similarly the researcher can

⁷⁴ Naples (2004) discusses the implications of the insider/outsider distinction in ethnographic research. She recognises insiderness and outsidership not as fixed or static positions but rather as ever-shifting and permeable social locations.

acquire it from people without denying it from them and can return it enriched” (ibid: 382). In such a perspective outsider research is primarily concerned with the relationship between researcher and participants and should rigorously focus on ethical requirements such as respectful enquiry and avoiding harm to participants.

In the context of the research question, particularly with regard to the interview questions, some of which are sensitive in that they are linked to sexuality, HIV/AIDS and experiences of violence, I see my outsider position as beneficial. By not belonging to the group under study, I believed it was more likely that I would be given information that would not be given to an insider because of feelings of shame or fear of gossip. Overall, I was aware that the interviewees might suppress aspects of their experiences that they believed I could not comprehend or should not be told about.

I was aware of the power dynamics in the interview situation itself, which were linked to my position as a white foreigner (from a dominant culture), and supposedly economically privileged woman with a university education. In particular, when working in low-income communities and Third World countries, dilemmas such as those addressed by Wolf occur – as they did in my case – and have to be reflected on:

My research was an attempt to analyze and depict their lives, their situation, and their gruelling work of factory jobs. ... I would go on to finish my Ph.D., get a job based on a talk about this research, make enough money in one month to sustain an entire village for several, publish, and, I hoped, make a career. ... Despite my good intentions, I was making a situation for myself based on structures of poverty and gender inequality (Wolf 1996 cited in Doucet & Mauthner, 2007:39).

In intercultural encounters there is a high risk of misunderstanding influenced by the values we hold. Four dimensions are pivotal to our values: (1) individualism–collectivism, (2) power distance, (3) construal of self, and (4) low or high-context communication (cf. Ting-Toomey, 1999; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001). Western countries, such as Australia, Canada and the US and European countries such as Germany, are identified consistently as cultures high in individualistic value tendencies, while African cultures can be identified clearly as group-based cultures. Basically,

individualism refers to the broad value tendencies of people in a culture to emphasise individual identity over group identity, and individual rights over group obligations. In contrast, collectivism refers to the broad value tendencies of people in a culture to emphasise the group identity over the individual identity, and ingroup-oriented concerns over individual wants and desires. Collectivists in particular are concerned with ingroup–outgroup face dynamic issues (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

The key in intercultural encounters is to be flexible and adaptable and not to be locked into one set of behavioural or thinking patterns. It is therefore advisable to communicate appropriately in intercultural situations, which necessitates adaptation, to be knowledgeable and respectful of different worldviews as well as differences and similarities between individualistic and collectivistic cultures and of our own ethnocentric biases and cultural-based attributions (ibid).

In the interview situation I tried to consider these issues and strived to establish – as far as possible – a non-hierarchical and friendly relationship with the interviewees. This is also consistent with certain claims of feminist research. Feminist researchers reject interviewing women as “objects” with little or no regard for them as individuals (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992). Oakley (1981) advocates a model of feminist interviewing (i.e. answering questions, express feelings) that strives to minimise status differences between the researcher and the research subject (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

The least I could do was to make the interviewees feel comfortable in the unaccustomed situation. Before the interview started I offered a breakfast, firstly as a courtesy after a two-hour journey to the University of Pretoria, and secondly, as an ice-breaker, because the informal situation enabled communication and exchange both between the interviewees themselves and the interviewees and the researcher. I shared some personal information with the participants, showed them on a map where I come from and answered their questions about Germany and other things. After breakfast the individual interviews started.

Since the interpretation of others' narratives usually takes place "back in the office" (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007:419), in isolation from the respondents, Doucet and Mauthner suggest that this "compels researchers to be reflexive about these processes of interpretation and power and how methodology and epistemology intertwine during this phase of research" (ibid). Furthermore, they recommend reflecting critically on the influence of institutional power dynamics on what becomes known and how:

The personal, political, and ethical dilemmas that arise in negotiating the dynamic relations of power that structure and sustain the institutions and practices through which research knowledge is produced is becoming a key issue within feminist research debates (ibid).

Issues of reflexive positioning in research projects have attracted significant attention in the form of subject positions such as gender, class ethnicity, sexuality, and geographical location. Critique of such an approach is that it actually puts the researcher – often a privileged white, middle class First World researcher – at the centre while marginalising the Third World narrator (ibid:42).⁷⁵ As Ramazanoglu and Holland state:

Feminism has been stronger on honourable intentions for accessing power relations than on effective skills and strategies to enable researchers to overcome limits of understanding, and the difficulty of seeing ourselves as others see us (2002:119 cited in Doucet & Mauthner, 2007:42).

4.2.2.2 Dilemmas of reflexivity and representation

The politics of speaking for, about and on behalf of other women and the issue of how white Western feminists can conceptualise difference and diversity without appropriating "other" voices and naturalising socially constructed categories became a great challenge in feminist activism and research (Rose, 2001:27). In South Africa, for example, a controversial debate on difference and representation was led in the early 1990s. It centred on the question that tore the Nigerian Conference on women in Africa and Africans in Diaspora (WADD) held 11–22 July 1992 in Nairobi apart: "Should white

⁷⁵ Postmodernists for instance claim that the researcher's presence is evident in the report. "Thus, a postmodern research report is similar to a work of art" (Neuman, 2000:84).

women present papers about black women's experiences?" The different positions taken on this issue were represented by Funani, Fouché and Gouws. While Funani's (1992; 1993) argued that white women cannot claim to know the black women's experience and present research papers about that experience, Fouché (1993) stated that the gulf between black middle class women or returned exiles and rural black women or factory workers is as great as that between black and white women and that there is also commonality of human experience. Gouws (1993) eventually endorsed the argument that white women should not speak *for* black women (neither should men speak *for* women), yet, if research meets the requirements of feminist research, white women can speak *about* the experiences of black women or black women can speak *about* the experiences of white women and men can speak *about* the experiences of women.

In order to reflect my position in the research on the issue of speaking for, about and on behalf of other women, I took the position of Gouws (1993) that if the research meets the requirements of feminist research, white women can speak about the experiences of black women. This position is also linked to my belief – and as Meintjes's (1993) has argued – that women share, to differing degrees, identification through their sexual role and reproductive capacity. Finally, I also believe – here following Reinharz's arguments – that as women

... we are entitled and able to study anything. Nor must we have a personal experience of something in order to study it. But as we study women's experiences we think we do not share, we sometimes find that we actually do share it in some way" (Reinharz, 1992:261),

and

that we can develop nonexploitative relations with the people involved in our research projects, without attempting to achieve "rapport" or "intimacy" with them. Relations of respect, shared information, openness, and clarity of communication seem like reasonable substitute goals (ibid:267).

Relationships of respect, shared information, openness and clarity of communication constitute the values that have guided my research. They are also important ethical

considerations.

4.3 From the theoretical paradigm to the strategy of enquiry

4.3.1 Logic of investigation and research question

Feminist research has been subsumed under the critical social science approach which favours the use of qualitative research methods. Although not uncontested, feminist researchers distinguish various characteristics of feminist epistemology and methodology or values. For feminist researchers feminist beliefs are the guiding framework of the research process, bringing women's voices and experiences into the centre of analyses. Feminist research uncovers patriarchal social dynamics and addresses power imbalances between men and women. In particular feminist standpoint theories emphasise the role of women's experience in social life and practice and claim epistemological privilege for those at the bottom of the social and economic hierarchies, arguing that they are better starting points than others for producing knowledge.

Deriving from this epistemological position, this study looks into life conditions, attitudes and perceptions of rural South African black women who are said to be at the bottom of the social ladder. Based on the literature review, this dissertation draws attention to aspects of female agency and compliance in the context of HIV/AIDS and sexuality. As a result of the theoretical implications of agency outlined in chapter 3, for the purpose of this research my understanding of agency is the subject's capability to act independently and to make her own free choices, so that she could have acted differently in a given situation. This may also imply some creative elements such as unexpected and unanticipated modes of behaviour. Structural, institutional or intersubjective constraints in which individuals have 'no choice' are not to be equated with the dissolution of action as such.

Female agency in sexual activity is operationalised by encompassing a woman's

§ decision regarding and control of with whom, when, where and how to have sex

- § negotiating and decision-making power in terms of protection, mainly condom use/safe sex in order to prevent STIs and HIV infection, but also unwanted pregnancy
- § ability to articulate and negotiate her individual sexual wants and needs.

Linked to its feminist paradigm, the study applies a qualitative research design. Most qualitative designs reflect flexibility in all phases of the research process or include both flexibility and planning. Early in the research process, prior to entering the field, two hypotheses and a research question were developed.

Hypothesis 1: South African black women in a rural environment have little or no autonomous agency in their intimate partnerships; therefore compliance with patriarchal rule is a survival practice that is destructive in a life threatening way in the era of HIV/AIDS.

Hypothesis 2: Owing to the liberalisation of gender power relations and of sexualities and the growth of modernity in post-1994 South Africa, young rural black women have fuller agency in their intimate partnerships than more senior women in the face of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

Research question: Do women of different age groups from the Mmakaunyane community have the capacity for agency within their intimate partnerships, particularly in terms of their sexuality? Is there any indication of transformation to be found in the gender relations?

The **objectives** of the research are the following:

Objective 1: To examine constraints to rural South African black women's sexual agency in a patriarchal social order.

Objective 2: To investigate the interplay of subordination and individual choices in order

to explore rural South African black women's potential for HIV self-protection strategies in their intimate relationship.

Objective 3: To probe whether their agency is defined by negotiating the terms of their subordination or the ability to transform existing gender relations.

Objective 4: To explore whether younger South African black women living in a traditional rural environment are more critical of constraints to their agency than more senior women.

4.3.2 Rationale for the chosen methodology

This research, which took place during November and December 2005, uses an *exploratory descriptive case study* as research design (Stake, 1995; 2005; Yin, 2003), drawing upon data collected from individual and group interviews.

Case study research is a widely recognised common research strategy in psychology, sociology, political science, social work, business, community management and economics and contributes knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political and related phenomena (Yin, 2003:1). Case study research allows for the understanding of complex issues examining data within a specific context. However, case studies are not synonym with qualitative research and can also be based on quantitative evidence (ibid:14–15). The term case study can be used to describe a research design or a unit of analysis (e.g. a particular organisation). In the scope of this thesis it concerns the use of the case study as a research design. As such it can cover a range of research methods and techniques, single or multiple cases and varied levels of analysis (cf. Hartley, 2004:332 cited in Kohlbacher, 2005:no page number) as mentioned above.

According to George and Bennett (2005:19–20) advantages of case studies are conceptual validity, identification of new variables and hypotheses, exploration of causal mechanisms and the ability to accommodate complex causal relations while main

disadvantages are seen in the problem of case selection (ibid:22–25) as well as in the lack of representativeness (ibid:30; 32) and a potential lack of independence of cases (ibid:33). Another frequent criticism is that it is incapable of providing generalising conclusions (Tellis, 1997:no page number) and its lack of rigour. In response, Yin (2002) notes that the generalisation of results, using case study as a methodology, is made to theory and not to populations.

Yin (2003:1) introduces his book *Case study research* with the words “The case study is but one of several ways of doing social science research” and acknowledges it as a preferred strategy “when “how” or “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (ibid). In such a setting, the case study would be an *explanatory* one. *Exploratory* and *descriptive* case studies depend on the form of research question posed, the extent of control a researcher has over behavioural events, and the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events (ibid; cf. ibid:3–7).⁷⁶

Explanatory case studies examine the data closely both at surface level and in depth in order to explain the phenomena in the data. Explanatory cases are also deployed for causal studies where pattern-matching can be used to investigate certain phenomena in very complex and multivariate cases, giving significant explanations and generalisations (ibid:4; Babbie & Mouton, 2005:283).⁷⁷ A researcher conducting an *exploratory case study* will focus his/her research question on a “what” question with the goal of developing pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further enquiry. This type of study has been considered as a prelude to some social research (Yin, 2003:5–6). In a *descriptive case study* the goal set by the researcher is to describe the data as they occur. What is

⁷⁶ Stake (1995) identifies three types of case study: *intrinsic*, *instrumental*, and *collective*. The distinction between intrinsic and instrumental addresses the degree to which the focus is on the unique or the generalisable features of the case research. A collective case study is an instrumental study extended to several cases.

⁷⁷ As a good example Yin (2003) mentions Graham Allison’s (1971) single-case study of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis; see: Allison, G.T. 1971. *Essence of decision: Explaining the Cuban missile crisis*. Boston: Little Brown.

implied in this type of study is the formation of hypotheses of cause–effect relationships (ibid:4).⁷⁸

Yin (2003:13–14) offers the following definition of case studies:

“1. *A case study is an empirical inquiry that*

§ investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when

§ the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. ...

2. *The case study inquiry*

§ copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result

§ relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result

§ benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis”.

The case study methodology satisfies the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding and explaining. Case studies allow for a close reading and a contextual advantage, and seek to capture the experience of people in their natural, everyday setting in order to understand larger social complexes. In addition to being a research design, case study can also be a research strategy (Yin, 2003). The choice of a case study is an epistemological question as it draws knowledge from a particular case. Case studies can be conducted using many different forms: a single case study, a multiple case or collective study, or embedded case study designs (ibid). Yet, many case studies aim to investigate a bounded unit in an attempt to elucidate a single outcome occurring within that unit.

This empirical study applies an exploratory descriptive case study in order to gain deeper insights into the complex life situations and views of South African black women in a

⁷⁸ As an example of a famous descriptive case study Yin (2003) cites *Street corner society* by William F. Whyte; see: Whyte W. F. 1955. *Street corner society: the social structure of an Italian slum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (Originally published in 1943).

rural community, as well as their individual behaviour patterns and coping strategies when dealing with patriarchal power structures directed at their sexuality. It aims mainly at developing hypotheses and propositions for further enquiry. In this case study, the case plays a more supporting role and facilitates the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Stake, 1995), that is, women's capacity for agency in their partnerships.

This case study looks at

- § South African black women's subjective perceptions and ways of processing social reality in the context of female sexuality and HIV/AIDS in a rural environment
- § their coping strategies in terms of the patriarchal power structures that determine female sexuality and sexual behaviour
- § the way women in a rural community construct their realities when talking about their experiences with HIV/AIDS.

4.3.3 Field of study: Mmakaunyane Village

One of the most critical steps in the research process is the way in which the researcher defines and identifies or selects the case or cases. The case to be considered must have clear limits and boundaries. One of the most common critiques of case study methods is that they are particularly prone to versions of "selection bias" (George & Bennett, 2005:23). For example, case researchers "may bias their sample with regard to a wider set of cases about which they are trying to make inferences – unless they carefully define and limit the *scope* of their findings to a well-specified population that shares the same key characteristics as the cases studied" (ibid:25). Other case selection biases include selection of cases based on their "intrinsic" historical importance or on the accessibility of evidence (ibid). Case researchers do *not* aspire to select cases that are directly "representative" of diverse populations. Case study methods involve a trade-off between the goals of attaining theoretical parsimony, establishing explanatory richness, and keeping the number of the cases to be studied manageable (ibid:31). In a context where accessibility is in the foreground rather than particular selection procedures, gatekeepers

play a particularly important role (Merckens, 2004:166).

Yin (2003:21; cf. 21–28) identifies the following five components of research design as being especially important for case studies:

- § the study's questions
- § its propositions, if any
- § its unit(s) of analysis
- § the logic linking the data to the propositions
- § the criteria for interpreting the findings.

I chose Mmakaunyane as a rural community because I expected – based on the literature review – that in such a setting “typical” life conditions of South African rural black women would be reproduced. These are the following:

- § Traditional practices are still in place.
- § African traditional and Christian norms and values define strict gender role regimes which then define women as inferior and subordinate.
- § Poverty is pervasive and enhances the risk of contracting HIV.
- § Women are less likely to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection or to negotiate safe sex with their intimate partner.
- § People have different levels of knowledge about HIV/AIDS.
- § Many people – if not infected themselves – are affected by HIV/AIDS because they see the suffering of family members, friends or neighbours.
- § HIV/AIDS is still stigmatised and not openly spoken about in public.

I chose Mmakaunyane in particular for the following reasons:

- § It met the above-mentioned expectations and represents a “typical case”.
- § The local area is under-researched.
- § The community under investigation needed to be located on the outskirts of Pretoria, because I did not have a car and thus relied on other people to take me there.

§ And – most importantly – through a colleague I had access to a very active community facilitator, who was willing to assist me in the course of my research.

Mmakaunyane Village falls under the Moretele Local Municipality (NW372), one of five local municipalities⁷⁹ in the area of jurisdiction of Bojanala District Municipality (DC37), in the North West Province. It is the smallest municipality and one of the 243 municipalities that are said to be poor municipalities experiencing difficulties in providing services for the people in the area. Moretele Local Municipality claims to be on zero budget and to receive infrastructure grants from the national government. It has two young councillors and one PR councillor (Proportional Representative; DA).⁸⁰

Mmakaunyane village is located 60 kilometres outside Pretoria and five kilometres outside Winterveld where, in contrast to Mmakaunyane, a great deal of research has been conducted. The area is rural and was a white-only farming area in the past⁸¹.

⁷⁹ Other: Local Municipality of Madibeng (NW372), Rustenburg Local Municipality (NW373), Kgetlengrivier Local Municipality (NW374), Moses Kotane Local Municipality (NW375).

⁸⁰ Municipal Demarcation Board 2007; personal information given to me in January 2007 when talking to some elderly community members.

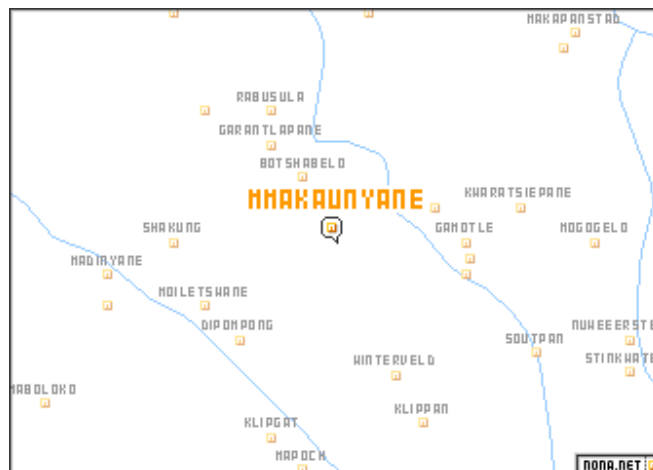
⁸¹ A man called Snyman used to own the farm. His grave is said to be among the graves of some of the residents of the village.

Figure 1: Location of Mmakaunyane



Available: <http://www.maplandia.com/south-africa/north-west/moretele/mmakaunyane/> [14 April 2009].

Figure 2: Mmakaunyane and neighbouring communities



Available: <http://nona.net/features/map/placedetail.1015393/Mmakaunyane/> [30 January 2008].

As noted in the introduction, the definition of ‘rural’ is a contentious issue and there is no agreed definition of the term ‘rural’ in South Africa (South Africa. Department of Land Affairs, 1997). In order to define Mmkaunyane as rural I take account of both geographic-based and social-based factors. In the Rural Development Framework (ibid:no page number number) ‘rural’ is defined as

... the sparsely populated areas in which people farm or depend on natural resources, including the villages and small towns that are dispersed through these areas. In addition, ‘rural clusters’ in the former homelands, ie large settlements without an economic base except for transfer payments, are also included.

This definition is applicable to Mmakaunyane.

At the beginning of January 2007, I visited Mmakaunyane and enquired about the village’s past by talking to several of the older residents. I was told by residents that there were no major events during the struggle, quite in contrast to the situation in the neighbouring community of Winterveld. During the apartheid era and under a commissioner, the residents became members of a bantustan for the Tswana tribe, meaning that this was home for the Tswana-speaking people. The area fell under Kgosi L Mangope, who was the President of the Bophuthatswana homeland until the 1994 democratic elections.

4.3.3.1 Historical context

The geography of settlement around Pretoria has been fundamentally determined by past policy in South Africa. The Natives Land Act of 1913 reflected a policy of territorial segregation. “[The Land Act] aimed specifically to get rid of those features of African land ownership and share cropping which white farmers found undesirable, and at the same time to increase the size of the African reserves for the more convenient recruiting of labour for the mines” (Davenport, 1987:259). The planned extension of these reserves was included in the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936.

During the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s, the apartheid government implemented a

policy of ‘resettlement’ to force people to move to their designated ‘group areas’ (forced removals). Some 13% of the country was reserved for black homelands and divided into ten ‘bantustans’ for the purpose of concentrating the members of designated ethnic groups, thus making each of these territories ethnically homogeneous. Four of these homelands were given independence (Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana and Ciskei), although this was never recognised internationally. Blacks would no longer be citizens of South Africa; rather, they would become citizens of the independent “homelands”.⁸²

The Bantu Homelands Constitution Act of 1971 was enabling legislation that empowered the State President to confer self-government on any of the eight territorial authorities. The sprawling territory of Boputhatswana, stretching in eight main territorial enclaves from north-east of Pretoria, became self-governing in May 1972 (Davenport, 1987:413). Kgosi Lucas Mangope was appointed head of state by the South African government.⁸³ According to Mashele “homeland legislatures and governments were tailored to strengthen traditional leaders relative to commoners, and to draw them into a de facto alliance with the government. Chiefs became rural policemen, employed to ensure stability by guarding against anti-government activities ...” (Mashele, 2004:349).

Bophuthatswana was chosen as the homeland of the Tswana. Bophuthatswana – meaning “the coming together of the Tswana people” – was a name given to the newly created, ethnically diverse Tswana territorial authority, which had no historical basis. Non-Tswana people in areas under the jurisdiction of the homeland experienced blatant discrimination, which intensified over time. From the moment Bophuthatswana came into existence, its ruling elite sought to make sure that the homeland served the interests of the Tswana above all other ethnic elements in the area. It was particularly in the realm of education that the Mangope administration sought to assert control and mould children into responsible Tswana citizens. In 1976 a new language policy ordered teachers to use

⁸² Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_South_Africa_in_the_apartheid_era [23 July 2007].

⁸³ In 1988 an attempted coup was suppressed by South Africa, who reinstated Mangope. A second coup in 1990 was also thwarted; available: <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/region/southafrica/bophuthatswana.html> [23 July 2007].

Setswana as the medium of instruction in schools in the homeland (Lekgoathi, 2003:59–61).

Mmakaunyane – as did Winterveld – lay within the boundaries of Bophuthatswana. To the “embarrassment both of the South African and the Bophuthatswana authorities” a majority of its 600 000 people in Winterveld were non-Tswanas (Hallett, 1984:310).

The Bophuthatswana authorities have used a variety of tactics to harass and put pressure on the non-Tswanas of Winterveld. Private schools, set up to meet the needs of children for whom Tswana is not their first language, and shops started by non-Tswanas have been raided, school principals fined or jailed, shopkeepers compelled to surrender their stock. Some non-Tswanas have been arrested as squatters, others denied workpermits and told that they must go to 'their' bantustans for a permit, yet others of pensionable age have found it extremely difficult to obtain pensions. Such a situation obviously provides glaring opportunities for corruption (ibid).

Police raids on the homes of non-Tswana residents, particularly in Winterveld, were stepped up in 1979 (Lekgoathi, 2003:63).

The apartheid state has provided strong parameters within which ethnicity generally has taken shape in the country. It has manipulated those identities for its own purposes and, in the context of rigidly-defined ethnic homelands, poverty, land shortage and vastly inadequate resources, has distorted and frozen these identities to the point where to this day “ethnic” divisions have been a source of conflict in the country (ibid:71).

After 1994 Bophuthatswana (as well as the other homelands) was reintegrated into South Africa and today forms a part of the North-Western Province. Today, Mmakaunyane village is a multi-ethnic community of 2 500 – 3 000 households, dominated by Tsonga⁸⁴ (personal information given to me).

The Rural Development Framework (South Africa. Department of Land Affairs, 1997)

⁸⁴ The Tsonga number about 1.5 million in South Africa in the mid-1990s, and at least 4.5 million in southern Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The Tsonga-Shangaan homeland, *Gazankulu*, was carved out of northern Transvaal Province during the 1960s and was granted self-governing status in 1973. Only an estimated 500 000 people – less than half the Tsonga-Shangaan population of South Africa – ever lived there. Many others migrated to urban centres, especially Johannesburg and Pretoria (Byrnes, 1997).

includes a list of areas categorised as ‘rural’, due to several reasons of which two special categories are both applicable to Mmakaunyane:

- § Displaced urban areas (with formal or informal housing) where most households have a worker travelling daily to an urban area (or mine) for work, often using subsidised transport;
- § Rural clusters, where the main source of income is transfers, with small dependency on the utilisation of natural resources, or on ties into a rural hinterland. These areas were created by *apartheid*.

4.3.3.2 Present context

There are a range of social-based criteria which allows this study to define Mmkaunyane as rural.⁸⁵ In the Moretele Municipality, the rural households within the service area of the local municipality comprise nearly 97% of the total households.⁸⁶ Moretele is the local municipality with the lowest access to potable water among the local municipalities that comprise the Bojanala district area of jurisdiction. Just less than 77% of households in this municipality have access to an acceptable potable water service. Only 13% of households have access to an acceptable level of sanitation. This is the lowest in absolute and percentage terms among the local municipalities in the district (Municipal Demarcation Board, 2007).⁸⁷ This problem was relayed to me when I spoke to some of

⁸⁵ There is a debate whether ‘rural’ is a *geographical concept*, a location with identifiable boundaries on a map, or whether it is a *social representation*, a community of interest, a culture and way of life (Du Plessis, Behiri & Bollman, 2002:6). In their working paper on *Definitions of “Rural”* Du Plessis, Behiri & Bollman (2002) recommend to consider first the geographic scale of a rural issue and then to select a definition which fits best as for instance a milieu in which a person lives (ibid:34).

⁸⁶ According to the Community Survey 2007 of Statistics South Africa (2008:15), Moretele Local Municipality had 43 209 households in total.

⁸⁷ Municipal Demarcation Board 2007. *Capacity Assessment Report for the 2006/07 Period, District Municipality Report Bojanala District Municipality (DC37), North West*. Most municipal information contained in this report was obtained directly from questionnaires administered to municipalities by the MDB in August 2006, August 2005, August 2004, October 2003 and October 2002. Municipal managers or a senior manager were required to sign off the forms each year confirming the accuracy of the information supplied to the Board. Following data capture, the questionnaires were sent back to the municipalities for verification. Any changes submitted by municipalities were captured and the database modified accordingly. Demographic and related data have been drawn from the 2001 Census. [Online]. Available: http://www.demarcation.org.za/powers_functions2006/DCReports/2006-

the villagers in January 2007. The biggest need in the community is water supply and sanitation services, which have been promised since democratisation in 1994. The overwhelming majority (96.2%) of people in Moretele District only have access to pit latrines (Statistics South Africa, 2008:80). People in Mmakaunyane have access to piped water only at a communal tap. Electricity has been available since 1995 (personal information given to me).

The infrastructure offers three preschools and three primary schools, one secondary and one middle school (this is not typically rural as it reflects some urban influences). I know of only one tarred road in Mmakaunyane with all the others being dirt roads that are heavily potholed. The community does not have a police station (the nearest is in Winterveld which serves mostly the widely dispersed Winterveld). Furthermore there is no access to shops (one small general dealer) and no access to a post office. In terms of health care the villagers have access to one mobile clinic only, which comes once a month, or to a private clinic (Good Sheppard) run by the Catholic Church since the early 1970s. There is no access to public primary health care facilities (there is also no ambulance to take ill people to hospitals). The nearest hospital is in Ga-Rankuwa which is at least 45 minutes away. Many traditional healers are to be found in the village.

HIV prevalence among women attending antenatal clinics in North West Province had reached 31.8% in 2005 at the time I was conducting my fieldwork (South Africa. Department of Health, 2006). It declined to 29.1% in 2006 with HIV prevalence in Bojanala at 33.6% being the highest in the province (South Africa. Department of Health, 2007).

In Mmakaunyane there is no economic activity; people rely on remittances from working family members in cities or depend on social grants. Most young people who qualify leave the area; a few have work in Pretoria, Centurion, Rosslyn and Mabopane. The average monthly income for a household is about R1 500. There is a daily struggle for

2007%20Capacity%20report%20DC37.pdf [26 March 2007].

food, with the residents depending on subsistence farming, and very often living from “hand to mouth”. Once a month a soup kitchen is held for pensioners (TUKS JOOL project) (personal information given to the me).

The villagers identified the following social problems in their community: they estimate an unemployment rate of 60% for young people aged 18–30, among the middle aged the unemployment rate is about 50%. In consequence, many families lack money and often their children cannot attend school. Family disputes and violence are a common occurrence, as are teenage pregnancies. In terms of HIV/AIDS, they estimate that three out of every five young people could be HIV positive. No counselling is available in the community, and people keep their HIV status a secret – no one is willing to talk openly about it; only a group of volunteers from the Catholic clinic (residents) visit and support HIV/AIDS patients. As in many South African black communities there are increasing numbers of AIDS orphans (personal information given to me).

In an article on local economic development and urban poverty alleviation, Rogerson (1999) presents the key findings of eight case studies that were specially prepared on local government initiatives and urban poverty alleviation in South Africa. The geographical range of studies included examples that were drawn from metropolitan areas, secondary cities and small towns (ibid:519). Five broad intervention areas for poverty alleviation measures by local government were looked at: (1) municipal or local level initiatives can make a difference for poor communities in terms of appropriate regulatory framework, (2) improving access to municipal services, (3) assistance with employment creation (especially the small micro and medium sized enterprise (SMME) economy), (4) enhancing security and protection from crime and natural disasters, (5) augmenting local policy coordination and integration.

International experience has shown that the potential success of these anti-poverty initiatives can be undermined by issues of capacity within local governments, legal constraints on the range of their initiatives, and financial weakness. The South African case studies illustrate that these are very real threats to the formulation and

implementation of successful anti-poverty initiatives. The examples draw attention to weaknesses in the capacity of local governments in post-apartheid South Africa to function as development facilitators, and to deal with the structural constraints to their operations, and in particular, resource constraints (ibid:531–532).

In the North West Province a case study investigation was conducted in Winterveld by Simone (1998) when the basic elements of such a framework were not yet in evidence. For the most part Winterveld was described as an area in economic decline and a community experiencing high levels of poverty. Unemployment estimates suggested that over 80% of residents were unemployed, albeit a large number of these were working in a range of informal economic activities in the area

Since the community at Winterveld borders on Mmakaunyane, one is able to draw the conclusion that the findings for Winterveld also apply to Mmakaunyane.

Until the closing years of apartheid, local government in South Africa had not been strongly concerned with issues of economic development and strategies of poverty alleviation were not even considered on the policy agenda. Under the post-apartheid frameworks, new local government in South Africa is required to be innovative in promoting both the economic and social development of localities, including poverty alleviation. ... At local government level in South Africa there are few functioning programmes or interventions that are *directly* targeted at poor communities. Indeed, the essential policy direction appears to be a reliance on market forces to allow the benefits of trickle-down to reach poor communities (Rogerson, 1999:531; emphasis in the original).

Not much has changed since 1999. According to the 2007 South Africa's Public Services Commission audit, 29 966 government-funded projects aimed at reducing poverty have been established since 1994; of these almost 2 500 have been established in the North West Province (cf. Public Service Commission, 2007:34–35). However, as Luyt (2008: 1) states in a recent paper on poverty alleviation in South Africa, poverty levels in South Africa remain high, and have not been greatly reduced since 1994. The major obstacle to poverty alleviation in South Africa is seen in poor governance (ibid:3). This includes

... not simply corruption, but also poor performance of government officials in their management of public resources and a lack of political will to act against

underperforming officials. The poor management of public resources translates directly into poor public service delivery implementation, and thus obviously undermines poverty alleviation policies (ibid).

Accountability is especially important at provincial and local municipal level, since it is at these levels that the major part of the national budget is aimed at alleviating poverty. In terms of implementation, in South Africa the weak links are provincial and local government, although there is great variation in the quality of provincial and municipal governance (ibid:3–4).

Local government performance in terms of service delivery and poverty reduction in Mmakaunyane is, according to the villagers, very poor, with corruption being mentioned as a major problem. The villagers call themselves “the forgotten people” (personal information given to me).

4.3.4 Identifying the population for study

In terms of the study, the research subjects had to be female residents of Mmakaunyane. *Theoretical sampling* and *purposive sampling* are generally the two main sampling approaches used for qualitative enquiry. According to Silverman (2001:251), these approaches are often regarded as being synonymous and the only difference between them “when the ‘purpose’ behind ‘purposive’ sampling is not theoretically defined”. Both approaches use prescribed selection criteria (although at different stages of the research): units are chosen because they hold a characteristic that is expected or known to have salience to the subject matter under study (‘symbolic representation’). Furthermore, both use samples that are small in scale (rule of thumb: studies involving individual under 50 interviews), with the opportunity to add or supplement the composition (which is integral to theoretical sampling anyway). The choice is heavily influenced by the purpose of the research, particularly by its theoretical orientation; pragmatic factors such as time and resources will also play a part in the decision (ibid:250–254; Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003:82–86).

In purposive sampling, which I used, members of a sample are chosen with a ‘purpose’ to

represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion (including some diversity, for example age or to explore differences between age groups/impact of age). “Purposive sampling allows [the researcher] to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested” (Silverman, 2001:250). It demands that the researcher think critically about the parameters of the population he or she is interested in so that the processes under study are likely to occur (ibid).

4.3.4.1 Sample for the problem-centred interviews

In order to achieve a systematic approach the sample had to meet the following criteria: There should be homogeneity in terms of gender, socio-economic status and location. The main criterion for differentiation was age – women younger than 18 were excluded.⁸⁸

1. gender: female
2. socio-economic status: low (based on: occupation, income and post-secondary education)
3. resident in Mmakaunyane Village, North West Province
4. having a male partner or being separated from a partner/husband or a widow
5. age: I put a focus on the age group 18–35 because women in this age group are mainly infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS (cf. South Africa. Department of Health, 2006:9). I added 11 senior women (> 35) in order to compare their experiences. The average age of the original sample was 32,9 years.

⁸⁸ Using data from the 1998 South African Demographic and Health Survey, including a nationally representative sample of 11 735 women, aged 15 to 49, a study on the rate of entry into sexual relations in South Africa provided evidence that the peak of the rate of entry into sexual relations occurs at age 18 (Bakilana, 2005).

Original sample:

Age group	N
18–25	11
26–35	10
36–45	5
> 45	6
Total	32

For the sample selection I employed a local research assistant who is well connected in the community. He did the following:

- § assisted in identifying potential female interviewees in his community
- § organised meetings between the researcher and the interviewees
- § assisted in selecting 32 interviewees according to the stated criteria.

In the November prior to the interviews, two meetings were held between me and the potential interviewees, whom the research assistant invited to his house in the village. I explained the research idea to the women, their role in the research and the logistics of the interview. The interviews were conducted at the University of Pretoria, firstly in order to detach the women from their everyday environment and, secondly, to give them a sense of “importance” by inviting them to the university as “experts” on their lives. I offered to pay the fare (R50) to Pretoria as well as a gratuity of R50 for the time taken. The research assistant supervised the transport of the interviewees to the University of Pretoria and organised an interpreter when necessary for an interview. Those who were willing to be interviewed and met the selection criteria were organised into teams. The original sample was drawn up with 32 interviewees and interviews were scheduled as follows: 16 November 2005: 5, 17 November 2005: 5, 18 November 2005: 5, 21 November 2005: 4, 22 November 2005: 4, 23 November 2005: 4, 24 November 2005: 5. Number of interpreted interviews: 15 (Tswana, Tsonga, Xhosa, Ndebele and Pedi).

Of the original 32 interviews conducted I finally selected 20; 12 had to be excluded because of

- § the poor quality of the interview: this problem concerned particularly interviews with younger women – there was not enough substance to the interview
- § language problems: the interviewee refused an interpreter but her English turned out not to be good enough and again the content was insufficient
- § transcription problems/noises on the interview tape: in some cases large passages of the interview could not be understood or transcribed owing to noise created by construction work in the university building.

To keep a balanced age group distribution, I reclassified the selected interviewees into the following age groups:

Final sample:

Age group	N
< 20	2
20–34	9
35–49	7
> 60	2
Total	20

The final sample was drawn up with 20 interviewees and interviews were scheduled as follows: 16 November: 2, 17 November: 3, 18 November: 2, 21 November: 4, 22 November: 3, 23 November: 2, 24 November: 4.

Nine of the 20 interviews were conducted with the assistance of an interpreter. Four of these interviews were later translated from the African language used by the interviewee and the interpreter into English and transcribed in a translation office. Thus I was able to compare the interpreter’s English translation during the interview with the translated transcription of the translation office. There were no big discrepancies detectable.

Although 20 participants seems a small sample, I believe that it is still adequate and substantial enough for the purposes of my qualitative study, especially since I added two focus group interviews.

4.3.4.2 Focus groups

I set up two focus groups which were drawn from the sample of the prior individual interviews. I selected participants who could speak English relatively fluently. Hence, each focus group consisted of five women, although usually a group size of 6 to 8 is recommended (cf. Finch & Lewis, 2003:172). As before, there was homogeneity in terms of socio-economic status. The main criterion for difference was again age. The average age of Focus group 1 was 25,4 years and was 41,2 years for Focus group 2. Dates for the focus group sessions were scheduled for 30 November 2005 for Focus Group 1 and 2 December for Focus Group 2.

The location and interview modalities were the same as in the individual interviews described below (see section 4.3.6: the interview situation), only this time these were group discussions and were all held in English facilitated by the researcher without the aid of an interpreter.

4.3.5 Description of the data collection method

The most widely used method in qualitative research and the primary source of data generation is the *individual interview*. Individual interviews are well suited to research that requires an understanding of people's personal perspectives and the contexts of the research subject (Lewis, 2003). The so-called *problem-centred interview*⁸⁹ (Witzel, 2000), which has been used here in particular, is very useful for gathering evidence on human behaviour and actions, as well as on subjective perceptions and ways of processing social reality. Guidelines are a crucial part of the problem-centred interview as they provide a framework of orientation to ensure the comparability of interviews (ibid).

⁸⁹ "The problem-centered interview (PZI) is a theory-generating method that tries to neutralize the alleged contradiction between being directed by theory or being open-minded so that the interplay of inductive and deductive thinking contributes to increasing the user's knowledge. The appropriate communication strategies aim firstly at the representation of the subjective approach to the problem, secondly the stimulated narratives are enriched by dialogues employing imaginative and semi-structured prompts. Theoretical knowledge develops by using elastic concepts that are further developed during the analysis by employing empirical analysis and which will be refined by 'testing' empirically grounded 'hypotheses' with the data" (Witzel, 2000:no page number).

The interview guide designed for this study was constructed so as to be theory-driven and was pre-tested.

In order to operationalise the research question, the interview guide covered the following themes:

1. *The quality of the interviewee's partnership*: I assumed that the quality of the interviewee's relationship influences her space for agency in the partnership, in the sense that women have fuller agency in good partnerships and are in a better position to negotiate safer sex and condom use than women in a bad relationship. Thus partnership quality has an impact on HIV risk and protection. What qualified a partnership as either “good” or “bad” depended on the participant's own assessment.
2. *Power strategies used in the intimate relationship*: relationship power is an important component of the safer sex negotiation process, and therefore a key factor in women's HIV/STI risk. Constructions of hegemonic masculinity foster dynamics of women's oppression in intimate sexual relationships and lay the groundwork for abuse. Any transgression of power makes protection difficult.
3. *The interviewee's knowledge about sexuality and her personal experiences (including experiences of sexual violence)*: suppression of sexual discourse and absence of sexual education lead to insufficient knowledge, which undermines the development of skills to practise safer sex behaviour, as well as of personal competencies such as negotiation skills and self-efficacy. Sexual violence is a primary HIV/AIDS risk factor implying sexual non-agency.
4. *The interviewee's knowledge about and experience of HIV/AIDS*: being well informed about ways of transmission and effective prevention measures is an indispensable precondition for negotiating and practising safe sex. In a country where massive illness and death occurs as a result of AIDS, it also surrounds the interviewee's lives and families in a tension field of discrimination and fear or solidarity and care.

5. *The perception of the interviewee's own HIV/AIDS risk*: the level of awareness of self-perceived risk elucidates risk factors in the women's lives.

I believed it was important for the open questions and face-to-face communication to allow space for flexibility of details and discussion and that the interview guide should allow for comparability. Interview guides are “ideal for obtaining comprehensive and comparable data. Since all respondents were asked the same questions, responses can be coded and tabulated” (Greeff, 2002:298). For me, the strengths of this method – getting large amounts of data quickly and obtaining depth in data – by far outweighed its limitations, as for instance the fact that interviewing involves personal interaction and cooperation (ibid:305).

Furthermore, in terms of my research objectives, I was very interested in exploring women's (shared) experiences with dominant socio-cultural values, which were not dealt with in the problem-centred interviews. Since focus group discussion is recognised as a data collection technique that is particularly useful for studying dominant socio-cultural values and one that enables the researcher to identify shared and common knowledge, I used *focus groups* as a supplementary source of data.⁹⁰ I took into consideration that people are likely to self-disclose or share personal experience (even on sensitive issues) in groups rather than in a one-to-one interview (dyadic setting) – especially in the presence of people whom they perceive to be like themselves in some way (ibid:306–307). With the help of focus groups I wanted to explore the way the interviewees think, feel and talk about their culture (cf. Lewis, 2003). In addition to the information elicited from the problem-centred interviews, the focus groups also discussed issues of relationship dynamics and issues linked to HIV/AIDS.

In using both individual and group interviews I expected to optimise the strengths of both. Group synergy has the potential to uncover important constructs, which may be lost if data is individually generated, and there is also room for the spontaneous exchanges of ideas (Greeff, 2002:319). Thus the study used two interview formats:

⁹⁰ Focus group interviewing can also be a principal source of data generation.

- § twenty problem-centred interviews (open interview guide; see Appendix A)
- § two focus group interviews/sessions that included five women in each group (see Appendix B)

In addition, prior to the individual interview the interviewees filled in a short questionnaire on their socio-demographic profile (see Appendix C).

As discussed in section 4.2.2, feminist research epistemologies call on researchers to be *reflexive* in assessing how the circumstances of observational fieldwork or the interview dynamics might be affecting the discourse that is constructed between researcher and subject (cf. Rose, 2001:23). In the following section, I will therefore reflect on the “knowledge production process”, that is, the interview situation.

4.3.6 The interview situation

I undertook my data collection in November and December 2005. In order to test the instrument, three pre-test interviews were conducted at the University of Pretoria with three women who were working as cleaners for the University (14–15 November 2005). After these interviews final adjustments were made to the interview guide.

In the following sections I refer only to the final sample of 20 interviewees.

The individual interviews and the focus group interviews took place at the University of Pretoria at the Institute for Women’s Research and Gender Studies. On the day of the interview the team came to the University of Pretoria, a journey of about two hours by kombi taxi from Mmakaunyane village.

Before starting the interview, each interviewee read and signed a consent form relating to her voluntary participation in the research. This form also gave information about the modalities of the research. The interview then started with the administration of a short questionnaire on participants’ social characteristics and this was followed by a problem-

centred interview using an open interview guide. With the consent of the interviewees all interviews and group discussions were tape recorded and later transcribed.

The length of the individual interviews varied: some of them took only half an hour, while others lasted an hour or even longer. I would estimate that the average length of an interview was forty-five minutes. The length of the two focus group interviews also varied considerably. While Focus Group 1 discussed the topics for about an hour, the discussion in Focus Group 2 lasted about two hours. However, length does not necessarily reflect the quality of an interview.

In several face-to-face situations, I realised that interviewees were reflecting on some of my questions for the first time and were not used to answering personal questions. Thus answers were sometimes rather short or, instead of talking freely, the interviewee expected me to ask further questions in order to continue the interview. In addition, while some interviewees were more bashful than others, others took the opportunity to talk quite frankly about their experiences. One interviewee, for example, revealed for the first time that she had been raped as a teenager, another that a close relative had recently died of AIDS. In such cases my position as an “outsider” was clearly an advantage. I attempted to communicate to all interviewees that I regarded each woman as an expert on her life. I also tried to let them know how valuable I regarded their participation in the interview and the information given to me.

Sometimes, it was emotionally troublesome for the interviewee to speak about certain experiences, such as sensitive issues like death or violence; however, the interviewee could decide whether to carry on, what she wanted to disclose or not, to take a break or to change the topic. In all the interviews I deliberately strove to minimise the hierarchical relationship between me and the interviewee in order to develop a non-exploitative relationship with each interviewee through respectful communication and cooperative non-verbal behaviour (cf. Reinharz, 1992:267). However, when reading the transcripts and working with the data I realised that I had sometimes directed an interview more than I had thought in the interview situation by asking further questions when the

interviewee's response was brief in an attempt to elicit more information.

A particular limitation during the interviews was language constraint, on both my part and the interviewees'. I conducted the interviews in English, which is neither the interviewees' first language nor mine, and the language skills of the interviewees varied considerably. Those who felt very insecure were assisted by an interpreter, so that in these interviews a third person was involved which might have created some bias in the responses because the answers given by these interviewees were mediated through another person. In nine cases the interviews were conducted with the help of a female interpreter (Interview Nos. 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 15, 16, 19, 20). Nevertheless, I believe the fact that the women were able to speak their own languages was very helpful for the participants and for the quality of the interview. To minimise bias some of the interpreted interviews were checked for congruence by a language office. In addition, a few interviewees who did without the help of an interpreter turned out to speak English in a way that was very difficult for me to comprehend, especially when working with the transcripts.

Owing to these language constraints, I decided to adjust the original voices of the participants and myself in the quotes to make them easier to read. I removed repetitions and adjusted incomprehensible expressions. Notwithstanding, I strived to maintain the characteristics of each statement.

For the focus group discussions I deliberately chose interviewees who spoke an acceptable form of English. A common weakness of focus groups is that while some participants are very active others are rather passive. Another particular limitation is a participant's possible desire to comply with social norms or socially accepted viewpoints (Greef, 2002; Finch & Lewis, 2003). In the two focus group discussions that I facilitated, the active participation was very balanced; although in Focus group 2 there was one woman who was less communicative than the others. Hence, generally speaking, I am under the impression that participants discussed the issues openly and particularly enjoyed the opportunity for group exchange.

In terms of my role in the group discussions – but also as an indicator for the face-to-face interviews – at the end of both focus group sessions I asked: *What impact did my whiteness have on the discussion?* With this question I wanted to account for the controversial debate on difference and representation of the early 1990s between Funani (1992; 1993), Fouché (1993) and Gouws (1993). In both of the groups, it would seem that my race had not presented a problem *because* I was from a foreign country and not a white South African. All participants saw in our encounter an opportunity from which they could benefit. One participant even referred to the argument that, by not belonging to the group under study, an outsider may be given information not given to an insider (of course informants may also have suppressed aspects of their experience for that very reason).

- FG 1* *So you say my whiteness wasn't an issue?*
All: No.
Gladys: We are learning.
Tshepiso: We gain something.
Gladys: For example in the community, under apartheid, black people are not supposed to mix with white people, to talk with white people.
Tshepiso: Be open, be free.
Julia: Because it's the chance we get. Our parents didn't get that chance but for us it's a chance.
Tshepiso: It's an opportunity.

Nomsa highlighted the difference it made because I was German. Her view clearly reflected the wounds of the past in the struggle for freedom. It implied the very universalising and rather radical notion that white South Africans (she said: women) resent the change to a democratic system and regret the downfall of the apartheid regime. She derived her stance, which indicates to me an ongoing racial and socio-cultural divide of post-apartheid South African society, from personal experiences acquired during job interviews.

- FG 2* *Nomsa:* You know, it depends on how racist a person can be. Because you've been so friendly to us, open to us, I even told you, you are just like black women, but it's something – a behaviour of a person.

All: Yeah..

Nomsa: Maybe it's because you are not from South Africa. It's because you're from Germany and then you don't know the scars that are in the hearts for being oppressed for the past years. And those dreams that now there is freedom and that the white women are still angry for that. So I don't know. What I am seeing is that you are different from them because you are not a South African.

...

Would it have been different if I were black?

Nomsa: Not at all.

Others: No!

Karen: Even this research that you do, this interviews we've going through, this is something that has been happening long. You are asking questions that are obvious, it happens. Then it doesn't make any difference if maybe it was a black person asking those questions. No. I don't see a difference.

So, as a result of my status as a foreigner, my acceptance in both groups was quite high and facilitated access to the informants. However, there was some willingness amongst the women to interpret my behaviour *in dubio pro reo*, while if I had been a South African it would have been far more critical. On the other hand, assuming that the women did not just intend to adulate me, their feedback indicates that my attempts to minimise the hierarchical relationship and to behave in a non-exploitive manner were more or less successful.

4.4 Working with the data

Data analysis “entails classifying, comparing, weighing and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005:201). The starting point of all analysis is the material, for example the interview transcripts and field notes. In most analytical approaches, the initial step in data management is deciding on the names to be used for the themes or concepts under which the data will be labelled, sorted and compared, while the final stage involves summarising or synthesising the data. Descriptive and classificatory analyses are of crucial importance in any qualitative research study whatever its method and purpose. Exploring the data to generate

descriptive accounts involves detection, categorisation and classification of the substantive content and dimensions of phenomena (cf. Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor, 2003). The goal of analysis

is to understand core concepts and to discover themes that describe the world you have examined. Your analysis is done when you can put together a theory that answers your research question and that would be accepted by your interviewees as an accurate depiction of their world and thoughts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005:245).

4.4.1 Introducing my data analysis approach

Qualitative data come in various forms; in this study they are in form of verbatim transcripts. With the interviewees' consent, all interviews and group discussions were tape recorded. The interviews were transcribed by outsiders, owing to my time constraints. However, I checked all interviews for correctness. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in English as spoken by the interviewee *or* as had been translated by the interpreter, which in such cases is indicated at the end of a quote. Confidentiality was guaranteed and to ensure the anonymity of the interviewees I used pseudonyms.

In order to work systematically through all the transcripts, I conducted the data analysis in this study using procedures of so-called *qualitative content analysis*, which has become very popular in Germany. Qualitative content analysis has been developed by the German social scientist, Philipp Mayring.⁹¹ The core of and central tool for any content analysis is its system of categories. Every unit of analysis must be coded and allocated to one or more categories (cf. Titscher, Meyer, Wodak & Vetter, 2000).

Classical content analysis, which gained significance in the first half of the 20th century, is essentially a quantitative method with its core and central tool being its system of

⁹¹ Mayring's concept of qualitative content analysis was developed in the 1980s in a longitudinal study on the psychosocial consequences of unemployment. About 600 open-ended interviews with more than 20 000 pages of transcripts had to be analysed in a qualitatively oriented way. In the meantime Mayring's work has become standard literature in Germany. In a bibliometric survey on the prominence of methods of text analysis, Titscher et al. (2000) affirm that the explicit sources for qualitative content analysis are from German-speaking countries only (cf. Kohlbacher, 2006; see Titscher et al., 2000:217).

categories. The simplest type of evaluation consists of counting the numbers of occurrences per category (assuming there is a relationship between frequency of content and meaning). Coding is “the heart and soul” of text analysis, with coding being the process of transforming raw data into a standardised form (cf. Kohlbacher, 2006; see also Krippendorff, 2004). The classical formulation of content analysis, which paved the way for the quantitative interpretation of content analysis, stems from Berelson.⁹² Its shortcomings are summarised and exemplified in Ritsert’s (1972 cited in Kohlbacher, 2006) critique; he argues that quantitative content analysis does not take the following four aspects adequately into account: the context of text components; latent structures of sense; distinctive individual cases and things that do not appear in the text.

Mayring's qualitative content analysis tries to overcome these shortcomings of classical quantitative content analysis by applying a systematic, theory-guided approach to text analysis using a category system (Kohlbacher, 2006; cf. Mayring, 1993). Two important basic ideas of content analysis are the following:

1. *Rules of analysis*: The material is to be analysed step by step, following rules of procedure and dividing the material into content analytical units.
2. *Categories in the centre of analysis*: Aspects of text interpretation that follow the research questions are put into categories, which are carefully founded and revised within the process of analysis (feedback loops; Mayring, 2000).

However, the basic difference between classical content analysis and structuring within qualitative content analysis is the development and use of a coding agenda (Kohlbacher, 2006).

Mayring distinguishes three different interpretative analysis procedures, which may be carried out either independently or in combination, depending on the research question: summary, explication, and structuring:

⁹² In the 1950s a controversy about research strategies in content analysis arose when Berelson's (1952) book *Content analysis in communication research* was first published and Kracauer's (1952) article *The challenge of qualitative content analysis* followed as a critical reaction contending that the quantitative orientation neglected the particular quality of texts and that it was important to reconstruct contexts (cf. Kohlbacher, 2006).

a. *Summary*: attempts to reduce the material in such a way as to preserve the essential content and by abstraction to create a manageable corpus which still reflects the original material. For this the text is paraphrased, generalised or abstracted and reduced.

b. *Explication*: involves explaining, clarifying and annotating the material. As a first step a lexico-grammatical definition is attempted, then the material for explication is determined, and this is followed by a narrow context analysis, and a broad context analysis. Finally, an “explicatory paraphrase” is made of the particular portion of text and the explication is examined with reference to the entire context.

c. *Structuring*: corresponds more or less to the procedures used in classical content analysis and is also viewed as the most crucial technique of content analysis, the goal of which is to filter out a particular structure from the material. Here the text can be structured according to content, form and scaling. The first stage is the determination of the units of analysis, after which the dimensions of the structuring are established on some theoretical basis and the features of the system of categories are fixed. Subsequently, definitions are formulated and key examples, with rules for coding in separate categories, are agreed on. In the course of a first appraisal of the material the data locations are marked, and in a second scrutiny these are processed and extracted. If necessary the system of categories is re-examined and revised, which necessitates a reappraisal of the material. As a final stage the results are processed (Kohlbacher, 2006:no page number).

The main idea of the analysis procedure is to preserve the advantages of quantitative content analysis and to transfer and further develop them into qualitative-interpretative steps of analysis.

I analysed both individual and group data. Group data differ from individual interviews in a number of ways, in particular in terms of group dynamics and interactions, the level of contribution, or the influence of other views. There are two main ways in which group data can be analysed, that is, whole group analysis and participant-based group analysis. I used the most common practice, namely whole group analysis, which treats the data produced by the focus group as a whole; the group becomes the unit of analysis, while additional information may be added (cf. Ritchie, Spencer & O’Connor, 2003:257–261).

4.4.2 The use of qualitative content analysis in case study research

I selected qualitative content analysis as an appropriate analysis and interpretation method for case study research because it offers a range of rule-based procedures for a systematic analysis of data material. Its contributions in case study research are –

according to Kohlbacher (2006) – the following:

1. *Openness and ability to deal with complexity.* Although it follows an open paradigm, qualitative content analysis is strictly controlled methodologically and the material is analysed in a step-by-step process.

It is this combination that fosters its strong ability to deal with complexity. ... The procedures of summary, explication and structuring step-by-step reduce complexity and filter out the main points of analysis in an iterative process. Therefore, qualitative content analysis perfectly fits the credo of case study research: helping to understand complex social phenomena (ibid).

2. *Theory-guided analysis.* Theory-guided analysis is one of the special strengths of qualitative content analysis, as is case study research. An essential feature of theory building is the comparing of emergent concepts, theory or hypotheses with the extant literature, because tying the emergent theory to existing literature enhances the internal validity, generalisability and theoretical level of the theory built from case study research. This is why qualitative content analysis is a particularly apt form of data analysis for projects that aim to start from theory and contribute to it (ibid).

3. *Integration of context.* One of the key features of qualitative content analysis (in contrast to classical quantitative content analysis) is that the context, including the latent context, is central to the interpretation and analysis of the material. Similarly, the case study approach puts emphasis on understanding the processes as they occur in their context; therefore, research questions about “how” and “why” rather than “what” or “how much” are best suited to case study strategy (ibid).

4. *Integration of different material/evidence.* A major strength of case study data collection is that it presents an opportunity to use many different sources of evidence, that is, transcripts of interviews/discourses, protocols of observation, videotapes and so on, of which the most is the interview. “Furthermore, qualitative or expert interviews are a very common field of application for qualitative content analysis. ... Therefore, qualitative content analysis offers a rule-based, theory-guided method for analyzing interview transcripts, just in the way it is required by the principles of case study research” (ibid).⁹³

⁹³ A fifth item mentioned by Kohlbacher (2006), namely *Integration of quantitative steps of analysis*, does not apply to my research and will therefore not be considered.

In line with Kohlbacher's argument about the use of qualitative content analysis in case study research, Philipp Mayring's qualitative content analysis will be applied for the data analysis in this study. This seems to me particularly apt in view of the language constraints of the part of both the researcher and the interviewees. I decided to apply Mayring's approach because it tries to fuse openness and a theory-guided investigation. Furthermore, it is a rule-based approach that ensures that the entire empirical basis is dealt with systematically and that the analysis is reproducible to a certain extent.

4.4.3 Data management

Central to a qualitative content analysis is a category system which is developed as near to the material as possible. Two procedures are vital when developing such a system: inductive category development and deductive category application.

As explained above, a qualitative content analysis distinguishes between three different interpretative analysis procedures, which may be carried out either independently or in combination: summary, explication and structuring. I mainly used *structuring* with the aim of filtering out certain aspects from the material according to content. This is a primarily deductive procedure since I had to define the category system beforehand so that allocation from the material/text to the category is always possible.

For each deductive category I carried out the following three steps (cf. Mayring, 1993:88):

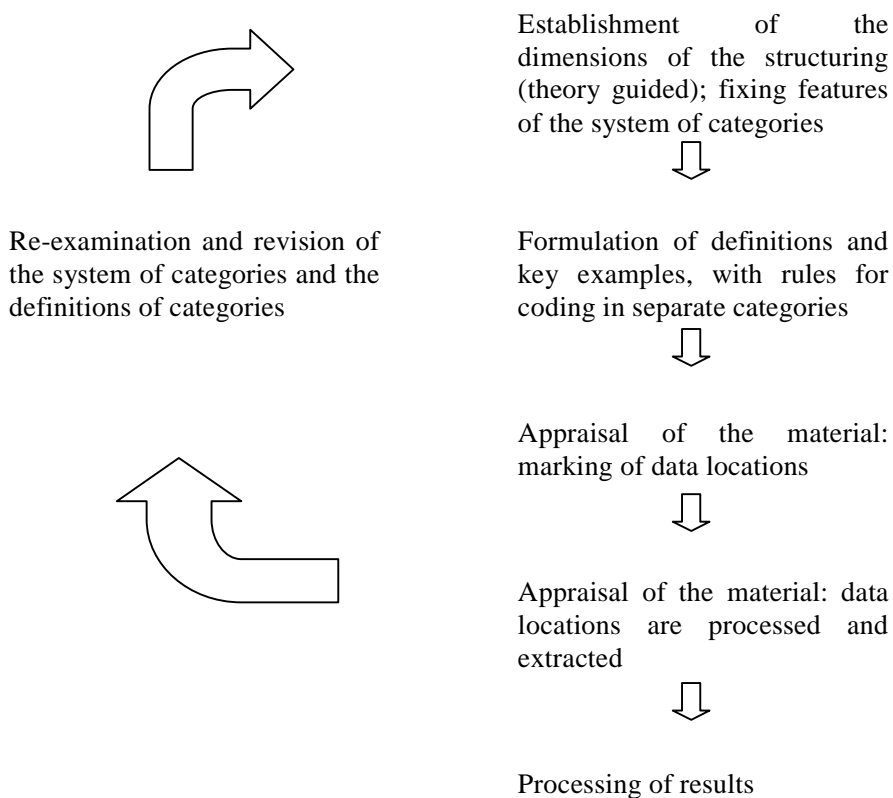
1. I defined the category explicitly (definition of which text parts will fall under a category).
2. I chose key examples (concrete examples from the text to illustrate the category).
3. I defined rules for clear classification where categories might overlap.

Using the interpretative technique, the interviewees' statements were allocated to various categories. I chose quotes that were core examples that best illustrated a viewpoint or

experience expressed by a number of interviewees. However, I also noted variability in accounts or ‘deviant cases’.

To start my data analysis I read and reread the interview transcripts several times. In most analytical approaches, the initial step in data management (cf. Ritchie, Spencer & O’Connor, 2003) is deciding on the themes or concepts under which the data will be

Figure 3: Model of procedure for structuring qualitative content analysis



Source: Mayring, 1993:89 (translation B.T.)

Finally, I placed the category definitions together in a coding agenda. After re-examining and revising the system of categories, I interpreted the data linked to the research question. As mentioned on p. 127, Doucet and Mauthner (2007) suggest that the interpretation of others’ narratives usually takes place “back in the office” in isolation

from the participants, as was true in my case. These authors remind researchers about being reflexive about processes of interpretation and power and the way methodology and epistemology interconnect.

4.5 Ethical considerations

A principal concern for any data collection process, irrespective of the methodology, is that asking people questions about their views, knowledge, attitudes or life experiences, particularly related to “sensitive” phenomena, may generate emotional responses that should be acknowledged by the researcher and the research process. There are many phenomena that are “sensitive” within specific socio-cultural and social contexts. Lee (1993) suggests three issues that create a concern about sensitivity: (1) issues considered private, stressful, or sacred, such as sexuality, (2) issues that if revealed might cause stigmatisation or fear and (3) issues where researchers may study areas subject to controversy or social conflict (Lee, 1993 cited in McCosker, Barnard & Gerber, 2001: no page number).

My research with its focus on issues of sexuality and HIV/AIDS thus required special concern about the interviewees’ wellbeing. Notwithstanding the debate within differing methodologies about the nature of objectivity, and the relationship between the researcher, the interviewee and the data, there is a need to be clear about the psychological safety of the people involved. I had to be aware of cues and/or signals by which the interviewee might indicate distress. If the interviewee needed time to cry or express significant emotion I had to show acceptance of the interviewee’s emotional response (cf. McCosker et al., 2001).

Although the problem-centred interviews dealt with sensitive topics, such as sexuality, the experience of violence and HIV/AIDS, no potential harm (e.g. physical, psychological, legal, social) was expected from participating in the research. If a participant felt distressed she was told that she could withdraw at any stage of the research without any repercussions. If an interviewee needed to cry she was given the

time she needed to get back in control. The participants were also assured that the information they gave would be treated with confidentiality and that the names of the participants would not appear anywhere. All participants read and signed an informed consent form prior to the interview. Ethical approval for the study was gained from the University of Pretoria's Ethics Committee.

4.6 Conclusion: validity, reliability and generalisability

Validity and reliability are more commonly accepted in quantitative research in the social sciences, while qualitative researchers argue for different standards for judging the quality of research. As an alternative to validity and reliability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose the concept of “trustworthiness”, which consists of four aspects: credibility as an alternative to internal validity, transferability as an alternative to external validity, dependability as an alternative to reliability, and confirmability for judging the soundness of qualitative research as an alternative to the traditional concept of objectivity.⁹⁴

More recently, in order to ensure the attainment of rigour using strategies inherent within each qualitative design, Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) argue that qualitative researchers should reclaim responsibility for reliability and validity by implementing verification strategies that are integral and self-correcting during the conduct of the inquiry itself.

Our argument is based on the premise that the concepts of reliability and validity as overarching constructs can be appropriately used in all scientific paradigms because, as Kvale (1989) states, to validate is to investigate, to check, to question, and to theorize. All of these activities are integral components of qualitative inquiry that insure rigor. Whether quantitative or qualitative methods are used, rigor is a

⁹⁴ Credibility: the results of qualitative research are credible or believable from the perspective of the participant in the research. Transferability: transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. Dependability: the traditional quantitative view of reliability is based on the assumption of repeatability – but we cannot actually measure the same thing twice. The idea of dependability emphasises the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs. Confirmability: qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

desired goal that is met through specific verification strategies (Morse et al. 2002:14).

Two other often suggested forms are triangulation (comparing different kinds of data) and member checking/respondent validation (taking one's findings back to the subjects being studied) (cf. Richards, 2005:139–141). For Silverman (2001:235) a major problem with triangulation as a test of validity is that, by counter positioning different contexts, it ignores the context-bound character of social interaction; an important argument against respondent validation is that overt respondent validation is only possible if the results of the analysis are compatible with the self-image of the respondents. In terms of validity, Silverman sees data triangulation and member validation as inappropriate for validating field research and instead suggests the following five methods: analytic induction, the constant comparative method, deviant case analysis, comprehensive data treatment, and using appropriate tabulations (ibid:237–241). He proposes “that reliability can be addressed by using standardized methods to write fieldnotes and prepare transcripts” (ibid:231). In the case of interviews and textual studies, he argues “that reliability can be improved by comparing the analysis of the same data by several researchers” (ibid).

According to Rose, feminist researchers have also challenged some of the traditional ways that validity and rigour are defined by claiming that transparency in all aspects of the research process should be a key criterion of validity and rigour. Rose understands the reluctance of qualitative feminist researchers to engage with debates about validity, until fairly recently, in the context of debates and controversies generated by “feminist standpoint theory”: linked to their claim of epistemological privilege to the realities of subjugated groups, strong versions of feminist standpoint theory imply that researchers should totally respect the “truth” of the subject’s perspective and refrain from trying to interpret the subject’s perspective (Rose, 2001:34). However, strong versions of feminist standpoint theory have lost ground (ibid:12; Olesen, 2005). In particular, postmodernist feminist epistemologies have drawn attention to the concept of reflexivity and to the role of the researcher in constructing knowledge. Haraway (1988), for instance, strives to locate a new conception of objectivity, giving feminist standpoint theory a postmodern inflection.

My particular concern is to research *lived experience* in the frame of standpoint epistemology seeing women's knowledge as emerging from women's situated experiences (Olesen, 2005). In such a frame, women's knowledge is understood as emanating from a position as the subject of domination and is located in women's experience of oppression. Interviews are treated as reports on external realities that describe respondents' experiences (in contrast to constructivism which analyses the conversational practices in order to probe how interview participants actively create meaning).

For the purpose of trustworthiness in my study I attempted to make the research process transparent: in the methodology chapter I broadly outlined the background for the research, the sampling method, the method of data collection and the method of data analysis. I reflected on epistemological issues, the role of the researcher and general ethical issues and sketched out my own values. Furthermore, I suggest that for my data analysis the relation between interviewer (my role defined as an outsider) and interviewee is an important criterion for the status of the interview data.

Generalisability is a standard aim in quantitative research and is achieved through statistical sampling procedures, which are usually unavailable in qualitative research. Silverman (2001:248–249) mentions three possibilities for obtaining generalisability in qualitative research:

- § combining qualitative research with quantitative measures of populations
- § purposive sampling guided by time and resources
- § theoretical sampling.

This case study, as with case studies in general, cannot make claims to be representative of some larger population. Common tests of objectivity are not applicable. However, Silverman's argument that "... the credibility of qualitative research studies rests not just on the reliability of their data and methods but also on the validity of their findings" (ibid:231) is also true for case studies.

Chapter 5: Findings: amid traditionalism and transformation – socio-economic and socio-cultural constraints on women’s agency

5.1. Introduction

A key objective in the transition process in South Africa, which has been taking place since the advent of the new democracy in 1994, is the transformation of gender relations to display greater equity. In terms of achieving greater gender equity and equality, the gulf between the progressive legislative framework and a range of traditional patriarchal forces has been identified as creating tensions and contradictions both in society and in the lives of individuals. South African women, particularly (rural) South African black women, continue to experience severe gender inequality owing to economic and socio-cultural constraints. Given that agency is located in the context of material and social forces – what Bourdieu termed ‘the field’ – actors may experience limitations in terms of their status in the field. Rural black South African women’s inferior social status and their economic marginalisation “are inextricably interwoven with the oppression women experience in the home and in many cultural ... contexts” (Liebenberg, 1995:87 cited in Amnesty International, 2008:47).

Despite declining educational disparities in post-apartheid South Africa, unemployment remains high and persistent in rural areas such as Mmkaunyane, undermining women’s possible endeavours for (economic) independence. In post-1994 South Africa, the majority of black women continue to live under poor conditions in rural areas which make them vulnerable to exploitive sexual relations and increased HIV risk. Furthermore, the lives of rural black women are generally governed by discriminatory customary law rather than state law, which constantly undermines women’s equality and progress.

This chapter examines the impact of structural economic and socio-cultural forces on the interviewees’ capacity for agency and self-determined opportunities in life, particularly with regard to their sexuality. It argues that, while material/socio-economic constraints can be perceived on a very physical level, socio-cultural constraints, for instance ways in

which socio-cultural assumptions inform gendered practices, are less visible but equally constraining. Although the post-apartheid South African state pursues women's advancement and greater equality, I assumed that on a grassroots level rural black women lack a vision for change either in terms of the gender order or for greater female autonomy owing to the continuous impact of restrictive socio-cultural influences, in particular those aimed at men's domination of women. The dynamics of oppression have a direct impact on female autonomy and agency. Yet, power is not simply physical coercion but "a factor inherent and sustained by belief systems that act as a means of heteropatriarchal social control" (Reddy, 2004:9). Religion and culture provide structures and tools that seek to make sense of life and being human, so that women and men cannot simply opt out (cf. Nadar, 2005). Women may not always be aware of how their choices are limited by traditional ideologies and socially constructed notions of patriarchy (Compion & Cook, 2006:100) with the result that they (tacitly) consent to (degrees of) male authority, in other words, they comply.

In the West, the socio-cultural concept of repression had a negative effect on female sexual autonomy (cf. Hite, 1976). In Africa, a similar effect arises from the concept of respect. One facet of this respect is, in rural areas especially, the respect women owe to men (Thornton, 2002:12). Legitimated through custom, men exercise authority over women and there is great social pressure on a woman to be a 'good wife' (good woman). Gender roles and rules prescribe men's and women's behaviour and shape perceptions, practices, beliefs and traditions. "Women learn they are defined in terms of subordinate roles; failing to challenge these roles confirms male supremacy in a way it needs. Daily actions are seen to cooperate with and conform to a principle" (MacKinnon, 1989:101).

Initially, section 5.2 presents a range of socio-demographic data on the women in the study. This presentation aims at representing the rural community under study as a setting for the 'typical' life conditions of rural black women in South Africa.

Section 5.3 examines the way the interviewees, classified according to their marital status, manage their material survival. It explores whether interviewees are, as a result of

poverty, involved in transactional sexual relations and interrogates the links between sex and money or gift-giving. It argues that, in intimate partnerships, the exchange principle from the male to the female partner is a sign of the quality of the relationship and does not necessarily preclude women's sexual agency, but rather signifies the woman's worth to the man and is constitutive of a woman's self-worth. However, all this is embedded in an oppressive framework of patriarchal values and norms.

Section 5.4 examines the linkages between the patriarchal code of respect and the institutionalisation of male sex-right. It argues that an entire network of socio-cultural machinery is employed to secure male sex-right by not touching on it, and explores the way the patriarchal code of respect and its manifestations constrain women's sexual agency. One such manifestation is the suppression of sexual discourse in the private and public sphere, which, firstly, prevents women from acquiring (full) sexual knowledge, secondly, attunes them to the heterosexual norm of male sexual dominance, and thirdly, is linked to some extent to the denial of HIV/AIDS in the country (section 5.5).

Section 5.6, finally, presents participants' viewpoints on gender relations. New configurations of women's identity and practice would require new ideas on the gender relations but I assumed that the interviewees might lack such a vision for greater female autonomy and a change to more equal gender relations owing to the restrictive socio-cultural influences of a hegemonic masculinity.

The main aim of this chapter is to explore the linkages between structural constraints on the interviewee's sexual agency, traditionalism and transformation.

Before I present and discuss my interview data, I shall present the profile of the study participants extrapolated from the biographical questionnaire.

5.2 Profile of the study participants

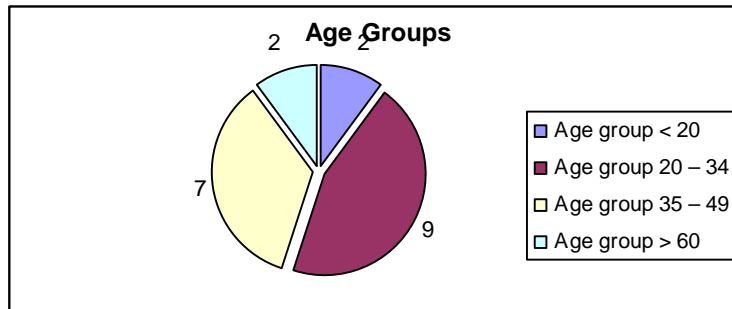
Before the individual interview was conducted, each interviewee filled in a short biographical questionnaire as a supporting instrument to the problem-centred interview (cf. Witzel, 2000). This was designed to gather information about the socio-demographic profile of the women in the sample. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 1: Profile of the study participants:

No	Date of interview	Pseudonym	age	Marital status	current partnership	No of children	Education (grade)
1	16/11/05	Elisabeth	26	single	boyfriend	0	12
2	16/11/05	Julia	21	single	boyfriend	0	12
3	17/11/05	Catherine	20	single	boyfriend	0	12
4	17/11/05	Gladys	19	single	boyfriend	0	12
5	17/11/05	Lorraine	23	single	married boyfriend	1	12
6	18/11/05	Lisa	19	single	boyfriend	0	12
7	18/11/05	Tshepiso	34	widow	boyfriend	2	12
8	21/11/05	Kamohelo	33	single	married boyfriend	3	10
9	21/11/05	Dyondzeka	31	widow	boyfriend	1	10
10	21/11/05	Rose	42	married, customary law (c.l.)	separated from husband	4	4
11	21/11/05	Mona	30	single	boyfriend	1	11
12	22/11/05	Maria	35	married, c.l.	separated from husband	1	5
13	22/11/05	Mandisa	46	married	husband	3	12
14	22/11/05	Karen	46	married	husband	0	12
15	23/11/05	Christine	48	married	husband	6	6
16	23/11/05	Grace	44	divorced	single	5	8
17	24/11/05	Nomsa	28	married	husband	1	12
18	24/11/05	Emily	63	widow	single	2	4
19	24/11/05	Sheila	40	married, c.l.	separated from husband, boyfriend	8	6
20	24/11/05	Margret	62	married, c.l.	husband	10	5

The sample consisted of the following age groups:

Figure 4:



In order to illustrate that Mmakaunyane represents “typical” life conditions of rural women in South Africa the socio-demographic characteristics of the women in the sample, such as marital status, number of children, household composition, qualification, work situation, income, and denomination are depicted in the following paragraphs.

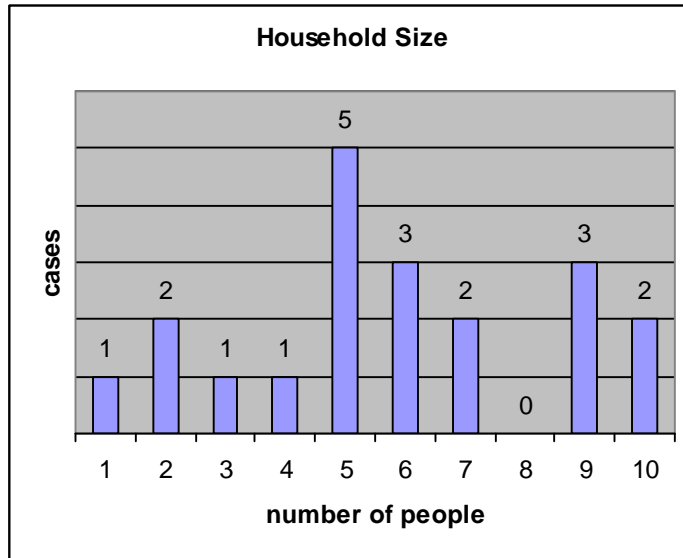
5.2.1 Household composition

Extended family households are said to predominate in rural areas and are likely to include children, grandchildren, siblings and other relatives of the head of the household (cf. Amoateng & Richter, 2003:250).⁹⁵ What kind of family pattern, that is, nuclear or extended, prevailed in the sample?

⁹⁵ The extended family is generally seen as being typically African. According to Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1984), the most significant feature of African family life is the importance of the larger kinship group beyond the nuclear family. A major scientific debate in Family Sociology about family structure in South Africa was led by Steyn (1993), Russell (1994) and Ziehl (2001). The controversy centred on the question of how applicable the nuclear family model is to the South African setting and whether there is any convergence in black and white family patterns, specifically whether African families show a trend towards living in nuclear families. In answering the question as to whether there had been any convergence of black and white family patterns, Ziehl (2001) concluded that there are significant differences in the family patterns of black and white South Africans; this does not mean that blacks do not live in nuclear family households; and that there is a tendency for urbanisation to be associated with higher levels of the household types that make up nuclear as opposed to extended family patterns. Her final conclusion suggests, that, among black South Africans, there is a trend towards the nuclear family pattern, but that it is a weak one (ibid:24).

The average household size of the sample was 5,8 household members (ranging from 1 to 10):⁹⁶

Figure 5:



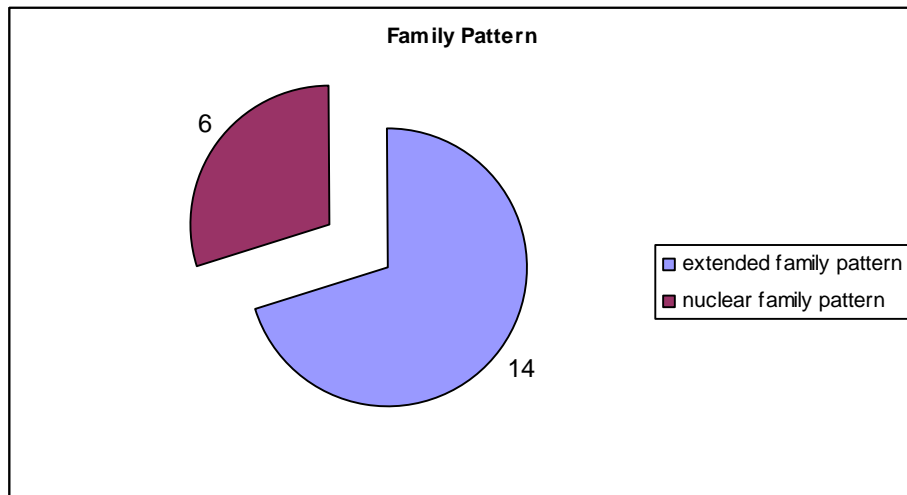
In detail, ten interviewees lived in a parent’s household with at least one parent (usually the mother) and other relatives (grandparent(s), siblings, nephews) – even as adults with their own children. They were either unmarried, had left their husbands or had been widowed.

Only five women in the sample resided with a husband (in both a nuclear or extended family pattern). In three cases these interviewees lived in multi-generational households with the husband, their own adult children and grandchildren. A nuclear family pattern such as ‘mother-father-child’ occurred only in one case; in addition there was one childless couple living on their own. Five interviewees headed their own household (two widows, a divorcee, two women living separated from their husbands); three of them lived together with their children, one with her children and grandchildren, and one senior woman, a widow, lived in a household on her own.

⁹⁶ The Census 2001 found that the average household size in the North-West Province was 3,7 (Statistics South Africa, 2003:73).

The sample showed the following family patterns:

Figure 6:

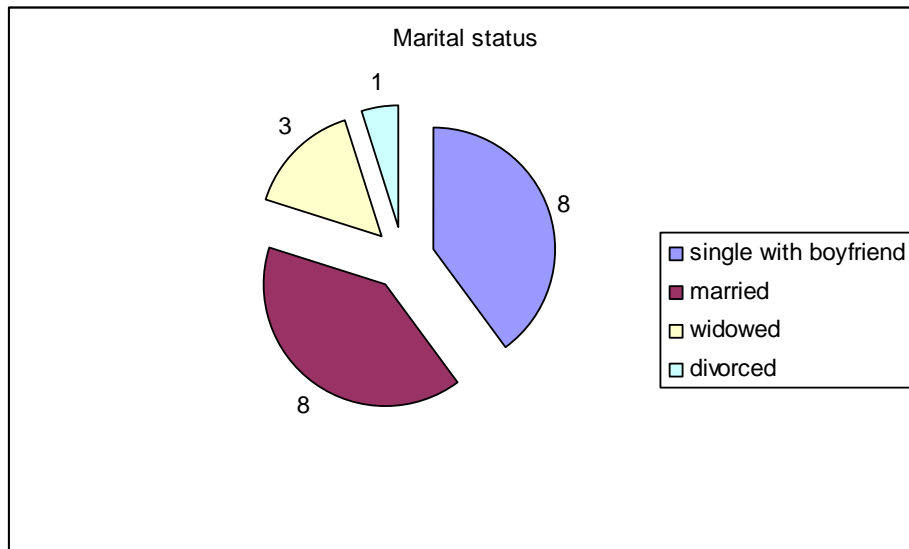


If there is a tendency among some of the African population towards a ‘nuclearisation’ of the family, it can be assumed to be the more affluent urban middle class, while a nuclear family pattern such as mother-father-child hardly emerged in the sample. Here the extended family pattern prevailed; consanguine groups supporting each other in order to assist economically and/or in the upbringing of children (Niehaus, 1992; Van Vuuren, 1997; Russell, 2003). Furthermore, in half of families (10) either a father or husband was absent.

5.2.2 Marital status and number of children

In the sample the women were either married or (still) single; three were widowed and only one was officially divorced.

Figure 7:



Population Census Data show great race differentials in the marriage rates.⁹⁷

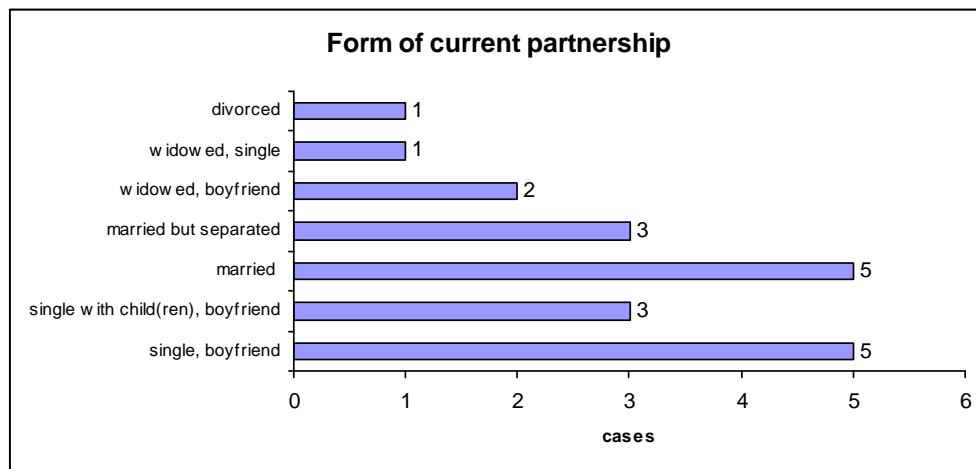
However, behind the official marital status, women in reality lived different “models”: Three women who were still married lived separated from their husbands. Of the eight single women three already had a child or children:

⁹⁷ Distribution of marital status by race (percentages):

Marital Status	African/Black	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Total
Never married	23.9	17.1	7.1	8.5	20.0
Married/ living together	63.5	69.5	79.6	81.4	67.2
Widow/widower	7.8	6.6	8.6	4.2	7.2
Divorced/separated	4.9	6.8	4.8	8.5	5.6

(Source: Statistics South Africa, 2005:121).

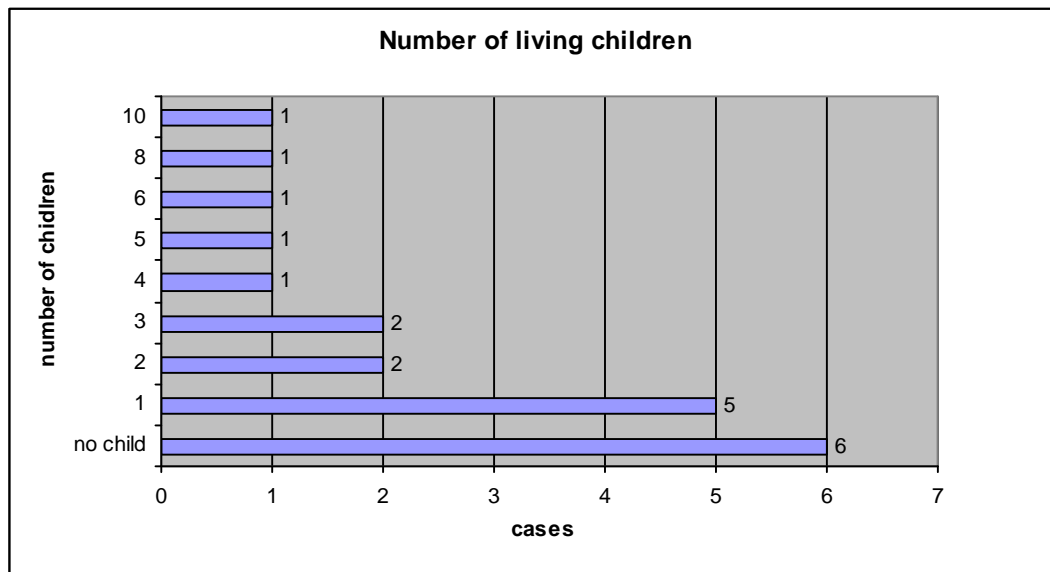
Figure 8:



It is generally believed that African marriages tend to be stable. This stability is attributed to the role of lineage or extended family in marital arrangements. Divorce is a relatively rare occurrence in South Africa, depending on the race group (Amoateng & Richter, 2003:257). In the sample only one woman was divorced and three were separated from their husbands. Most women lived in long-term partnerships/marriages. Some younger women had a boyfriend for many years, for example five to eight years, and were discussing marriage as a possibility.

The average number of children in the sample was 2,4. If one refers only to the group of women who had children (n= 14), then the average number was 3,4. The relatively high number of childless participants in the sample was due to the young age of this group of interviewees (average age 21). Only one senior woman (aged 46) did not have a child.

Figure 9:



5.2.3 Socio-economic situation

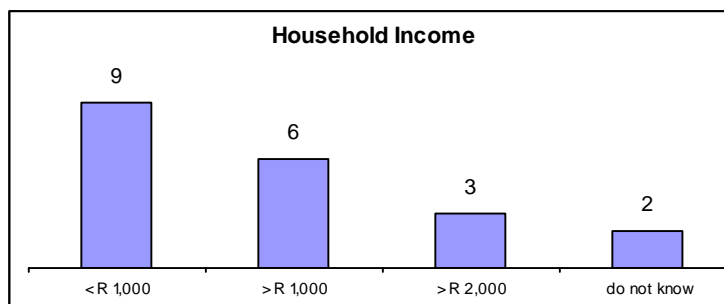
According to the United Nations Development Programme (2000), 60% of black South Africans fall below the national poverty line and almost three-quarters of the poor live in underdeveloped rural areas. Although there is a reduction in both absolute income poverty (the income of poor people) and relative income poverty (the gap between the average income of poor people and the poverty line) black South Africans, however, continue to account for a disproportionate share of poverty: they account for 93% of those living on less than R322 a month (South Africa. The Presidency, 2008:18). The official unemployment rates in the 2001 Census for Black Africans stood at 50.2% (men: 43.3%, women: 57.8%; cf. Statistics South Africa, 2003:55).⁹⁸ Although HIV/AIDS affects people across the socio-economic spectrum there are specific links to poverty; HIV infection disproportionately affects poor people. Low socio-economic status contributes to ill health through factors such as unequal access to education, health care

⁹⁸ The 2001 Census provided the best representative figures prior to my research in 2005. The *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS)* of Statistics South Africa for quarter 4 of 2008 states an unemployment rate of 21.9% (cf. Statistics South Africa, 2009:v). The unemployment rate among the black population remained at 25.9% the highest compared to other population groups (ibid:x; figure 4).

and employment opportunities, and the psycho-social stress of being disadvantaged (cf. Hallman, 2004:6).

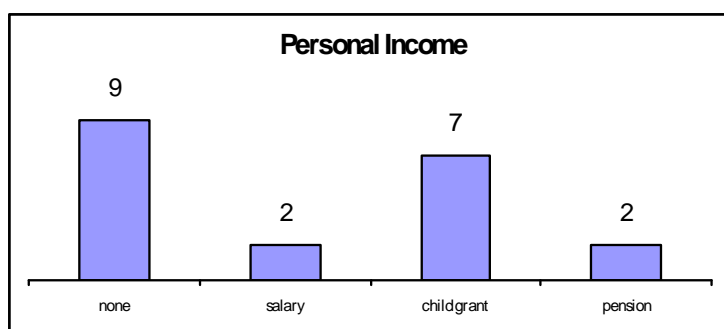
Socio-economic hardships are central issues in rural daily lives. Mmakaunyane is a poor community and economic life in Mmakaunyane is dominated by households and individuals searching for survival activities. Hence, the financial situation of the households was precarious; more than half of the households had a monthly income below R1 000 or below R2 000 and could be described as poor households:

Figure 10:



Moreover, the personal income situation of the women was even worse: nine had no income at all and seven lived on child grants. Two women who earned a salary and the two pensioners were somewhat better off.

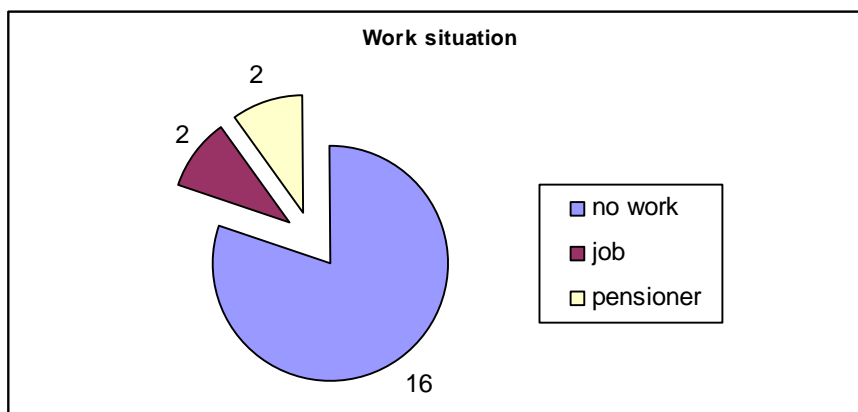
Figure 11:



Being young, female, and African often entails being on the low end of the socio-economic continuum in South Africa (Hallman, 2004:7).

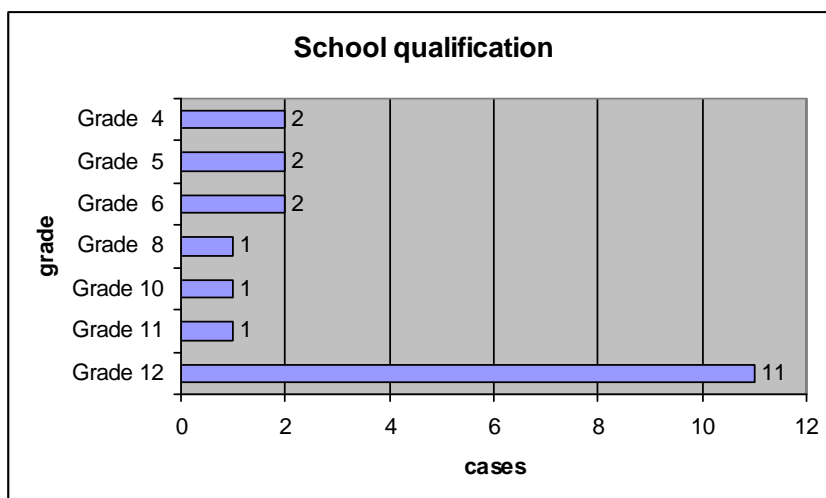
Given a high national unemployment rate, which is also true for Mmakaunyane, it is not surprising that only two women in the sample had a job and 16 did not have paid work at all – which also explains the women’s dire financial situation.

Figure 12:



The level of qualification, in particular of the younger participants, was quite good since over half of the group (n= 11) completed Grade 12.

Figure 13:

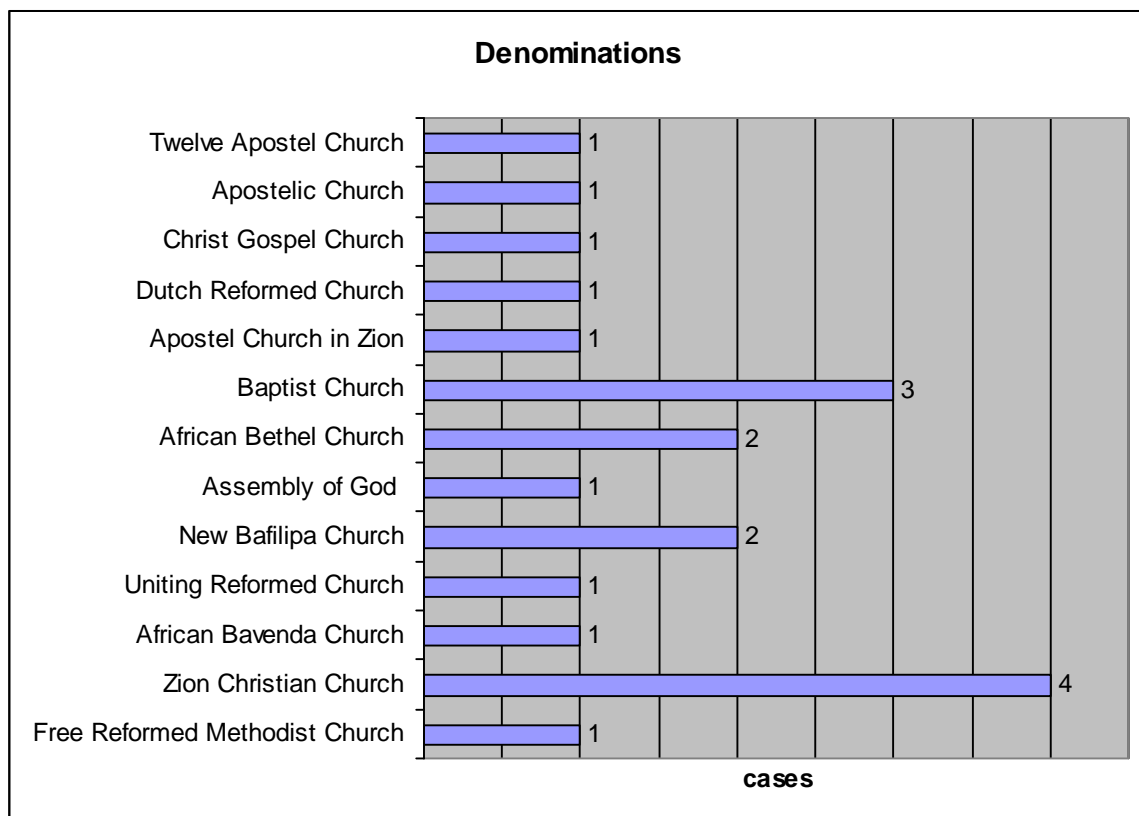


5.2.4 Denomination

Christianity has a powerful influence in South Africa and its local communities; faith is important to African Christian women in their daily struggle for survival. Representative survey data on sexual risk behaviour among young South Africans give evidence of the important role religion plays in the South African communities: the item “religion is very important in everyday life” was agreed to by two sample subgroups with 88.7% respectively 84.4% (cf. Pettifor et al., 2004a:2000; table 3).

All the women in the sample were members of a church, although church membership cannot automatically be equated with religiosity. However, it was striking to find so many different denominations in such a small sample.

Figure 14:



5.2.5 Summary

To summarise, the sample showed the following characteristics: Despite the impact of a migrant labour system and the former apartheid system, the extended family network seemed alive in Mmakaunyane. The majority of women lived in households with a range of other family members beyond the nuclear family and the average household size was 5,6. A nuclear family pattern was found in six cases. All women had a current (husband, boyfriend) or have had a previous intimate relationship (divorced or separated, widowed). Most women were either married or single (another three are widowed, one is divorced), often had long-term partnerships/marriages and more than two-thirds had children. Those who had no children were likely to have children at a later stage. Although they had a fairly good level of education, most women were unemployed and the socio-economic situation of both – the individual woman and the household in which she lives – was characterised by limited livelihood opportunities and poverty. The sample chosen showed homogeneity in terms of socio-economic status and location; the main criterion for distinction being age. This represents the rural community of Mmakaunyane – an area where no local economic development or initiatives for poverty alleviation have taken place – as a setting of ‘typical’ life conditions of many rural black women in South Africa.

5.3 Socio-economic constraints in the participants’ lives

As described in section 4.3.3, Mmakaunyane is dominated by rural households in which traditional practices are still in place. The area is characterised by a lack of structural development with infrastructure and services being of poor quality. Only a few households have access to an acceptable level of sanitation, and high unemployment rates and high levels of poverty characterise the socio-economic situation in the community. Indeed, no government programmes for poverty alleviation are in place – all of which give evidence of the way provincial and local governments have failed to implement poverty alleviation policies on the ground (Kongolo & Bamgose, 2002; Luyt, 2008). Thus, there have been no great changes in terms of poverty reduction for the residents

since democratisation in 1994, confirming the belief that “the same people who found themselves poor under apartheid, found themselves caught in a cycle of poverty that seemed to be worsening in democratic South Africa” (Benjamin, 2007:175). Economic life in Mmakaunyane is dominated by households and individuals searching for survival activities. In addition, owing to its structural underdevelopment, North West Province is said to be one of three provinces⁹⁹ in particular that are characterised by conditions in which the progress of learners through the education system is hampered (cf. South Africa. Department of Education, 2006:74).

In order to reproduce this reality, low socio-economic status was a criterion for my sampling. To briefly summarise: for the group under study, socio-economic hardships were central issues in their daily lives. As illustrated in the previous section, the overwhelming majority of participants was unemployed and had no income, with some receiving a child grant and two a small pension. Being employed and earning a regular salary was an exception that was true for two married interviewees only. The financial situation of the households in which the participants lived – most of the women lived in households containing a range of other family members – was precarious, and the personal income situation of the women was even worse. For most participants opportunities for making a living were very limited as a result of poverty.

Notwithstanding these conditions, the educational level of the women in my study was quite good (cf. section 5.2.3), in particular among the younger women (aged 18–34). Nine of the 11 women in this age group had completed Grade 12, which underlines the success of the educational system in reducing educational inequalities in the country. However, because Mmakaunyane is underdeveloped in terms of economic performance, all the interviewees, except for Nomsa and Christine, were unemployed. If people living in Mmakaunyane want to find a job they generally have to leave the area (both Nomsa and Christine commute over long distances to reach their work; Nomsa works in Mabopane and Christine in Pretoria).

⁹⁹ The other two provinces concerned are Eastern Cape and Limpopo.

In the knowledge of these conditions, I wanted to investigate the way the participants in my study managed their material survival, whether their agency is constrained by their economic circumstances and whether there are elements of transactional sex detectable. In this regard, a range of studies conducted all over Africa¹⁰⁰ gives evidence of the fact that poverty is a driving factor for women to engage in transactional sexual relationships in order to secure survival or to gain access to consumption goods. As noted earlier, given these circumstances women's direct access to resources through transactional sex and the possibility of choosing partners is interpreted as a form of agency. Young women who consciously engage in transactional sex do not see themselves as victims, rather they are acting in a calculating and exploitative way, seeking to assert themselves and further their own interests in the pursuit of modernity (cf. Leclerc-Madlala, 2003).¹⁰¹

In the sampling I did not state the type of relationship the interviewee should have and therefore I neither deliberately included nor excluded transactional sexual relationships. Nevertheless, I expected to come across them.

5.3.1 Unmarried women: in need for resources

Several of the younger unmarried women without personal income depended on the extended family household they lived in (with parents and/or other relatives) and/or the money and gifts they were given by their boyfriends. Interviewees like Tshepiso, Mona and Kamohelo had returned to their parents' home when they had been left by or had left their partner.

While I had expected that some of the younger women would be involved in transactional sex, there was no evidence that any of the women in the sample was involved in such a relationship. These women's relationships were love relationships, long lasting or, if

¹⁰⁰ See footnote 38.

¹⁰¹ Seen from a radical feminist perspective such an interpretation of agency is flawed since it disregards the sexism embedded in transactional sex: in transactional sexual relations the greater economic power of men exploits female bodies and it is men who usually determine the conditions under which sex takes place.

fairly new, amorous;¹⁰² Dyondzeka was the only one who admitted that her boyfriend sometimes gave her money when she slept with him. However, the participants seemed to believe that it is legitimate to expect material support from a boyfriend; in other words asking for money or gifts from a boyfriend was very common, and was regarded as normal.

This finding confirms what I described in the literature review: gifts are an important part of dating relationships in South Africa, reflecting the perception that gifts are a symbol for a girl's worth and a man's interest (cf. Luke & Kurz, 2002:4; Kaufman & Stavrou, 2002; cf. section 2.4.3). They are also part of the exchange principle inherent in the South African concept of sexuality (cf. Thornton, 2002; section 2.2.1). In my sample, all the young unmarried women admitted that they asked their boyfriends for support, and that when they did, the men either gave them money or bought them what they wanted. Two exceptions to this pattern were Kamohelo's boyfriend, who did not keep his promises, and Gladys, who did not accept her boyfriend's presents because of his involvement with another woman. However, the wide acceptance of and both partners' matter-of-fact attitude towards material support from the boyfriend's side were well demonstrated in the responses from Catherine, Lisa and Elisabeth:

Well, if I want something, maybe, let's say earrings, I just tell him in advance. Let's say something, maybe a dress – I just tell him in advance, that on this day I want something like this, so that he can buy it for me, because obviously I don't work, I don't have money.
(Catherine)

Lisa: I ask him. Like, when I need some things.

Interpreter: When she wants something, she asks him.

And then do you discuss it? How do you do it?

Interpreter: Hm, just in the discussion she asks, can you give me some money that I need, some things that I need. He promises something.

And he is giving it to you or is it just a promise?

Interpreter: He gives it to her. (Lisa & Interpreter)

¹⁰² Only few relationships were described as problematic at the time of the interview.

... if I, maybe need money, so maybe I want to go somewhere, maybe there's some work some-where, so I need to go there. So I go to him and then [say], 'will you maybe please give me some hundred Rand or two hundred Rand, I need this and this and this'. So another thing, if maybe I am not feeling well like maybe I am sick, so I go to him, ask maybe hundred Rand, I want to go to a clinic or to a doctor ... (Elisabeth)

If a boyfriend struggled to provide because he already had other obligations, money could become a matter for dispute, as in the case of Elisabeth. Her discontent mirrored a feeling of being devaluated and not coming first.

Every time I ask [you] for money, you tell me your parents need something, so what about me? ... You have to do something cause it's me and then your parents.

Sometimes if I ask him for money, then his parents need money and then me and he has to look for himself. So sometimes it's difficult. I feel like maybe he doesn't want to give me that money.

In Kamohelo's perception the boyfriend's non-provision and broken promises indicated a rather poor, problematic relationship:

The problem in this is when she asked something from him, he always promises but he does not fulfil the promises ...

So, what would you like, what would you expect or what would you like to get from him?

What she wants is that when she asks something from him, he should be able to assist and then to give her love. (Interpreter for Kamohelo)

There was clearly a taken-for-granted expectation of material support on the part of the male partner; a "modus operandi" which outrun conscious intentions (Bourdieu, 1977:79), which, I suggest, in my research context is linked to the African socio-cultural construction of sexuality, as described by Thornton (2002) as indicating love, loyalty and commitment. Whereas radical feminism condemns women's economic dependence on men per se as a means of dominance – which it undoubtedly often is – I postulate in line with difference theorists a more nuanced interpretation that considers its local meaning.

This exchange principle, which is inherent in relationships as a gendered practice, signifies a good or a bad relationship. Exchanges of gifts or money are indicative of a woman's value to the man and are not to be equated with a sexually exploitative relationship. Material exchange from the male to the female partner is a socio-cultural obligation and economic dependence does not necessarily undermine women's sexual agency. Negotiating and decision-making power in terms of having sex and protection from disease or pregnancy is not automatically precluded (although it can be, as in Tshepiso's case; I will expand on the issue in section 6.4.2). A similar interpretation is given by Poulin (2007) in a study of young Malawian men and women.

Tshepiso's case was more complicated. Her boyfriend supported her family financially and she was very grateful; however, at the same time she felt obligated and dependent not least because of his oppressive behaviour. Tshepiso felt as if she "sacrifices" herself and her interests to him. For example, she decided it was better to refrain from greeting other people in order not to rouse his extreme jealousy. Tshepiso's narrative illustrates the inner conflict she experienced, on the one hand, in coping with her partner's oppressive behaviour and finding a way to balance her feelings of dependence and, on the other, her gratitude and love for him. The emphasis she put on 'love' is important for remaining in the relationship and putting up with her boyfriend's moods.

The boyfriend I have now is a jealous person. He does not want me to do anything. He does not want me to have friends. He just wants us to be together each and everyday. And he is jealous; I can go with him to, let me say to town or to anywhere. Then you find your previous students, he doesn't know about them. Just to greet them, eish.

What happens then?

He fights. He shouts. But because I rely on him because of financial problems, sometimes it is difficult. But we have to sacrifice.

To get money, do you ask him for money?

Yes. He supports all my family, my children; he is doing everything in his power. He is loving but he is just too jealous.

...

Ja. He is a difficult person, but I do love him.

What do you love about him?

I love his caring. He is a drinker but he does care about me.

What does he do to show that?

Just be there, providing, just make me happy. And he loves my daughters very much. He is the one who is taking the responsibility. Now they are going to school because of him, everything.

In this context the possibly more Western concept of dependence/independence was not “alien” to the study participants. Tshepsio disclosed feeling “dependent” on her boyfriend who provided for her whole family and would rather like “to do things for herself”. In a similar manner Julia and Karen broached the issue of dependence/independence in the focus group discussions. Julia mentioned it when talking about professional life chances (“you have everything of your own. Then you don’t have to depend on someone”; cf. p. 188), Karen when talking about the benefits of good education (“you won’t be depending on somebody else ... because you are independent, you rely on yourself”; cf. p. 193). Therefore I will use the concept in the data analysis.

Tshepiso found the feeling of dependency quite restricting. She was the only one who admitted that her current boyfriend (mis)used his financial power to limit and control her. In response she was longing for greater autonomy and had concrete plans for the future to enhance her independence:

Somehow it is not fair. I don’t want to be dependent. Life is too short. I want to do things for myself but he doesn’t allow me to do that. He is too selfish.

Do you have other plans?

Ja. I have got other plans. I was doing home-based care. I want to be a sister, a nurse because I love people. I love helping people. I just love helping. So I was doing home-based care. Because of financial problems I had to quit, but I will do it again. That is my plan.

In sum, despite the severe levels of poverty there was no evidence among the participants of their being engaged in multiple partnerships or exploitive relationships as described by Selikow et al. (2002), Hunter (2002) or Leclerc-Madlala (2003). Instead, there was a fairly strong emphasis on the aspect of love. However, within a love relationship the female partner expected material support from the male partner who was not – owing to the prevailing social gender norms – in a position to refuse. If a boyfriend did not give

gifts in the form of cash or other support, it signified to the women that the relationship was unhealthy. The love aspect was central for both partners and their gendered practice – although in different ways. For the female partner it disguised her economic dependence and all the disadvantages which may be connected to it and for the male partner it gave a reason for his duty to provide. Whether the young women exchanged sexual favours for gifts was not evident. However, all the partnerships here included sexual relations. For the woman money and gifts made explicit her worth to the boyfriend but were by no means associated with prostitution. I suggest that such a conception overrides feelings of dependency. On the contrary, if accommodated as a matter of course the boyfriend's provision enhances the woman's self-worth and gives her a feeling of power. On the other hand, it can become disempowering – as illustrated in Tshepiso's case – if the material assistance is accompanied by erratic, moody, pressurising partner behaviour. The woman then becomes aware of the price she is paying as a result of her dependent status and her constrained level of agency is revealed. Tshepiso's story illustrates the thin line between feeling empowered and valued or disempowered and dependent – it all depends of the man's attitude: he has the ultimate power and choice to act.

In terms of the question of how to achieve greater independence, I found that in both focus groups access to education was considered important as a foundation for obtaining greater opportunities in life, for achieving independence and for having better options for marriage. While Focus Group 2 merely argued about the general benefits of education for a better and more independent future, Focus Group 1 participants linked independence to job opportunities, expressing their own experience of the fact that even a fairly good education did not necessarily lead to employment.

The younger participants in Focus Group 1 linked a woman's independence closely to obtaining a qualified job with a regular income – and thus replicated the modern feminist argument that employment and economic independence are indispensable steps towards greater autonomy (cf. Friedan, 1963). This position was summed up in the example of having a “government job”, a profession representing higher education, a large income

and all the advantages deriving from it: certainly a career and way of life out of reach of the participants. In the case of our participants, economic constraints did not allow the interviewees to live an independent life: after separating from their partners, economic constraints forced Tshepiso, Kamohelo, Maria or Mona to return to their parents' homes.

FG 1 I: If a woman wants to lead a life on her own, what will she do?

Catherine: You must get a job.

Kamohelo: And your house.

Julia: A proper job.

I: What is a proper job?

Julia: A permanent job.

Kamohelo: Like government job.

Julia: Find your own house, and your own car, and you'll be successful, you know. Suppose you have everything of your own. Then you don't have to depend on someone.

In the course of the discussion on independence, participants introduced “love” as a kind of obstacle (“troublemaker”) in a woman’s life. In other words, as soon as a man is involved in a woman’s life, she will lose her independence and become trapped in relationship problems which are likely to constrain her agency. The views differed: some promoted staying alone and even abstaining in order to have a peaceful life, others could not imagine a life without a man. There was a notion – also articulated in Focus Group 2 – that strongly reflected the pervasiveness of the dominant pattern of hegemonic masculinity and the heterosexual norm: women who live without a man were assumed to have had very bad experiences and to prefer to stay alone for this reason. In other words, a woman living independently on her own was hardly imaginable in an environment in which people believe that a woman has no standing without a man and that she needs to be protected by a man.

FG 1 Catherine: And she mustn't fall in love. Immediately when you fall in love –

Gladys: – troublemaker is coming.

Julia: Say, you have someone who is going to visit ... and it's not safe cause of AIDS. When your previous partner comes and ... finds another man inside.

Tshepiso: It is better when you stay alone, you have to abstain forever.

Julia: But that is not easy. You have to have someone in your life. It's not easy to be alone.

Tshepiso: Many women are coping without a man They hate men, because of the previous relationship or because maybe she has been raped when she was young.

5.3.2 Married women: negotiating expenses

In marriage there is traditionally a strict division of labour. While women take responsibility for household chores and child rearing, material provision is the duty of the husband (cf. Hargreaves et al., 2006:15; Castle & Kiggundu, 2007:47; Fox et al., 2007:594). The participants in my study, when asked what they expected from their partner, emphasised the fact that they expected a partner to provide for the family (see section 6.2.1).

In a traditional community a married woman is under the marital control of her husband (cf. Curran & Bonthuys, 2004:10). In the literature review I highlighted the role of *lobola* which underpins all forms of marriage in southern Africa. *Lobola* has been criticised by some African feminists who argue that the payment of *lobola* is the cornerstone of patriarchy, entitling the husband to full ownership rights over his wife, which under certain conditions renders them vulnerable to all forms of abuse (Ramphela, 1989:400; Mugambe, 2006:76). According to official customary law, in monogamous marriages all marital property resides with the husband, who has sole capacity to perform juridical acts in respect of this property. This includes money earned by the wife from work done outside the home (Curran & Bonthuys, 2004:11).¹⁰³

The economic dependence of wives has been a major theme in all modern feminist theories. Economic power can be used by husbands to confine their wives, force them into submission and create dependency – a humiliating experience for some women in the sample whose marriages had failed. These women, either living separated from their

¹⁰³ The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act of 1999 determines that, unless spouses conclude an antenuptial contract to exclude this effect, marriages concluded after the operation of the Act would be in community of property. This provision does not generally apply to existing customary marriages which were concluded before the promulgation of the Act (Curran & Bonthuys, 2004:11).

husbands like Rose, Maria and Sheila or officially divorced like Grace, had been left penniless after their separation and were confronted with the problem of having to provide alone for a number of children since customary law makes no provision for spousal or child maintenance after divorce (ibid:12).

Ok, she is separate now from her husband, this man. Now, he is the father of the children, but he is not taking care of them. And now she is left alone with the kids. She has to take care of them, take them to school, provide for everything. And then she can't make anything to eat out of R180 a month. It's quite difficult for her. (Interpreter for Rose)

The five married women who still lived with their spouses were slightly better off than the other participants. Two of them were working and thus had a regular income, while one was a pensioner, and two were unemployed and lived in poor households. However, they displayed a variety of behaviours in terms of decision making on spending.

In my sample it was just Mandisa and Nomsa who followed the traditional route of letting the husband decide alone how the money is spent. Both had internalised the husband's position as the head of the family and as decision maker, but this did not seem to be a problem for either of them and they did not feel it placed constraints on their agency.¹⁰⁴

We Africans, we don't sit down and put money together, this is for you, this is for us, no. We just give you the money once, take it to the husband to do that, do this. (Mandisa)

... But he just leaves me and gives me my own space on that thing. ... Like shopping – we have to go shopping together. We fight a lot because I want this, he says 'it doesn't suit you', especially clothing. So he will even leave me out of the shop and just go somewhere and then when he comes and tells me 'when I come back I want to find you finished', you see, something like that. Because he did give me space and I will just take whatever I wanted. (Nomsa)

¹⁰⁴ The question arises whether the sexual agency of the two married women who earn salaries is enhanced or not. For Christine I cannot answer the question, however, she seems to enjoy the sexual relationship with her husband (see p. 253). Nomsa's example will be discussed in more detail in section 6.4.1.

In contrast, Christine and Karen made joint decisions with their spouses. If there was a disagreement both women discussed the issue with their husbands until they reached an agreement. Emily's deceased husband, on the other hand, was happy to leave all the decision making to his wife.

He did bring the money, and then I decided. I said: 'Look we're going to do this and this and this and this'. And we understand each other, and then he said 'yes', he said 'yes'... (Emily)

Tell me, who makes the decision when it comes to money, children matters. How do you decide about such things?

They discuss.

I: Do you make a decision together?

Yes.

...

If you want something and your partner says 'we can't buy this and we can't do this' and you really want it, how do you manage to get it? What do you do?

She tries to persuade him, to talk sense to him, to show him the right way, why she wants that. And they end up agreeing to it (Interpreter for Christine)

However, this joint decision making on spending is not necessarily an expression of greater equality in the relationship. In Emily's case her husband wanted to be free of responsibility and thus left everything to his wife. In Christine's case she sometimes had to make some effort to persuade her husband about what was best. Karen and her husband cooperated in trying to make ends meet since they were both unemployed; prior to their unemployment Karen's husband decided on how the money should be spent.

... those years that he was employed, he can just go into the shop. Most of the household things inside of the kitchen, the pails, the dishes and everything – he is not ashamed buying things like this. ... He did it and said, go into the shop and see that, maybe here's a sale, a plate, some dinner plates or whatever. He buys them, everything.

... but now, as I am unemployed, and also he, the grant that he gets, he puts in the house, so he can do whatever ...

You make decisions together?

Yah.

If you have a different opinion on something as your husband, what do you do?

A different opinion, then we discuss, because sometimes I make things ... and he's got a point, then I am going to discuss it ...
(Karen)

A good example for agency was given by Margret. She had taken a remarkable step in terms of economic (in)dependence which could be interpreted as a 'late act of resistance'. Margret is one of the two senior participants and, at the time of the study, had been married for 46 years. Through half of the marriage her agency was severely constrained by domestic violence until her eldest daughter intervened more than 20 years ago. Since then, her husband has stopped battering her. On the advice of her youngest daughter Margret took her husband to the Maintenance Court where he was instructed to pay R500 a month to support his family. Prior to this, he had not provided for his family and had spent all his money on alcohol. Margret herself did not actually object to her husband's behaviour "out from the custom" but took action when supported by her daughter even though she felt uncomfortable doing so. Considering how long Margret's had lived under customary rule this was a fairly radical step for her to take.

... she said out of R780 of her husband, he is giving her R500, so she is getting R780 of herself plus R500 from the husband.

Oh! So you are a rich woman!

(Margret in English) Oh yes, I am. *(Translation continues)* She is saying, he didn't want to provide for the family. .. she did take her husband to the Maintenance Court. So, they told him, that after getting his pension, he has to give the wife 500 Rand.

Why did she do that?

When he got his pension-money, he bought beers and didn't buy anything for the house ... and then she made the decision to go to court. Yah, it's a Maintenance Court. It is not a court. But there is a mediator inbetween from the government.

Who gave you the idea to go there?

The last born daughter. Ok, she said, it was not ok for her to go ... she did have mercy for him, it was ok, out from the custom, it was ok for the husband to use money just like that. Until the last born daughter told her that, 'no, this man has to support us. He must not drink all his pension-money'. (Interpreter for Margret)

This episode demonstrates that some (younger) women no longer conform to the imposed traditional rules and, as Hargreaves et al. (2006:11) note, “... challenge to the rules may emerge from women’s rebellion”. It might be that the legislative framework for the promotion of gender equality that has developed since 1994 is supportive in this respect, and may have motivated Margret’s youngest daughter to push her mother to assert her rights.

In terms of the question of how to achieve greater independence, participants in Focus Group 2 stressed the role of education (while the younger participants in Focus Group 1 stressed employment as well). Karen explained her view on how education enhances a woman’s options and agency while, without it, there will be no choices. It is education that permits independence and can help, as Mandisa added, to escape from unpleasant relationships.

- FG 2* *Karen:* I think for a woman ... without education you cannot stand for yourself. And then you have to be educated and then after that then you’ll know how to lead a normal life. Because you won’t be depending on somebody else. You’ll know that because you are independent you are going to rely on yourself. Everything. If you have to do something then you’re going to tell yourself that ‘now I want to do this’ and then you are going to do it. So I think we should be educated. ... I think if you don’t have education, then you are out.
- Nomsa:* I do agree with you on that one.
- Emily:* You’re nothing.
- Nomsa:* You have to build your future through education.
- Karen:* ... you are going to build your future on that foundation [education] ... but this present moment, in our generation, if you don’t have education then you’re out.
- Emily:* Yes! Yes!
- Karen:* Because you are not going to do anything. ... What will you do – what must she do if she wants to live her own life without having somebody to rely on? Then you have to focus on education.
- Mandisa:* And to avoid abuse and things.

This emphasis on education reveals an understanding of the transformative role education plays in achieving greater individual and social development. Considering the women’s experiences of previous restrictions and inequalities in receiving an education, in

particular in the rural areas, this would indicate a hopeful and future-directed stance. The greater average age of participants in Focus Group 2 may explain why participants' perceptions differed to those in Focus Group 1. With their own restricted schooling opportunities under apartheid in mind, the post-apartheid state represents infinite opportunities for future generations and education is seen as key to transforming inequality; however, the immediate experience of the younger participants was that even an improved education does not provide employment or the enhanced opportunities that are connected to it.

5.4 The socio-cultural machinery securing masculine sexual dominance

After the end of the apartheid era, South Africa underwent rapid sexual liberalisation. Changes in the socio-economic, political and social arenas, and the emergence of an HIV/AIDS epidemic also elicited change in the realm of sexuality. The sexual rights of all South Africans were affirmed in the Bill of Rights (cf. Beresford, Schneider & Sember, 2008:201) and “[t]he Constitution has created the spaces for moral and cultural alternatives in the midst of – rather than by displacing – the taboos of old ...” (Posel, 2004:60). It is possible that the HIV/AIDS pandemic – which climaxed in the post-apartheid era – has accelerated liberal sexual discourse through extensive public health education campaigns. However, as the new openness has also provoked strong opposition from conservative (religious) groups (Beresford, Schneider & Sember, 2008:213) it has created tensions and contradictions between different normative frames. At present, contradictory sexual discourses coexist in South Africa, either endorsing sex as freedom, as a symbol of a new accomplishment of life linked to urbanisation and the emergence of consumerism on the one hand, or sexuality viewed as a locus of moral shame with HIV as a signifier of bad sexuality on the other (cf. Posel, 2004:62). MacFadden (2003) warns against patriarchal sexual discourses that help to entrench and conceal the heterosexist and patriarchal identities and relationships that lead to the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS among women.

In the literature review I expanded on what I perceive as the sexist nature of traditional South African (sexual) culture. I highlighted in particular the impact of Christian and African tradition on defining South African black women's subordinate social status and on shaping their sexuality. I also discussed the increased sexual violence against women and girls in South Africa which has been interpreted as a masculine response to transition (Morrell, 2001b:28; Niehaus, 2004:392; Posel, 2004:62; Walker, 2005) and has been identified as a key issue in the HIV/AIDS epidemic (cf. Maman et al., 2000; Vetten & Bhana, 2001; Dunkle et al., 2004a; Jewkes et al., 2006b; Fox et al., 2007; Amnesty International, 2008). Within the context of increased sexual violence against women, I drew attention to an argument made by Michael Whisson, who states that the old moral system was not effectively replaced by the new, thus setting the stage for the exploitation of the weak by the powerful at every level of society, and that this exploitation affects women and girls in the form of sexualised violence, a brutal reality often masked by religiosity and denial (Whisson, 2004:362–363). Whisson draws the conclusion that the debate on sexual behaviour caused by the impact of HIV/AIDS takes place “against the social background of the widespread abuse of women and children and the cultural background of denial and evasion” (ibid:364).

This is the broader background against which I probe socio-cultural constraints to rural South African black women's sexual agency. In my research context I was interested in exploring the way the socio-cultural background of denial and evasion (Whisson, 2004) plays out in the participants' habitus and how the suppression of sexual discourses helps to entrench and conceal traditional heterosexist relationships (MacFadden, 2003).

In his explanation of the Kabyle society, Bourdieu (1977:164–169) argues that the world of tradition is experienced as a natural world taken for granted and that crisis is a necessary condition for the questioning of *doxa*, that is, of what is taken for granted. However, crisis is not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of a critical discourse. The AIDS pandemic is a crisis in its own right and it has, indeed, brought “the undiscussed into discussion” (ibid:168); it has broken old taboos and silences and has drawn attention to issues of sexuality, sexual practice and sexual behaviour, forcing

society to confront questions about the nature and impact of sexuality. In this context I seek to explore whether there are any indications of critical discourse among the interviewees about the traditional gender regime, or any indications of a changing attitude towards existing gender relations emerging.

In the following sections I will firstly present data on the local norms and moral codes guiding the participants' social conduct. In considering Curran and Bonthuys' (2004:6) assumption that women in particular argue that old customs are no longer appropriate in contemporary customary communities, I intend to explore whether rules are taken for granted or discussed critically or whether they are even being eroded. To what extent are women active agents in promoting socio-cultural practices and values that perpetuate gender imbalances? In dealing with these questions I had to consider carefully and be aware of not falling into the trap of, what I discussed previously, as cultural reductionism and colonial modes of representation.

Secondly, I would like to explore the way culture and society have influenced a participant's sexual development; how sexual norms and knowledge were obtained. Given that HIV/AIDS opened up spaces for greater outspokenness about sexuality and sexual rights, I investigate the prevailing discourse on HIV/AIDS in the community and whether the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS has in some ways broken the traditional silence on sexual matters in the community of Mmkaunyane.

In the changing South African societies, shifts in the gender order are underway, yet the local level is characterised by a deeply entrenched acceptance of male traditional authority and patriarchal control. I was therefore interested in exploring rural South African black women's vision for change in the gender order and whether governmental gender transformative achievements have reached the grassroots level.

5.4.1 *The patriarchal code of respect and its rules of good conduct for women*

Focus group discussions are recognised as being particularly useful for studying dominant values (cf. Finch & Lewis, 2003) and therefore I asked the two focus groups, which I had set up as a supplementary source of data, to discuss what the participants regarded as appropriate behaviour and misbehaviour for a woman/wife according to the local moral codes, as well as what was regarded as proper female sexual conduct. I wanted to probe the way values and rules are reflected by the participants, and to what extent things are taken for granted and institutionalised or, maybe, criticised.

Focus Group 1 called on the socio-cultural construction of the two very distinct gender roles that expect women to be submissive and men to be assertive. Participants related a woman's good conduct to her submissive attitude towards the husband, such as showing him respect, obeying his rules and reflecting his values, not questioning his behaviour, doing the household chores and taking care of the children. In a way, the participants' description brings to mind the Western concept of the public/private divide: women are supposed to do all the work in the home while men are going "outside". In chapter 3 I discussed what Oyewùmi (2003b:39) called the "Westocentricity" of certain concepts used by modern feminism (cf. p. 78). The public/private concept seems to be applicable to the experience of the study participants primarily because they did not perform agricultural labour as before in times of intense migration.¹⁰⁵

FG 1 I: What do you regard as appropriate behaviour for a woman/wife in your culture?

Catherine: A wife or a woman has to respect her husband.

...

All, Kamohelo: We have to wash the dishes, cook, watch the kids, take the responsibility of the house, kids and even – he can stay outside with another woman. You don't have to ask him when he comes back. That's our culture.

¹⁰⁵ Early 20th century anthropologists found a distorted pattern of the sexual division of labour in most rural African societies. In the era of full-blooded migration "the vast bulk of rural labour had come to be performed by women" (Bozzoli, 1983:150) who were burdened with domestic and agriculture labour.

Furthermore, the group alluded to the rules that a woman is told about when she marries, such as (a) to be patient, (b) not to leave her husband or in-law family and return home to the family of origin because there would be no room for her anymore (“you don't have to come back because they are not allowing us to come back”), (c) to respect her husband and her mother-in-law. This strict role allocation of domestic service and child caring to the female is one of the main features that, for Millett (1970), characterises the *family as patriarchy's chief institution*. “The limited role allotted the female tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience” (ibid:26) while the rest of human achievement is largely reserved for the man. Once more, the question is raised as to whether such a Western notion can be applied to the lives of the women in Mmakaunyane, although that would be my preferred interpretation.

Authors like Bozzoli (1983), Ramphela (1989) or Campbell (1990) approached the social reality of South African families from a similar perspective. The axiom of patriarchal gender relations constituted their research interests and interpretations. Although written in a time when apartheid was the prevailing dispensation, these interpretations hold true to this day. As Ramphela (1989:395) phrases it: “The family (used here in its wider sense) is still a major sphere in which the domination of men is secured at the expense of women. Each family is a site for individual men to oppress women in their own particular way”.

The group explained the value of respect for the husband in the following ways: when there is an argument the wife has to go down on her knees. She is not allowed to raise her voice to her husband; instead she always has to “calm down” and “take control of the situation”. In the problem-centred interview Christine gave an example of the way she conformed to such a rule:

... when maybe there is an argument [with the husband], she tries to be humble so that conversation can just get ... just to cool up everything. Every time when the husband is shouting, then she goes down. (Interpreter for Christine)

In addition, respect includes the rule that even when a husband beats his wife, she has to stay in the relationship, hide the violence and is not supposed to leave. “When he abuses you that’s your problem” (FG 1; Julia). These issues all bear witness to what Hargreaves et al. (2006) found in their research: that it is the woman's responsibility to make the marriage work, to endure its hardships and to stay in the marriage. It seems to me that, with the separation of the wife from her family of origin, these rules of obedience reinforce her dependent status by enforcing her absorption into the in-law family where she may become isolated and fall prey to a violent husband. Often the mother-in-law reproduces patriarchal domination in the home by controlling her daughter-in-law’s behaviour. The rules have a deeply patriarchal essence since they play into the hands of the perpetrator leaving the survivor of the violence unprotected.

- FG 1* *Tshepiso:* It is like when you get married, your auntie must tell you those rules, when you get married.
Julia: They give you rules, many rules.
Tshepiso: You have to be patient, you don’t have to come back home because there is no room for you. If you’re married you have to take control of any situation, you don’t have to come back because they are not allowing us to come back.
Kamohelo: They say you must respect your husband – and your mother-in-law.
I: When they say you have to respect your husband – what does that mean?
Kamohelo: When you argue you have to go down on your knees.
Julia: And you don’t have to raise your voice to your husband. You always have to calm down.
All: Calm down.
Julia: When he beats you, you don’t have to go home, you have to stay. Whenever it’s hard, you have to stay. When he abuses you, that’s your problem.

This group’s discussion raised issues that radical feminists have identified as methods by which male power is manifested and maintained: physical force and control of women’s consciousness. Millett (1970:33) highlights the point that patriarchy grants the father almost total ownership of wife and children, including powers of physical abuse. Others (Daly, 1978; Barry, 1979) focus on how women actively participate in carrying out the rules.

In the problem-centred interviews, several participants (unmarried: Kamohelo, Mona; then married: Sheila, Maria, Grace, Margret, Tshepiso) who reported domestic violence had endured it for several years, trying to follow the rules until they gave up hope of change. Contrary to the rule, the married women in this group had all managed to leave their abusive husbands (in Margret's case, her husband stopped beating her). Non-compliance with the rules usually resulted in punishment; wives leaving their marriages fear social degradation and stigma. Maria mentioned the disgrace she feared when thinking about leaving her abusive husband because it is the wife's responsibility to make the marriage work, regardless of the abuse she has suffered. A failed marriage dishonours the woman (see p. 263).

Based on the patriarchal code of respect, possibly the most coercive rule revealed in the group discussions and also mentioned in Hargreaves et al.'s (2006) study, was one with far-reaching consequences for female autonomy and agency, that is, a wife may not refuse her husband sex (the issue will be discussed at length in section 6.4.1). This rule puts female sexuality under male control giving men full ownership over women's bodies – a situation supporting MacKinnon's (1989) argument that sexuality itself is the dynamic underlying gender inequality, as well as Rich's (1986a) argument that compulsory heterosexuality makes women feel that the male sex-drive is a man's right.

Sexuality itself is a process of putting the contents of gender into play, a process through which meanings of gender are embodied, and are thus constituted and organised in socially determinative or compulsory ways (Miriam, 2007:215). Male sex-right, mainly legitimated in marriage, is a patriarchal socio-cultural construction implying a severe violation of women's human and sexual rights since it defers their consent to sexual intercourse. In the Mmakaunyane community male sex-right is a key underlying force in intimate partnerships. It is inscribed in the patriarchal code of respect together with other rules of obedience restricting female sexual agency to the fullest.

Focus Group 1 had a clear understanding of the patriarchal notion of this code of respect and the discriminating effects socio-cultural values with their gendered rules have on

women. In marriage a wife has no right to protect her bodily integrity; her body is owned by her husband. If she resists, the husband has the right to substitute her. Some participants, however, displayed some critical thinking concerning these matters, which supports Bonthuys and Curran's (2004) argument that women may be the ones to tackle the inappropriateness of old traditions in contemporary customary communities:

FG 1 Tshepiso: That is why men take advantage of women because of the culture. Because you don't have to go home and explain the situation, you have to stay there and think everything will be ok, even when you see that nothing is going to be ok but you have to. Because of our culture.

There was a sense of insurgency in the group in that they recognised the discriminating nature of the imposed rules, the double standards applied to men and women that confine the woman to the house while allowing the man to do what he likes:

FG 1 Catherine: Julia said a wife should obey the rules – but not all the rules. Sometimes I disagree with those rules.
I: Like what rules?
Gladys: ... a woman in the culture is oppressed.
Tshepiso & Gladys: Yeah, we are under pressure. We won't have to say a thing to a man. They say you are disrespecting. We have to obey.

The participants in Focus Group 1 did not refer to the naturalness of this order, but clearly identified culture as an oppressive force, implying, although not consciously expressing it as such, that socio-cultural prescriptions are socially constructed and thus their possible change dynamics. This discontent may lead to individual acts of resistance, as in Margret's example (cf. p. 192–193), and may result, if guided, in forms of collective action. This reflects Connell's idea that a dominant pattern of masculinity is open to challenge and thus to the possibility of change in gender relations (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:846). What evoked their more critical stance was not articulated and was not quite clear to me. I suggest it may have arisen from an interconnection of personal experience of oppression with an intellectual understanding of how male dominance undermines women's well-being.

However, the discourse in Focus Group 2 took an entirely different turn. It strongly reflected the way women buy into patriarchal rules and defend patriarchal values by connecting them to both the socio-cultural tenets of Christianity and African tradition. No criticism of the existing gender relations was expressed. This group discussion mirrored what Bourdieu (2001:34) calls “doxic acceptance”. Contrary to Focus Group 1, thoughts and perceptions were structured in accordance with the nature of domination that is imposed on the dominated (ibid:13), which is, according to Bourdieu, an act of submission. The discussion also exemplified what Daly calls “mind rape” through “deceptive (male) myth creation” (e.g. Christian dogma) which conditions women’s psyches so that they are emotionally compliant (cf. Daly, 1978:109–110).

In Focus Group 2, good conduct was not discussed as something imposed on woman by culture; on the contrary, compliance with the rules was seen as a necessary condition for developing self-respect. The group participants displayed the deeply internalised patriarchal values that secure male power, such as the value of marriage or virtues that confine women’s movements. The participants emphasised the fact that a young woman must “look after herself” and thus not be “rubbish”, meaning she should keep herself pure in order to get married. There was an emphasis on the pivotal role of marriage. Good behaviour was defined according to a strict Christian moral code and encompassed a set of norms and social values; for example, a woman should not drink alcohol, smoke, gamble, walk the streets or be out late. Instead, going to church and doing the household chores were examples of good conduct. Furthermore, misbehaviour entailed not listening to parents or seniors, meeting boyfriends, going to parties or having premarital sex. Women who misbehave “will end up in the streets”, or “next to the liquor store”. Lorraine took her own case as an example:

FG 1 *Lorraine*: Yeah, like me. I was 15 years old.¹⁰⁶ I was misbehaving. I thought I have to do everything by myself. Going out, not respecting anyone, just say ‘I’m doing this on my own’. And I end up being pregnant because I was not listening to my parents.

¹⁰⁶ In the biographical questionnaire she declared her age to be 23 and her son’s age as 10, which suggests she was 13 when her son was born.

Also in relation to the question of proper sexual conduct, Focus Group 2 raised the issue of self-respect on the one hand and the loss of respect for seniors and traditions in the younger generation on the other. In the opinion of the group, self-respect was an indispensable precondition for a woman in terms of her self-esteem and positive development. However, this self-respect stemmed from appropriate behaviour and conforming to certain values and norms; it included respect for her parents and the older generation who guide the younger people. In promoting conformity with the established order there was no space for critical thinking. Furthermore, marriage was identified as being very important for a woman as a way of gaining social respect. For Nomsa, who acknowledged that there are other ways of life, dedicating her life to marriage was a deliberate decision in accordance with her faith.

FG 2 Emily: (laughter) Growing up – that means you must trust yourself, and look after yourself, so you can get married. Otherwise if you are not looking after yourself, you are rubbish, you won't get married. That's why they want us to look after ourselves when you're still growing up from the teen age. When you are still teen age, you must know who you are, and where you're from and where you are going to. ... So, you must have a good behaviour ..., to the family you must behave. ... You respect anyone, can be your family, can be not your family, you don't even know that one but you must respect her as if it's your mother's ... If it's like a granny's age it's your granny. Don't say 'oh no, I don't know that one', I can do as I like', do what you like in front of them.

Nomsa: Can I add something? Because life is not all about getting married. There're other women who feel that if they behave appropriately, they can end up doing everything for herself without a man next to her. There are others who have that ideas in their minds ... to go to school and learn and do something for themselves. ... Even myself when I was still young I did have that idea and when I was still growing and heard there's a marriage, I felt, it's a gift from God. I don't have to put it away. So let me change my life to this.

In this group traditional norms were strongly supported; adhering to tradition would be rewarded with a respectable life (“you go far”), while ‘disobeying’ as observed in today's youth was perceived negatively. Respect was what younger people owe older people; being respectful or not affected a family's reputation. Emily in particular defended this

concept of respect and resented it when young people refused to show respect. She lamented (as did the much younger Nomsa) the loss of the older generation's authority, as they could not guide the young any more – a problem often recognised in traditional communities.

FG 2 Emily: They do as they like these days. It's not like before. You can't say 'no, you can't do that', no. To whom? ...

I: *Can you give me examples?*

Maybe a small child, twelve years, ten years, standing with her boyfriend in front of the people. You can't say a word because they will say 'what? I know what you know.' So it's difficult these days. Difficult. They are not scared. When we were growing up, we were very scared If you were standing with a boyfriend and see that, comes somebody 'ui', even kneeling with your knee and [you] run away, [so] that older people mustn't see you. You try all your best, mustn't see you. Because even if he sees, although you don't know him, he can smack you. You won't tell at home 'somebody smacked me'. 'For what?' They will know what you were doing. But these days you can't do that, can't even say a word.

The participants lamented the erosion of norms and traditions in today's youth and were suspicious about a general moral decline. In the group as a whole there was a sense of acquiescence (cf. Bourdieu, 1977) in that members of the group defended or supported traditional values and rules. This may be read as a reaction to observable crisis tendencies in a society in the throes of transition and the participants' fear of dealing with a world that is losing its character as a natural phenomenon.

5.4.2 Women as active agents in perpetuating patriarchy

As displayed in the above conversations, patriarchy requires a degree of consent and active participation from women. With the concept of habitus, Bourdieu (1977) theorises the way objective social structures permeate an agent's subjective schemes of thought and behaviour. In the sample, Mandisa, Nomsa and Emily, who had a strong Christian-based faith in common,¹⁰⁷ in particular displayed active compliance with patriarchal rule

¹⁰⁷ Nomsa, Mandisa and Karen were all members of a fundamental Christian church called Born-Again-

although their ages differed greatly (46, 28, 63). Their habitus accounted firstly for Rakoszy's (2004) claim that patriarchy is interwoven in the Christian tradition in pervasive ways and that women's subordination is legitimised in the religious context by the presumed maleness of God and the male identity of Jesus. Secondly, it demonstrated Bourdieu's (2001) argument according to which a key reason for the perpetuation of the system of male dominance is its ability to make it appear natural.

All three women complied with the Christian model of female subordination. In several interview contexts they displayed an orthodox Christian-based understanding of the male's superior and the female's inferior natural positions in the world. In the Christian worldview the dualism of gender is fundamental, as is the notion of the complementarity of man and woman, and, in relation to the question of good conduct, Mandisa argued that her submission to her husband as head of the family according to the word of God, earned her great social respect – a benefit phrased by Connell (1995) in the context of hegemonic masculinity as “patriarchal dividend”.

FG 2 *Mandisa:* I take the word of God that told us that you must submit yourself to your husband. The husband is the head of the family, he must love me. So I take that, that thing made me a respected person.

Nomsa expressed a similar attitude in the problem-centred interview. In order to have a good marriage she positioned herself, according to the creation myth, as “Eva”, that is, coming after the man, and stated that it is her duty alone to take responsibility for the household chores because of women's and men's distinct natures. Although she deliberately submitted to her husband, she also belittled men in general (“they are like our children”) which may have given her a feeling of power and control:

So I used to listen to that other woman and then I just said ‘no, no, no, this thing, if I just want my marriage to work, I have to position myself’. I did even refer to the Bible because God created Adam and thereafter created Eva and then positioned Eva. And who is

Christians, while Emily belonged to the Apostolic Church. However, Karen neither articulated an essentialist view of gender nor denied women's equity rights.

Eva? I am Eva, so which means God has put me in that position to take care of my husband. And then, you know, how men are, they are not like us, they are like our children ... we have to take care of them.

... we have to sit down to know our positions not only our rights but even our position in marriage because I have to provide 'yes' to my husband, hopefully no matter sexually. I have to wash for him, that's my work, that's my position. Yeah, so other women will say 'why can he not wash for himself?' Men are not meant to take care of the kids, they are not meant to take up napkins on kids. We are, we are – the women, we have to take care of those things. So I don't know, maybe it's because I'm too cultural but that's how it is.
(Nomsa)

Nomsa's last statement ("but that's how it is") attests to Bourdieu's argument that women comprehend power relations through schemes of thought that are expressed in the founding oppositions of the symbolic order and that, furthermore, their acts of cognition are acts of doxic acceptance (cf. Bourdieu, 2001:33–34). Women's (and men's) traditional roles are assigned by God and derived from nature. It is a woman's duty to serve men. Likewise, Emily's mindset was structured by the naturalised social construction of the male and female hierarchy. She glorified the past and was highly critical of the ongoing erosion of the traditional hierarchical gender order and of contemporary women opposing the hierarchical gender arrangement. Like Nomsa and Mandisa, Emily rejected new role models which allow women greater autonomy and independence. In her statement she took the view of the dominant gender when she claimed that the woman *must* submit and *must* be under the guardianship of her husband ("they must come down") without offering any explanation for this. Her attitude seemed to be hostile towards women who act differently to her understanding of the gender order.

The relationship today of men and women? It's not so good like us, like that time of us, nnh, nnh, it's not nice. Because really these days, if you look at them, they both just don't care. If the man does this, the woman says: 'I also want to do the same.' And she's doing it. We never think about that, you see (*laughing*). ...
So, you think, it's better to think like this?
Oh yes, it's better to think like that, because really, we can't say, you can't think 'you must be equal with the men', no, I'm a woman.

I'm not a man, I'm a woman, who must be under the man, who must – you must always be down. When you have done something wrong and the man opens his eyes and says, 'hey, hey you,' you must say, 'oh, I'm sorry', so come down. Now they are not coming down – they are not coming down, these ladies.

Nomsa's, Mandisa's and Emily's essentialist thinking implied structures of permanence and invariability. In Emily's words: "A woman must be a woman, because she will die woman". They all rejected views that question the strict ideology of separate spheres or promote greater equality between men and women and thus militate against change in the gender order. On the basis of the idea that differences in gender originate in biology, all three women held inflexible essentialist ideas about stereotyped female and male gender roles. The acknowledgement and non-questioning of this gender double standard – or doxic acceptance – are major obstacles to change in the gender relations.

The examples above illustrate the way women can be complicit in their own oppression and in that of their fellow women. These women represent excellent examples of what Daly in her model terms the *scapegoat* or *token torturer* (Daly, 1978:132), that is, women who identify with the patriarchal viewpoint and are used in the absence of men to promote, monitor and mask patriarchal belief and values,¹⁰⁸ a process explained by Bourdieu (2001) by the notion of symbolic violence.

Another concrete example of compliance is given in the context of gender-based violence against women. In Hargreaves et al.'s (2006) study responses given by the informants to the question "Why do men beat women?" were that under certain circumstances physical violence may be a legitimate tool for disciplining women who challenge the social rules and boundaries. There was the notion that the woman must have provoked the violence in

¹⁰⁸ As early as 1990 in her study on working class township families, Campbell (1990) found that patriarchal ideology perpetuates township ideology to date despite growing numbers of female-headed families. The increasing number of female-headed families and households would not lead to greater equality for women because changes in the status quo of family structures are not automatically accompanied by changes in expectations and beliefs about families. Women's power within the family is exercised strictly within the traditional patriarchal structures and is mainly limited to senior women.

some way (ibid:18–19). In common with these findings, Nomsa and Mandisa identified with the perpetrator rather than the survivor, believing that women who experience partner violence must have caused or provoked it. Nomsa doubted “that a real man can start and beat her ... without any wrongs”. The women must have misbehaved, not fulfilled their duties, wasted money (i.e. gambled) and then falsely blamed the husbands for abusing them:

FG 2 Nomsa: Because you can see, you’ll find that in many abusive relationships the woman is involved there. You find that – the way we did explain about the misbehaving of a young woman – you are married, your husband is providing, you have taken money to play cards ... so he’ll come back and beat you up because his children will be hungry ... And then you start speaking out ‘my husband is abusing me’ which means you are the cause of the abuse, you have started this abuse. So you’ll find that some women they are the cause of their abusive life.

Nomsa: Because I don’t think that a real man can start and beat her ... without any wrongs. They are not stupid. They do have that love that they told us. The first day they tell you that ‘I love you’ and suddenly they start beating you up. Something is wrong. You have to check yourself.

Mandisa: (unclear words) You get the right man, giving you money, providing everything in the house, you start saying ‘hey, this man is boring, he is not talking, he has no jokes’. You know. You start having a boyfriend. And you get everything at home!

A great deal of empirical research has shown that intimate partner violence is widespread in South Africa and is an indication of dominant/hegemonic masculinity (Varga, 1997; Wood, Maforah & Jewkes, 1998; Wood & Jewkes, 2001; South Africa. Department of Health, 1999; Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana, 2002; Dunkle et al., 2003; 2004a; Fox et al., 2007). Several participants in my study have been the survivors of partner violence themselves, others reported about mothers,¹⁰⁹ daughters or friends. However, Nomsa and Mandisa resisted the notion that men violate women/women’s rights for no other reason than to assert their power and male dominance or to force sexual access. Both conformed to the view of customary law and held women responsible for any such assault in that

¹⁰⁹ Even Nomsa reported of her mother being beaten by her father.

they deserved punishment for deviant behaviour. In denying that they would ever become victims themselves as long as they live according to the rules, Nomsa and Mandisa avoided any criticism of the existing rules which distort so many women's lived experiences. Their teleological worldview of human nature provided a "charter for the institutions that control or regulate people's sexual behaviour, ultimately to reproduce the group and structure the life course" (Herdt, 2004:52). The women displayed what Freire calls "adapted consciousness" rather than critical consciousness, that is, a state where a person accommodates the conditions imposed on her or him, and acquires an authoritarian and a-critical frame of mind (Freire, 1993).

5.4.3 *Sex and secrecy*¹¹⁰

From a sharper sociological perspective, sexuality is a product of socialisation, social environment and enculturation mediated through families, communities, peers and/or institutions such as churches, schools and others. Particular societies can distort the outcomes of sexual behavioural development through, for instance, such forces as discrimination, sexual shame and silence, or the condemnation of homosexuality (Herdt, 2004:43; 55). In other words, culture and society decisively influence an individual's sexual development including their capacity for sexual agency. African discourses on sex have been infiltrated by Christian and European moral discourses, which in many ways are linked to issues such as secrecy, repression and taboo (cf. Thornton, 2002:11; 13).

Therefore, asking questions about sexuality was an undertaking that required some sensitivity since it involved entering a very private sphere. In view of the fact that interviewees live in a socio-cultural context where sexual matters are surrounded by secrecy and shame, they could perhaps have felt very uncomfortable talking about them. I thus had to be alert to signs by which the interviewee indicated distress. On the other hand, I also hold culture-specific beliefs about sex and sexuality which I had to be aware of as I could also have felt uncomfortable with some questions. However, I assumed that

¹¹⁰ "*Sex and Secrecy*" was the title of the 4th conference of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) hosted at the University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg), 22–25 June 2003 (cf. Reid & Walker, 2005).

being of the same gender as the interviewees was beneficial and that my outsider position was more of an advantage than a disadvantage in this research context. I hypothesised that I would be given sufficient information even if interviewees suppressed aspects of their experiences that they believed I should know about or felt shy to talk about. Furthermore, in some interviews the interpreter was present which could have added a barrier to the interviewee's openness or, on the other hand, it might have facilitated the interview.

In terms of custom, sexual knowledge can only be legitimately communicated during initiation schools and rituals (Thornton, 2002:12). In (Southern) African communities initiation and circumcision have been practised for centuries and initiation schools are part of traditional cultural practices.¹¹¹ In the "new" South Africa (post 1994) initiation schools are protected by the Constitution. Initiation marks the passage to adulthood; male and female initiates are taught about customary values, beliefs and conduct. It particularly emphasises the differences between the two genders. Female African initiation ceremonies, much like their male counterparts, provide instruction on customary values and conduct, gender sexual scripts and what society will expect of them as adults.¹¹² Only Christine revealed that she had gone to initiation school. At 48, Christine was one of the older study participants apart from Emily and Margret who were 63 and 62 respectively. Although Emily and Margret did not mention initiation, I assumed that they had taken part in it as perhaps did the others as well. However, others, both a younger participant (Catherine) and a middle-aged one (Karen), rejected it strongly when asked. Notwithstanding, initiation rituals for both women and men are still in place in Mmakaunyane (usually for four weeks in winter; personal information given to me by my local research assistant) but I suspect the women did not talk about them owing to my outsider status as a white foreigner, which was a disadvantage in relation to this topic.

The following two sections explore the impact of silence and secrecy in more private

¹¹¹ Cf. Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities/ National House of Traditional Leaders/ Human Rights Commission. [Online]. Available: <http://www.pmg.org.za/files/gazettes/060922initiation.pdf> [13 May 2008].

¹¹² Available: http://www.essortment.com/all/africawomenrit_rnpw.htm [13 May 2008].

environments: firstly, how sexual norms and knowledge were imparted to the participant and, secondly, the impact of silence and secrecy on participants' sexual debut. Given that an agent is socialised in a field (social sphere) and adapts to the roles in the context of her position in the field (Bourdieu, 1977), I postulate that silence and secrecy around sexuality impact negatively on the participants' development of confidence in their power to resist dominant gender norms, as well as of sexual knowledge and agency, whereas it facilitates male dominance, sexual power and privilege. One of the main tenets of radical feminism is that inequality is built into the female–male sexual encounter and into the social conceptions of male and female sexuality (MacKinnon, 1989) to the advantage of men. Rich (1986a), for example, states that one way in which male power manifests itself is by enforcing heterosexuality on women and the 'great silence' about other forms of sexuality.

5.4.3.1 Inter-generational silence and participants' sexual education

As I have suggested earlier, silence and secrecy on sexual matters was strongly protected in Mmakaunyane. Based on the patriarchal code of respect, the discussion of sexuality across generations (parents and children) or across age groups was taboo. Interviewees confirmed that parents cannot talk to their children about sex out of respect, nor can children use sexual language or refer to sexuality in front of those they must show respect to (Thornton, 2002:8; 12; Campbell & MacPhail, 2002:339) despite the HIV/AIDS ravaging the community. Nomsa, for example, confirmed that sexuality was a taboo subject. She also confirmed its hidden and secretive nature.¹¹³

You know what, from our family by culture it's, it's – what can I say – talking about sex is an offence (*laughter*). You cannot go straight to your mother and ask, they will only tell you when you are just about to see periods or maybe if you are seeing periods then you are just afraid. ... We are not exposed to sexuality, you don't know about sex. (Nomsa)

¹¹³ According to Thornton (2002:13), the sex act is secret because it is one of the most powerful tests of interpersonal power and self-knowledge in the African epistemological universe. Directly explored through the body it is an "experiment and exploration of possible mixings of personal substance and spirit, both being important notions in the African concept of sexuality".

Likewise, other informants across all generations expressed the fact that communication with parents about sex is uncommon. Statements by younger participants made in the problem-centred interviews took the same direction as Nomsa's statement above: "talking about sex is an offence", parents do not talk about sexuality and "don't teach us about sex [because] they think that we are not going to respect them". Six women of different age groups responded directly or indirectly about not having been taught anything about sexuality, for example:

Nobody taught me, it just happened. (Catherine)

I: And your mother?

(Laughing with a sigh, meaning no) (Lorraine).¹¹⁴

Rich's (1986a) argument that it is a characteristic of male power to withhold women from knowledge by means of non-education particularly applies to the specific sphere of sexual education. Sexual non-education undermines the development of women's sexual agency and assists men in forcing male sexuality on women. Adolescent girls thus grow into male identification and learn that the locus of sexual power is male (cf. Barry, 1979:218).

The absence of sexual knowledge is mirrored in Lorraine's and Catherine's accounts of their sexual debuts. Both experienced unplanned first sex at a very young age; Lorraine even fell pregnant at 13. Although the mean age for sexual debut in South Africa is 18 (cf. Bakilana, 2005¹¹⁵; Shisana & Simbayi, 2002), lower socio-economic status raises the chances that entry into sexual relations will occur at an earlier age (Hallman, 2004). Neither woman considered that they had been forced into sex and described their first sexual experience matter-of-factly as something that had happened to them because of

¹¹⁴ As adolescents some participants were misinformed by their parents (Karen recounted the story that they were told that babies come from airplanes) or received prudish advice or punishment if they experimented. Instead, peers were central in guiding their sexual education. In other cases participants from different generations reported that they were educated by a close family member, usually a granny or sisters.

¹¹⁵ The analysis used data from the 1998 South African Demographic and Health Survey, including a nationally representative sample of 11 735 women, aged 15 to 49, interviewed in 1998. There was evidence that younger cohorts of women were entering into sexual relationships at a younger age.

their immediate circumstances. Both interviewees' answers show that their sense of agency in their first sexual experiences was severely limited.

I was young, and then I met someone. ... He met me and said, 'I love you' – 'how can you love me?', 'yeah, I can do that, you can trust me, 'ok, let's start.' ... He talked to me about it, when a man and a woman sleep together, yeah, having sex, and ... the woman can be pregnant. I just said, 'I want not to be pregnant.' ... I want to enjoy sex.

I: And could you enjoy sex with him?

No, I didn't understand that sex is something like that. (Lorraine)

As both Lesch and Kruger (2004:473) and Campbell and MacPhail (2002:339) describe with regard to their informants, sex is something that "just happened", as in the case of Catherine and Lorraine in my sample, and was – as may be expected – not very pleasurable. Neither Lorraine nor Catherine mentioned any feelings of romance; both girls' motives for engaging in an early sexual debut were a combination of curiosity and a total lack of knowledge and a reflection of an environment with deeply entrenched sexual taboos.

I: And did anybody teach you about sexuality? Where did you learn about it?

No, nobody taught me. It just happened. I met this guy and we had sex. ...

I: What did you experience?

In the beginning it was painful, because then I was a virgin, then it was so. ... I was very young.

I: Did he force you?

No, no, no. (Catherine)

Julia also lacked sexual education but she framed her experience as romantic. She was very open to the question. She described the insecurity in both partners and how she had tried to hide her nervousness so as not to appear inexperienced. Owing to a lack of knowledge, her sexual initiation was still a shock. Although her boyfriend was quite respectful of her feelings, penetration had been painful; however, she emphasised that she nevertheless enjoyed her sexual debut. Julia's sexual debut was characterised by greater understanding between the two partners which gave her the chance to articulate her

desires and to develop sexual agency.

Ok. I was experiencing the romance and the feeling, you know. When you don't know anything about sex, everything it's surprise. I was so surprised, and I was so shocked, cause when he touched me, I said 'uh, what are you doing?' You know, cause it's my first time, I don't know anything. But I did enjoy it, I did enjoy that cause he takes things slowly and we talked. He said 'can I put a condom on?' I said 'yes'. You know, he asked me questions, a lot of questions about how I want to have sex, where and why. He asked me.

...

I answered as if I know, you know, I didn't (*laughs*). I know in my mind that I don't know anything about this. But the way that I answered, was as if I knew everything about sex. I said 'do this', you know but ... I couldn't show him my nervousness cause I said 'do this, do this', then we kissed and when he feels, you know he kissed me, and he licked me and whatever, I said, in my mind I said 'wow'. But when we had sex, it was painful, your first time always is painful. But for most of the time I enjoyed it ... We did touch each other for maybe it's about an hour before we can do that. Cause he was afraid to tell me that 'I need you' and I was afraid. We were both afraid. ... After our first time, eh, we did improve a lot, we did change styles and you know, gained fun sometimes. (Julia)

Lesch and Kruger (2004) reported from their sample that pain was expected and accepted in the first sexual experience. Their informants had not questioned the belief that sex would initially be painful nor had they expected pleasure from their first sexual intercourse (ibid:469–470). In contrast to the young women in Lesch and Kruger's study, Julia acknowledged her own sexual pleasure without feelings of shame. It seems to me that Julia was able to experience herself as an active agent in her first sexual encounter.

As set out in chapter 3, it was radical feminists (Brownmiller, 1975; Rich, 1986a; MacKinnon, 1989) in particular who cast light on gender relations in the private sphere and broached issues such as rape and domestic violence. MacKinnon (1989:127) defines rape as indigenous, not exceptional, to women's social condition, as an act of terrorism within a systemic context of group subjugation. Representative survey data shows that forced sexual initiation is extremely high in South Africa (Wood, Maforah & Jewkes,

1998; Jewkes et al., 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Jewkes, Levin, Mbanganga & Bradshaw, 2002a; Jewkes, & Abrahams, 2002). First sexual encounters are often characterised by emotional pressure leading to forced sexual initiation or even rape.¹¹⁶

Two women in the sample, Rose and Tshepiso, disclosed that they were raped in their teens. Rose was the victim of a conspiracy which ended in her forced sexual initiation/rape. This happened when she was still quite young, about 16, and had no sexual experience or knowledge and trusted her boyfriend and his family. She was led into a kind of trap and her boyfriend forced himself on her against her will. She did not dare to fight back, particularly since Rose realised that her sister was part of the plot. After the rape she was left alone and did not disclose what had happened to her to anybody. Later Rose married the man, which may have rebuilt at least partly her dignity in the face of shame.

Tshepiso was raped repeatedly by her aunt's boyfriend. Her parents were separated and her mother was working as a migrant labourer, so Tsepisho and her siblings stayed with her aunt. The aunt's boyfriend took this opportunity to abuse her. Tsepisho, like Rose, did not dare to disclose what was happening to her. Instead she felt nobody would believe her and that she had no choice. It was a situation of total powerlessness, in which Tshepiso was left alone with her pain with no protection. Nobody was there to help her, and she related the way that she felt her father had failed to protect her from the horror. In answer to the question of how she had got over it, she said briefly, "I managed". However, the first time Tshepiso ever disclosed the rape was the day of the interview.

I have been raped several times and I did not tell anyone. It was ... a rough time and it was my aunt's boyfriend. My mother was not staying with us. She was working and came home during month end or after two months. We were struggling. We were staying at my uncle's place. My mother was a single parent of four kids. She had

¹¹⁶ In the RHRU (Reproductive Health Research Unit, University of Witwatersrand) youth study, 28% of women reported that their first sexual experience was unwanted compared with 1% of young men. Furthermore, 6% reported having been forced to have sex, including 2% of males and 10% of females (Pettifor et al., 2004b).

to work hard for us. Then we stayed there and I was raped for many times and I could not say a word because they did not believe us. It was not easy. I have to keep it for myself.

I: But sometimes it's bad.

Ja. Sometimes is bad, but I tried. I am coping. I must go on, but it is hard.

I: How old were you?

I was in standard four. I don't know. Maybe I was 15.

I: And then you kept it secret until now?

Ja.

I: Up to now?

I could not tell anyone. It was difficult. ... It is painful because we didn't have a choice. Sometimes I feel that my father failed to protect me because he was not there for me. I feel if he was there, it could have been easier because he would protect me. I do understand that marriage does not have a guarantee. There are some ups and downs. They had to separate, they had to divorce. I did understand that, it is just that there was no one there to protect me. So, I felt anger.

I: But you are not broken, you are strong. How did you manage?

I managed. It was difficult. (Tshepiso)

In a patriarchal culture, silencing women is a vital mechanism for hiding violations based on gender. The suppression of sexual discourse makes it impossible for juniors to discuss sexual abuse by elders with anyone. As Thornton (2002:12) notes, a girl who is sexually abused, for instance by an uncle, cannot discuss this with anyone senior since it would show a lack of respect. For the same reason it is extremely difficult to go outside the family to make a complaint. Another distorted though effective mechanism is holding the rape survivor responsible for the rape, generating feelings of guilt or self-blame and shame in the survivor. Feelings of shame can become so intense that many rape survivors never tell anyone what happened to them, as in Rose's and Tshepiso's cases. Recently rape has received greater public awareness in post-apartheid South Africa, since more women are admitting publicly to having been raped (Posel, 2004:62).

Finally, and outside the private sphere, public schools are an important source of sexual education today and could play an important role in enhancing adolescents' sexual agency.

I: Who taught you about sexual matters?

The teachers in the school. My parents didn't tell me because I live with my mother but she's quiet, she's not talking. Then my father became separated from my mother but we see each other. But they didn't talk to me about sexuality.

I: So where did you learn, at school?

I learn it from the school and friends. (Elisabeth)

I: May I ask, where you learnt about sexuality?

Sexuality?

I: Hmm.

At school.

I: At school. Somebody else? Like mother or sisters?

No, you see, when I'm growing, my mother, they using the culture. They can't tell you these things, this, AIDS, you see, with condom, you see, when you go to menstruation, use this and this and this – they can't tell you.

I: So they didn't talk, only at school?

At school. (Mona)

As some of the participants reported, sexual education at schools often tends to be primarily biological in nature. Often quality is a problem because of “the lack of appropriate materials, lack of time in crowded curricula, lack of training on and how to teach about HIV and AIDS, teachers' reluctance and embarrassment to address the issues explicitly, the adverse school culture and parental objections to sex education” (Khau, 2007:60).

To summarise: The experiences of sex education among the participants differed considerably. Some experienced total silence and had not been taught anything; others had received vague information from sisters, aunts or grannies. In contrast to other studies (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002) peers played only a minor role. The intergenerational secrecy traditionally surrounding sexuality was still preserved with no differences between the age groups being detectable. The majority of interviewees disclosed the total absence of proper sexual education. The suppression of sexual discourse inhibited the development of skills that support female sexual agency and hindered the development of personal competences such as self-esteem and decision-making skills or skills for practising safer sexual behaviour, for example, preventing

unintended pregnancies and STI/HIV infection. Today public schools are important sources of sexual education and HIV-awareness-raising programmes, but these often have few effective results.

Despite the sensitivity of the topic I got the impression that most participants were not reluctant to talk about sexual issues and that the presence of the interpreter did not lead to greater bias in the answers. For instance, Rose disclosed her forced sexual initiation in the interpreters' presence; Tsephiso on the other hand was alone with me. However, I had hoped to receive more information about initiation schools and in some cases I also expected fuller details about what had been taught to the interviewees. I think the brevity of some of the answers was because interviewees were unfamiliar with having to discuss their personal experiences. Because of the sensitivity of the topic I tried to be alert to shifts in the power balance during interviews and the interviewees generally were fairly open.

Women develop their sexual knowledge in their sexual relationships with men. Given that the interests of male sexuality construct what sexuality as such means, including the way it is allowed and recognised, felt and expressed (MacKinnon, 1989:129), it is very likely that women's sexual feelings are not acknowledged as they would be if women (and men) had a better female-oriented sexual education.¹¹⁷ Restricted access to knowledge and experience can be expected to facilitate social and cultural imperatives that limit sexual options for women and ensure the enculturation of the heterosexual norm and male sex-right. Barry suggests that early adolescence is the first significant phase of male identification in a girl's life and development, given the importance placed on the male sex-drive in the socialisation of girls as well as boys; adolescent girls learn that the locus of sexual power is male (Barry, 1979:218). With regard to their sexual agency this means that young women become accustomed to the hetero-patriarchal norms more or less unquestioningly and reproduce existing practices and structures.

¹¹⁷ Lesch and Kruger (2004:472) point out that adolescent women and men need an "erotic education", to explore their sexual desires and how to gain sexual agency.

5.4.3.2 Reproducing male sexual dominance: hegemonic male sex-drive and female chastity discourse

As has been suggested, it is a tacitly accepted rule in the women's code of conduct within conjugal relationships in a customary community such as Mmakaunyane not to refuse their husbands sex. This also applied to premarital relationships. Male sex-right is bolstered by appeals to nature claiming men's greater sexual potency than women's. According to conventional social norms, women are supposed to be sexual recipients, not initiators (Lesch & Kruger, 2004:473–474). McFadden (2003), for instance, highlights the fact that constructions of women's sexuality as bad and filthy are aggressively invoked whenever women seek to transgress cultural and social boundaries defended in the name of "tradition". Given that sexual desires, meanings and practices conform to local sexual customs, what are the interviewees' understandings of male and female sexuality? (What I explained in section 5.4.3. about the sensitivity of the topic also applies here.)

Of those who answered the question – *What do you think is important for a woman in a sexual relationship and what is important for a man?* – the majority noted a difference in the sexual needs and desires of men and women (e.g. Elisabeth: "We women like, ok, like, women like loving, caring, tenderness, things like that"). They reproduced the male–female stereotyping, the prevalent hegemonic notion of men's greater sex-drive and greater sexual needs and praise of feminine virtue. Only Catherine ("no, I think it's fifty-fifty"), Karen and Margret ("they have a sexual need for both of them") believed that there is no difference and that women have sexual desires too.

She said, sometimes the husband gets tired quickly and then sometimes she will be satisfied, but it is not something regular, daily. Sometimes the husband will ejaculate earlier ... but sometimes she is ok, she said it is different. (Interpreter for Margret)

In contrast to the other interviewees, Karen acknowledged that not all men are sexually potent. Her view on men probably arose from her personal experience of her husband's

weakened potency resulting from his heart problems. Although Karen disclosed during the interview that at some point in her marriage she had affairs with other men, her acknowledgement that women have sexual needs too was not revealed as a personal experience but was an observation about other women, which may have been an attempt not to present herself as ‘loose’ or ‘immoral’:

I think it is different for each person. It depends on a particular person, because there are men, some of the people, they are not that sexual. They don't have that sexual drive, yah, they don't have it, even though they are men, but they don't have it. Some of them, are just like that. They feel to have that desire just a little. Yah, some of them, they just feel every time, this is a woman, just want it (*laughing*). And then even women, some of them, they have strong sexual wishes. Yah, they just can go out and look for it. (Karen)

The perceptions of the majority of participants across all age groups distinguished clearly between feminine and masculine sexuality and were oriented towards the traditional Christian-based moral double standards for men and women, that is, a naturalised greater male sex-drive and a more chaste female sexuality.

Cause he likes sex more than a kiss and I like a kiss more than sex
(Julia)

Ok, she says ... that a man likes sex a lot, women less. (Interpreter for Lisa)

Men always look for women to have sex with, are always interested in sexual intercourse. She thinks that is what sexuality is. They are not like women. (Interpreter for Sheila)

Kamohelo's answer was representative of this stance. She perceived women as being morally better, as having a greater understanding of love and not necessarily being pressurised to have sex. Men, on the other hand, were “just after sex”, even if they did not care particularly for the woman:

She thinks that women are much better because in most cases men are just after sex. ... What she would like is that maybe men should

not just look after sex. They should start to love each other, to wait maybe some months or two before they can think about doing that. This is a dream.

I: Why are men like this? What makes men like this?

She thinks that maybe they don't like you. Maybe that guy doesn't like you, but he just wants sex and after that he will go. (Interpreter for Kamohelo)

Christine also emphasised men's greater sex drive and found therein an explanation for why men rape. In other words, she attributed rape to men's uncontrollable sexual urges and completely disregarded aspects of interpersonal power:

No, it differs, men are different from woman because men usually are the ones that are after sex ... that is why she thinks that men usually rape. (Interpreter for Christine)

In most statements, sexuality was portrayed as something that is imposed by men on women and to which women must submit. This supports MacKinnon's (1989:130) argument that sexual difference is a function of sexual dominance. Male sexuality constructs the meaning of sexuality, leaving little space for diverse patterns of sexuality to emerge. There was a lack of positive discourse on women's sexuality and desires. The essentialised perceptions of most participants – recognising women as less sexual than men and men as having a greater 'natural' sex drive than women – corresponded closely with research findings analysing women's lack of power and men's dominance in heterosex (Miles, 1992; Shefer & Foster, 2001). Hence, the “male sex drive and female chastity discourse” is not restricted to women or people living in Mmakaunyane, but is widespread in South African communities.

To summarise: women's sexuality, sexual pleasure and desire is confined by the suppression of sexual discourse in traditional African culture helping to maintain the traditional script of sexual conduct undermining women's capacity for (full) sexual agency. The suppression of sexual discourse, also a consequence of the code of respect, facilitates the perpetuation of male sex-right because it suppresses all other forms of sexuality and undermines the development of the skills and sexual knowledge necessary for the achievement of full sexual agency for women. Women learn to accept the male

sex drive as natural and men's alleged greater natural sex-drive is the basis for a man's sex-right thus leaving it to men to define what sexuality is. The male sex-drive discourse is central to the construction of both male and female sexuality in partner relationships in Mmakaunyane (as elsewhere); the participants' sexuality was shaped alongside and in relation to male sexuality and also in relation to the dominant gender order. This traditional sexual script is embedded in the habitus which raises the question of whether women feel that the male sexual drive is a *right*, as some radical feminists claim (cf. Rich, 1986a, Daly, 1978; see section 6.4.1).

There is, furthermore, a strong link between the suppression of sexual discourse and the denial of and secrecy surrounding HIV/AIDS in the country. As already pointed out in the introduction to the chapter, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has accelerated liberal sexual discourse in post-apartheid South Africa; however, this liberalisation has provoked strong opposition from conservative groups and traditionalists. As a result, contradictory sexual discourses coexist in South Africa. HIV/AIDS-related stigma and denial are still very powerful in South Africa (cf. Delius & Glaser, 2005). Since I contextualised the research question on rural women's agency in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, in the following sections I will discuss some issues that I view as being relevant to the research question. I assumed that the secrecy surrounding and denial of HIV/AIDS and the denigration of people living with HIV/AIDS have a harmful effect on women's potential for HIV-self-protecting strategies in intimate partnerships, primarily with regard to their knowledge about HIV and AIDS and, secondly, their openness about addressing HIV/AIDS with other people. In this context the question arises as to what extent HIV/AIDS, as a crisis phenomenon, on the other hand compelled participants to question the status quo or even the existing gender relations and lead to behaviour change.

5.5 HIV/AIDS and the veil of silence

From the beginning of the epidemic many people infected by HIV have been rejected or even victimised by their families and communities, often because the disease is interpreted as witchcraft (cf. Ashforth, 2002). Likewise, traditional beliefs stigmatise

women in particular (cf. LeClerc-Madlala, 2001;¹¹⁸ Delius & Glaser, 2005). Ashforth (2002:125) points out that “the ANC government has failed to provide leadership for reducing the stigma associated with the disease”;¹¹⁹ and that “Judge Edwin Cameron has long been the only HIV-positive person in a prominent position to be open about being seropositive” (ibid). Until today many people continue to deny that HIV exists in their communities. This was also true for the community under investigation.

5.5.1 The denial of HIV/AIDS in Mmakaunyane

Before I started my research I was told that in Mmakaunyane HIV/AIDS is something you do not talk about. If people referred to HIV/AIDS it was coded “the disease”. According to my informants witchcraft interpretations were not uncommon. In one of the problem-centred interviews the interviewee stated:

If may be someone is HIV-positive, they can say to you, it’s not HIV, he is bewitched (Elisabeth).

In both focus groups, participants explained that stigma and denial were generally associated with promiscuous sexuality, HIV/AIDS and moral transgression or – as just illustrated – interpretations in terms of witchcraft. In the Mmakaunyane community the sexuality discourse was linked to issues of morality and shame with regard to HIV/AIDS or, as Posel terms it, as a signifier of bad sexuality (cf. Posel, 2004:62).

¹¹⁸ In her PhD thesis, LeClerc-Madlala (2001) carried out an ethnographic study in a community in the Durban area on the meaning and symbolic representations given to sexual activities and to HIV/AIDS. She investigated AIDS in terms of the words, images, ideologies, myths and metaphors that people associate with the disease. LeClerc-Madlala showed that the Zulu interpretation of AIDS is intimately bound up with the overall socio-cultural construction of femininity, in which women are both the sources and the disseminators of the disease – and therefore demonised.

¹¹⁹ In early 2002, an AIDS dissident collective of ANC leaders (probably Mbeki himself) circulated an anonymously authored document which denounced the use of antiretroviral drugs, entitled “Castro Hlongwane, caravans, cats, geese, foot & mouth and statistics: HIV/AIDS and the struggle for the humanisation of the African” (available: www.virusmyth.com/aids/hiv/ancdoc.htm). In his 2007 published biography about Thabo Mbeki, Gevisser (2007:736) describes how Mbeki admitted to him that the document “was an accurate reflection of his views”. The chapter on the AIDS crisis in Gevisser’s book gives an excellent overview of Mbeki’s dissident view and deficient AIDS policy (ibid:727–765).

Unsurprisingly, there was no purposeful action for planning to fight HIV/AIDS in the community. I find these ‘politics of denial’ noteworthy, as in 2005 when I conducted my fieldwork the HIV/AIDS pandemic had already impacted significantly on South African society; the disease had become more and more visible in communities (e.g. through the growing number of funerals) and many thousands of people in South Africa had already been infected. Interviewees declared that they had seen “so many” burials in Mmakaunyane. The number of funerals at weekends – and also during the week – was rising constantly and was a fact that is hard to deny. Emily, for instance, was very aware of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the younger generation:

I: So, you are really aware? You go to funerals?

Yes, every week.

I: In Mmakaunyane?

Yes, where we stay, there where you have been. Even this week, Saturday. We go to take again a young girl, she’s so young. When I came to that place, she is so young. Why cannot our grannies go?

(Emily)

AIDS is a reality. With the question *Does HIV/AIDS have an impact on your life?*, I enquired about the interviewees’ factual experience of HIV/AIDS in a context of denial, the influence it had had on their lives and families so far. Again I asked questions about a highly sensitive topic and what I have said before about sexuality also holds true for issues concerning HIV and AIDS. I expected that my outsider status would be of an advantage in this respect because I could be seen as a neutral person not involved in community politics or someone who would tell others after the interview. However, if an interviewee fears stigma she might feel ashamed to disclose personal experiences. Since I turned to this topic at the end of the interview I hoped to already have established trust between me and the interviewee so that she would not find it too difficult to share her experiences with me. However, I will only briefly summarise what I was told and will focus on their level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

For two thirds (13) of the participants HIV/AIDS had already had an impact on their lives; they all reported close relatives (usually nieces, nephews, cousins) who had been

diagnosed as HIV-positive, and some had already died of AIDS. One young interviewee (Julia) disclosed in the interview for the first time that her cousin had died of AIDS – which confirmed the advantage of my position as an outsider. Emily and Rose had cared for a sick relative, while others like Tshepiso had worked with HIV/AIDS patients in the past, as did Nomsa at the time of the interview. Furthermore, some of the interviewees had, at some stage, feared that they might be infected and had taken a test. The experiences of the participants differed in terms of whether (a) a relative was infected and the disease either disclosed or kept a secret by the infected person and the family, (b) the interviewee either cohabited with the infected relative and witnessed the suffering directly or did not cohabit, (c) the interviewee was caring either for a sick relative or some other HIV patients, or (d) the relative had passed away or was still alive, eventually getting treatment and thus raising hopes for fighting the disease and living on. What I found was that some respondents actively supported infected relatives and non-relatives in a consciously non-discriminatory and non-stigmatising manner. Thus, they might have lived through a tension between their personal knowledge and experiences on the one hand and the community politics and collective morals on the other, which may give rise in future to processes that question the discriminating attitudes and the lack of social support.

HIV-related stigma remains a massive barrier to fighting the epidemic effectively and poses a severe problem for prevention efforts and open public debate; it can also lead to misinformation and inaccurate knowledge of HIV transmission. Having solid knowledge about forms of transmission and effective prevention measures is an indispensable precondition for negotiating and practising safe sex and thus for sexual agency.¹²⁰ Knowledge of AIDS is a prerequisite for recognising risky sexual behaviour and taking

¹²⁰ Representative studies show that the general awareness of HIV/AIDS in South Africa is high (South Africa. Department of Health, 1999; Pettifor et al., 2004b). However, in the Nelson Mandela/HSRC study, Shisana and Simbayi (2002:88) found different levels of knowledge in different age groups and concluded that knowledge of HIV/AIDS is not as “universally high and satisfactory, as often suggested in South Africa”. Information and spread of knowledge are not evenly distributed across the country owing to differing levels and quality of education, socio-economic status, place of residence (rural–urban) and race (ibid). In a recent case study in a rural community in the Bushbuckridge District, Posel, Kahn and Walker (2007) discovered an unexpected “multiplicity of versions of what HIV/AIDS is and what causes it” (ibid:142), ranging from scientific orthodoxy or conspiracy theories, through to AIDS as a “traditional” sickness caused by the breach of customary taboos.

action to change it, for example by using condoms (cf. Prata, Morris, Mazive, Vahidnia & Stehr, 2006). However, as Prata et al. (2006) sum up, studies on the influence of AIDS knowledge on condom use have reported mixed results; some found positive associations, others not. In a convenience sample of 429 participants in South Africa, Haile, Chambers and Garrison (2007) found that women had more knowledge of HIV transmission than men but were not more likely to be tested. Yet, those who had been tested for HIV generally had more knowledge than those who had not.

How then do a negative community response and a deficient sexual education system affect the participants' personal knowledge about HIV/AIDS? Can any change in terms of openness be identified? In the following section I will explore the interviewees' knowledge of HIV/AIDS so as to probe this question.

5.5.2 Participants' knowledge of HIV/AIDS

In the problem-centred interview I asked the question “*What do you know about HIV/AIDS?*” in order to find out whether the participants had any knowledge of transmission, prevention and protection, how informed this knowledge is was and to what extent myths about HIV/AIDS are in place.

The majority of the sample put HIV/AIDS in a context of pain and death, describing it as lethal, a disease which kills, which cannot be cured and which makes people suffer. Almost all the participants could relate that transmission is a result of unprotected sex – always meaning heterosexual intercourse¹²¹ – and that condoms can protect against infection. A few also stated other means of transmission, for example used injection needles or coming into contact with an infected person's blood by mistake. Typical answers included:

Oh, definitely I know that it's deadly and kills. And if you die, you have to suffer, and it infects you in many ways, if you have sex

¹²¹ In an article about men, AIDS discourse and activism, Burja (2000) addresses the widespread African denial of homosexuality, which is seen as a threat and key challenge to hegemonic masculinity.

without a condom, maybe by accident, like used injections.
(Catherine)

Okay, through sexual intercourse; and another one if somebody is hurt then maybe is bleeding and he got a cut and then you are trying to help that person it means you are going to be transmitted.
(Interpreter for Grace)

Eventually, three women in the sample declared that they did not know anything about HIV/AIDS:

I don't know anything about it. I just see a person, who is walking, passing and they say that person has AIDS or HIV. But I don't see [it], I don't know. (Interpreter for Margret)

Karen, too, knew that it is a lethal disease but did not believe HIV is incurable because she had heard of cases where people were cured with the help of God – despite the fact that she witnessed her nephew improving through medical treatment:

Ok, what I know about HIV is that, hm, it's a killer disease, and then, I don't say that it is incurable. Yeah, because people they believe, that's incurable, but I don't believe that.

I: What do you think?

Because, what I know is that ... I heard about people, who have been healed ... of AIDS.

She told a hearsay story about a man being healed of AIDS, which bore witness to the grace of God and appeared to be a healing miracle. She was very uncritical of the story because it corresponded with her own strong and pronounced Christian faith, which was reflected in several other interview contexts/passages.

... but it takes one to believe and to trust God, to have faith in God. I heard someone speaking about what happened to [this person]. He was suffering, dying of AIDS. But because of the grace of God and because God wanted him to live and to be a living testimony to other people, knowing that he was dying, God healed him. ... It was in a crusade, people were there, and then that pastor who was preaching and praying for the people. And then he was brought

there, he was very, very thin, very small, they even took him like this, in a blanket. ... Somebody testified about the greatness of God, ... then he knew, 'I can be healed also', you see. ... Yah, and then he accepted Jesus Christ as a Lord and a Saviour. Then after the things happened, now he is healed, he's a pastor. (Karen)

Although there were other interviewees who hold strong Christian beliefs, nobody else revealed a similar stance towards HIV and AIDS.

Consistent with recent findings by Versteeg and Murray (2008), I found that the interviewees had sufficient knowledge of HIV/AIDS, its main route of transmission as well as protection – despite the veil of silence around HIV/AIDS and the denigrating discourse in the community about its links with sexuality. Sufficient knowledge is indispensable if women want to make informed choices about risk-reducing strategies in their intimate partnerships. Almost all participants knew that HIV transmission comes from unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person and that condoms are the best prevention measure. A few also mentioned used injection needles or contact with an infected person's blood as a cause for transmission. As indicated, the possibility of homosexual transmission was never mentioned. The majority in the sample placed HIV/AIDS in a context of pain and death, describing it as lethal, a disease that kills, has no cure and which makes people suffer. Myths about HIV transmission were not related, only in one case was it considered that AIDS may be cured by the grace of God, an interpretation consistent with this participant's strong Christian belief system. Some also mentioned that it was not possible to become infected with HIV by touching, hugging or shaking hands or sharing food with someone with HIV. Thus, it seems that neither the denial of HIV/AIDS in the community nor deficient sexual education had a particularly negative impact on study participants' knowledge. This fairly good level of knowledge can be attributed, I suggest, to the impact of widespread media and awareness campaigns in South Africa; some of the younger interviewees also mentioned school education. This knowledge may also follow from experience, since many interviewees experienced the infection and/or death of close relatives as a result of AIDS.

5.5.3 *A step forward: talking on sexual matters*

In the introduction to this chapter I proposed that the AIDS pandemic is a crisis in its own right which has led to the breaking down of old taboos and silences such as questions about the nature and impact of sexuality. One aspect of this is the traditional silence among parents and children about sex, which has been identified as highly problematic in the HIV/AIDS crisis since it, firstly, impedes young people's informed choices and, secondly, leaves education programmes to operate in a vacuum (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002:338). As section 5.4.3.1 reveals, younger participants' parents still did not talk to them openly about sex. It seems that to this day the influence of culture and religion massively inhibits the teaching and learning of sex education in black families. Owing to the code of respect, communication on sexual matters between parents and children was still uncommon and linked to feelings of shame. Parents may have felt shy about it or denied the fact that their teenage child is sexually active, as high rates of teenage pregnancies and high rates of HIV in young women prove. Therefore, in the era of AIDS, a lack of communication with parents remains a persistent problem. This finding corresponds with Delius and Glaser's (2002) conclusion in an overview of sexual socialisation in contemporary South Africa, arguing that the communication gap between parents and children has even widened. Only a few parents are willing to discuss sexuality. "More than ever before, it seems, youth are being left to negotiate their sexuality on their own" (ibid:50).

It certainly is not easy to break a strong socio-cultural taboo, yet in view of the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS plague and possible personal experiences with HIV-positive relatives or friends, HIV/AIDS could become a vehicle for initiating more open communication and trust between parents and children on sexual matters in families in future. Among the interviewees I could already observe a changed attitude: because HIV/AIDS threatens the lives of their children and grandchildren several women had broken the taboos and had started to speak openly about sexuality and HIV protection to their children. It seems the women had overcome their own fears as they had realised that if they failed to talk to their children they would place them at (greater) risk of HIV

infection. This changed behaviour attests to Bourdieu's (1977) argument that crisis can create conflicts that question *doxa*. Emily is a good example of the traditional silence around sexual matters and her changed attitude resulted from the impact the HIV/AIDS epidemic has had on the younger generation. In a time when there was no HIV/AIDS epidemic she had not taught her own daughter anything about sexuality. Today, however she talked to her grandchild, as she saw her life as being endangered.

You have a daughter?

Only one.

What did you teach her about sexuality? Did you talk to her about it?

No, no.

Because you thought it's not appropriate?

It seems, we are free now. Now we are very free. Now I'm talking with my grandchild about it. But that time it was still a secret.

...

You didn't tell your daughter anything?

Nothing.

But today you speak to your grandchild?

Yes. I think, what makes me change now is the way life is with this young generation. Their lives are in danger.

I: So, you mean HIV?

Yes, yes. (Emily)

Likewise, Tshepiso, Grace, Christine and Mandisa, who all had adolescent or young adult children, talked to them particularly their daughters far more openly than their own parents spoke to them, and tried to establish trust between them. Tshepiso, who was raped as a teenager by her aunt's boyfriend and did not dare to disclose the abuse to anyone, considered her own experience of not breaking the silence when she tried to build up trust and to communicate openly with her twin daughters:

But I try to talk everything with my daughters. I think it will help them in future. (Tshepiso)

All the participants were very aware of the risk of HIV/AIDS infection to themselves (see section 6.3.3), but as mothers they were also concerned about the HIV risk to their children. As a consequence several interviewees had broken the traditional silence around

sexuality thus acknowledging the fact that their (teenage) children were sexually active. Some spoke about proper condom use or provided their children with condoms.

Grace attended a clinic on a regular basis and always took condoms home with her. She had taught her children about their proper use and discussed sexual matters in order to prevent HIV infection. Although Grace was quite religious and tried to influence her children to live a moral life that will not put them at risk, at the same time she seemed to be quite pragmatic. She discussed relationship problems with her daughter in an atmosphere of trust:

Okay, she does speak to her family, and then most of the time they like to gather may be in the evening just to chat. And when they are speaking about it, she guides them and tells them how to take care of themselves, not to walk around; not to sleep around; just to keep safe, and then just go to church knowing that in the church they are preaching how they should live.

Do you mention condoms, do you talk about condoms?

She brings the condoms from the hospital as she is taking the treatment in the hospital. Then when she comes home, when she is teaching them about them or guiding them about them, then she is telling them about them that this is the condom.

Do you talk about the relationship of your daughter and her boyfriend?

Yes, she does. She does speak to her and they discuss a lot, and when her daughter has got a problem, a relationship problem, she likes to discuss it with her mother, she trusts. (Interpreter for Grace)

Similarly, Mandisa had taught her daughters how to prevent pregnancy and, although she did not mention HIV, she did advise the use of condoms:

Do you have daughters? Did you talk with them about sexuality?

No, I didn't just speak to them, but I showed them the danger, 'use condoms'. Show like when somebody has get the period ... If you just talk to him, if you reach the stage, you see, if you do this, the outcome, and this and this and this, you stay with a boyfriend, you won't be pregnant, things like that ... (Mandisa)

Christine worried about her daughter who lived in an abusive relationship but kept silent

about the problems. However, Christine could encourage her daughter to take an HIV test. Meanwhile, her daughter had not disclosed her status to her – a common attitude in an environment where HIV/AIDS was so stigmatised:

Her eldest daughter, her boyfriend is abusive. Yeah, her eldest daughter has just said the boyfriend is abusive and she doesn't speak. She sees her coming, sad, may be the face swollen and when she asks her, she doesn't tell that she was beaten by her boyfriend. She just keeps quiet but the other younger sister, because they are sharing problems, she tells the mother that that boyfriend of hers just has beaten her up. And when they tell her to report to the police she doesn't want to go.

Do you understand why she is not speaking about it?

She doesn't understand why she keeps quiet about this.

...

Do you raise the issue of HIV/AIDS with your daughters when they have boyfriends?

Ja, she does speak to them especially the eldest daughter, she encouraged her to go to the clinic to make some tests.

Did she go to the blood test?

Ja she did go but she did not tell her.

Are you worried?

I must. (Interpreter for Christine)

Likewise, those who still had small children or did not yet have any articulated the intention to be open about sex education. Nomsa explicitly stated the importance of educating both sexes:

It will be the first thing not even to my daughter, even my son I will have to teach about it. ... Our parents never told us about sex but even to myself I just have to give them a sex talk for both of them. This is the son and even if I can get a girl, it's just the same thing. (Nomsa)

Ok, if it's a baby girl? Ok. I just want her to be like, maybe I'll take it like she is my friend. So I'll sit down with her, talk to her about maybe boyfriends, sexual harassment, what, what. But I would just like her to live a life that is straight. So like maybe I'll talk to her about many things like HIV, men, women. (Elisabeth)

Because they were aware of the health threats and dangers that the HIV/AIDS pandemic

presents to the lives of their children, interviewees in their roles as mothers understood the importance of open communication about sexual matters in a trusting environment to promote safe sex behaviour. Yet these were all acts of individual behaviour change and insight which were not motivated by any collective activity in the community. However, in order to raise parental awareness of the importance of open communication about sex on a larger scale in the community local group initiatives would be required (cf. Campbell & MacPhail, 2002:342) which at the time of the study were not in place.

I also asked each participant a question about her daughter or if she had no daughter to imagine that she had one: (*If you have/had a daughter*) *what wishes do you have for your daughter when it comes to sexual experiences?* The question tried to explore indirectly by drawing on the negative experiences that they would like spare their own daughters. The women mainly wanted to spare their daughters the negative experiences they had had to go through, be it a too early a sexual debut, a violent marriage or a violent parental home, things that might hurt them. The wish repeated most in this context was “not to rush into things”, to be mature enough when engaging in a sexual relationship or entering into marriage, as exemplified by Kamohelo and Tshepiso:

She says that her wish is that her children must just go to school to learn and not to rush into things. When they start having relationships they should be grown up enough. (Interpreter for Kamohelo)

So, now they are 17 years. So, I think they are too young to get into a relationship, especially when coming to sexuality. I told them to abstain, not to rush into things because it will hurt them. Take things slowly. (Tshepiso)

Julia referred to two decisive experiences that she wanted to spare a daughter. Firstly, Julia emphasised that she would be very open with her daughter about sex so that she would be more knowledgeable and wait longer. Secondly, Julia grew up with a violent, alcoholic father and suffered as a result of her parent’s fights and subsequent divorce. It was therefore Julia’s wish to be able to offer her daughter “a happy home”:

I wish for her to be taught about everything. She doesn't have to experience things the way I did, you know. Cause if she was my daughter, I'll tell her everything about sex, about waiting before having sex, and having sex when you are ready. I mean, I would tell her everything but I don't want my daughter to experience things the way I did experience them cause I experienced things under a pressure of my family. So I don't want my daughter to be raised the way that I was cause I was struggling. I want my daughter to grow up in a happy family.

What is the pressure of your family you mentioned?

My pressure of the family, it was the divorce between my mother and my father. So I don't want that to happen to her. The way I experienced that it was terrible. I don't want her to grow in – my mother and father used to fight. My father was a drinking man. When he came back from wherever he was drinking, it was a fight in the home, you know. A big fight. I didn't know what to do at times, I didn't know what to do. I don't want her to grow up the way I did cause I did not grow up in a happy home. So I like to give her a happy home. (Julia)

Being a wife is very important in a traditional community in terms of respectability and fulfilment of the social role for which a girl is socialised from childhood. There are numerous constraints on women leaving a marriage. In this context I found two opposing stances among the study participants: those expressing a wish for their daughter to get married and find a good husband (Mandisa, Christine, Rose) and thus follow the traditional route, and those wishing for their daughters not to marry at all and instead to escape marriage through a good education “for a brighter future” (Grace, Sheila):

I wish them to get the right husbands maybe ... Life is beautiful, other things and experiences outside this sickness, HIV/AIDS, so I do wish to my daughters. (Mandisa)

Her wish is that her daughter must be educated and stay with her, working but not to get married. She is afraid may be the relationship is going to hurt her daughter. (Interpreter for Grace)

She only hopes that her daughters will be educated. If they can have education, they will have a brighter future for themselves. But ... she does not want them to get married.

Do you talk to them about it?

Yes.

What do they say? Do you speak to them about your experiences?
Yes, she gives them the experience and tells them that if you are not educated then you cannot do anything and that's where trouble starts and so if they can take their time and go to school, life will be good. She tried to show the problems that they may come across, what will happen if boys and girls come together, the dangers, and where you have to be careful. (Interpreter for Sheila)

This rejection of marriage seems to me a rather radical break with tradition, a harsh expression of criticism of the existing gender order. It questions traditional gendered roles, undermines male authority and favours women's autonomy. What the mother could not achieve for herself she wished to realise in her daughter. Both Grace and Sheila lived through violent marriages; both saw education as the basis for a chance at a better life, as did the focus group participants who also highlighted the significance of education for living a more independent life. I suggest that both women had reflected critically on the power imbalances in their marriages that undermined their well-being significantly and had developed an understanding of the way in which this inequality discriminated against them. Furthermore, their views seem to reflect a positive awareness of the transition and progress in South African education, with its equal access for all races (despite the fact that the education itself lacks to some extent provision of quality on the ground, the constraints to independence resulting from unemployment have been discussed in section 5.3). It is in this context that they envisioned alternative ways of being for their daughters. It also indicates to me a cautious critique of the existing gender relations they wish to be transformed.

5.6 Lacking a vision? Viewpoints on gender relations

Gender relations are at the centre of intimate relationships. To finalise the interview, I explored the interviewees' opinions and visions about the relationship between women and men in their society by asking the following question: *Can you tell me what you think about the relationship between women and men in general?* I was interested in finding out whether the women would reflect on changes in the gender relations or issues such as masculine domination over women, gender-based power imbalances, intimate partner violence, women's lack of autonomy, female oppression and so on. I assumed that the

interviewees possibly lacked a vision for greater female autonomy and a change to more equal gender relations owing to the restrictive socio-cultural influences of a hegemonic masculinity, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995:77). On the other hand, women's practices also support the construction of masculinities. If new configurations of women's identity and practice were to occur it would require new ideas on the gender relations (cf. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005:848).

Viewpoints on gender relations basically consisted of just two discussions on the topic of gender relations; either whether related to male domination in the form of violence against women or to an ideal of love, that is, consummate love. Three participants from the younger age groups perceived gender relations primarily through male violence against women, and the pervasive nature of gender-based violence in their immediate environment. Julia observed partner violence in her own family:

I will say men should stop abusing their wife or their woman. Cause I have that experience and those who have men who don't abuse them, it's a lucky thing. I think they deserve the best. They deserve the best man who doesn't abuse his wife. They deserve the best. Cause nowadays abuse is high, it's high abuse. Men abuse is too much high. So I would say that men should stop abusing their wives or the women because I have experienced it. It's not nice. (Julia)

In addition, Elisabeth and Lisa believed the gender relationship could change if women learnt to speak out.

For women I can say, women don't like to talk. Now I can tell women so: if you have a problem, talk to someone who you trust, maybe your mother, your brother, your sister or someone else. So if you have a problem with a boyfriend, if you don't like something or you don't want it just say 'I don't like this, I don't want it, that's the end'. So don't just – maybe women like to protect their boyfriend like maybe he's beating her, can state to me 'oh my boyfriend is ok, he's caring, loving'. But she seems to look fine in that relationship. So I can say to them that they can talk to each one who they trust. So for men, men are abusive, I can say to men: if they want to be loved by women maybe they cannot beat women and be caring,

loving, be kind to their wife, maybe like sharing. So talk to each other. If he has a problem maybe from work, he can talk to his wife or girlfriend, 'for now my things are doing that like that', so that they can be together and then be fine. (Elisabeth)

Between men and women – men are abusive, they are abusive sexually, and then women, sometimes ... they just keep tight, people, women, they are abused by their husband or their cousins. If they can report this, maybe this can be solved. (Interpreter for Lisa)

Contrary to the very religious or, on average, older women, these three younger participants put a name to the violence against women and were willing to break the silence around it. On the other hand, however, the majority answered the question by stating that a woman and a man should love each other. I was a bit surprised by such an overemphasis of the idea(l) of love and the lack of diversity in the responses. However, when I considered Bourdieu's (2001:112) insight that, in the context of male domination, loving "abdicates the intention of domination" the responses seemed less surprising. Christine's statement is an example of those who highlighted aspects of (mutual) love in order to characterise gender relations. Christine emphasised the suspension of power in a loving relationship and expressed a wish for perfect harmony and reciprocity or, as Bourdieu (ibid:111) has termed it, of "fusion and communion".

She says that, what she thinks is that a man and a woman they should love each other and they should not stay arguing, they should always try to be one and do things together. If they love each other, there is no way that they are going to argue about anything or may be fight but, they are going to stay loving each other. If there is a problem they are going to solve it. Because some men, some husbands, they got that thing of saying that 'I am a husband, I'm head of family' and then that doesn't work because sometimes you can be head but not doing things right. (Interpreter for Christine)

A study conducted in New Zealand on women's accounts of male partner violence concluded that perfect-love discourses regulate women in a variety of ways to remain in the relationship and to stay silent about the man's violence (Towns & Adams, 2000). In my case study, several of the women who had been survivors of domestic violence in the past applied a perfect-love discourse in response to the question about gender relations.

She thinks that if a man and a woman, if they are husband and wife, they should love each other and trust each other. (Interpreter for Kamohelo)

She said, she can tell them to love each other until they die. (Interpreter for Margret)

They must lead a nice life to make their child growing up nicely and happy, all those things. Make someone to be happy. (Mona)

Ok, love between a husband and a wife is when a man and a woman are living together, they love each other and then there is a good communication in the house. If somebody says ‘could you please pass me that thing’, you do it with love, everything. Love. Even when you are busy washing clothes, there is something that says, I love this man. (Interpreter for Maria)

As I mentioned earlier, in the context of traditional Southern African culture and customary law, it is a wife’s duty to bear all the hardship in the marriage, to hide abuse and to keep silent about it. Therefore I think that in a partnership barren of love and, instead, a place of suffering, the idea(l) of love can represent a vanishing-point projection to a better life, a panacea for all sufferers. Likewise, the New Zealand study alludes to the meaning of love in Christian teachings: “Love constituted as redemptive is a strong component of Christian teachings in which the loving Christ suffered at the cross and gave his life for the redemption of humanity” (Towns & Adams, 2000:573). This is also the context for Grace’s answer; she placed a man’s and a woman’s love, the love between two humans, explicitly in a teleological context of God’s transcendental unconditional love:

What she thinks is that between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife there should be God. Because even if you love each other, the owner of love ... is God. What she wishes is that each and every family should invite God to be the centre of their lives. (Interpreter for Grace)

In the introduction to this chapter I hypothesised that on a grassroots level rural South African black women may lack a vision for change in the gender order in spite of the ambitious gender mainstreaming policies of the post-apartheid state. The responses of

participants confirm this idea in so far as there is no articulation of gender equality issues such as equal partnership, equal share of assets and so forth. However, what the overemphasis of the ideal of love discloses is a strong desire for the abdication of (gender-based) violence. It reveals to me the de facto pervasiveness of violence in gender relations in the community under investigation. The love concept expresses the desire for new notions of manhood that are different from men's traditional dominant role.

5.7 Conclusion

The main aim of this chapter was to explore the linkages between structural constraints to the participant's sexual agency, traditionalism and transformation. I maintained that socio-cultural constraints are less visible than socio-economic constraints, yet more powerful. As a result women may lack a vision of transformed gender relations.

Financially, unmarried women relied heavily on their boyfriend's gifts or money and married women were in any case dependent on their husbands. However, I have shown that the exchange principle is inherent in the female–male relationship and cannot automatically be equated with a transactional sexual relationship. It may, rather, be regarded as an indicator of the quality of the relationship and does not automatically undermine women's sexual agency. Men can take advantage of their greater material power but in loving relationships providing for your partner is principally a sign of commitment and important for the woman's self-worth. In marriage material provision is traditionally the duty of the man. However, there appears to be a variety of ways in which decision making on spending can take place without implying greater equality in the relationship. With regards to married women's sexual agency, the socio-cultural rule not to refuse one's husband sex seems to have a greater impact than material dependency.

In terms of material restrictions, participants saw escape from poverty as lying in enhanced educational opportunities and the employment opportunities arising from them. Although their immediate lives were marked by long-term unemployment they did not show cynicism about the benefits of education, as found in the study of Compion and

Cook (2006).

In the beginning of this thesis I referred to the observed gap in post-apartheid South Africa between the progressive character of public gender and sexual equality discourses on the one hand, and a conservative backlash against gender and sexual transformation on the other (Robins, 2008). The perpetuation of male sex-right would seem to me to be one of the underlying unnamed core problems in the debate. As demonstrated by some of the interviewees' statements, it is not only groups of traditionalist men who resist gender change in order to defend male privilege – this resistance includes groups of women. It is through symbolic violence that women's compliance is secured. In some women's worldview a hierarchical gender order assigned by God and based on biological difference was the foundation of their identity and value system. Since change in the gender order was a challenge and a threat to their belief system and worldviews, it had to be warded off. Or, as de Beauvoir states, "one of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one cannot revolt against nature" (cited in Daly, 1978:56). Women's compliance is one important explanation for why, in the private domain, patriarchal norms and values remain largely unaffected.

Up to the present day, a range of traditional social values has prescribed strict gender role regimes that undermined the informants' ability to protect their sexual and reproductive health. Younger women in this study showed greater discontent with socio-cultural rules guiding their lives and constraining their agency and put the 'naturalness' of the hierarchical gender order tentatively into question. In contrast to the dire reality of unemployment and the consequential poverty in the participants' lives, the image of 'having a government job' and its benefits, which was expressed in one of the focus groups, may represent the vision for a better, more independent life free of constraint. However, while social improvement is more a matter of external forces, dissolution from constraining socio-cultural traditions has a greater effect on the individual's frame of mind. It presupposes self-reflection and critical thinking about the social reality of being female; in order to start such a collective 'feminist project' I think women still cannot abandon a shared category, 'woman'.

It has been suggested that HIV/AIDS has accelerated liberal sexual discourse in the country and has broken old taboos and silences in the sexual realm – however, this has not happened in the public sphere of the community under investigation. In spite of the veil of silence over HIV/AIDS and sexuality in the community, participants showed great awareness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, had sufficient knowledge about ways of transmission and protection and, most strikingly, displayed changed behaviour in their immediate private environment in terms of breaking the silence. However, only two participants in this context implied an indirect critique of existing gender relations.

Generally, there was a lack of a vision for change in the gender order in terms of women's autonomy, and yet, by emphasising an ideal of love in this respect, participants underlined in reverse the pervasiveness of gender-based violence and a desire for its abdication. I suggest that this expresses a desire for new, less dominant notions of manhood and more equal gender relations.

Chapter 6: Findings: relationship quality and spaces for sexual agency in intimate partnerships

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the linkages between partnerships either assessed as good or bad, and the interviewee's capacity for sexual agency. It argues that although women are likely to have greater capacity for sexual agency in good partnerships and to be in a better position to negotiate sex and condom use than women in bad relationships, particularly if the latter is characterised by violence or abuse, the socio-cultural template of the male sex-right always constrains women's full autonomy and sexual rights. Age will be considered in this context as a critical variable for different experiences.

In the literature review I discussed features of the sexist nature of traditional South African) culture, providing the framework for continuing gender and sexual inequality. In a socio-cultural context which defines men as superior, women's choices and in particular women's sexual autonomy is limited and under male control. Since my theoretical position is based on the radical feminist position that male dominance is sexual, I argued in chapter 3 why I regard radical feminist concepts as appropriate for analysing sexual aspects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the South African context. However, I have rejected the perception of rural black women as helpless victims. In this context I draw attention to the sphere of private relationships. I have established the possibility of the agency of women in intimate partnerships as fundamental to engaging their HIV vulnerability on the micro level even under the most constrained social conditions.

Firstly, I examine participants' lived experiences of sexual agency within different categories of intimate partnership as different spaces for agency. Given the enormous evidence of gender-based violence and sexual abuse of women in South Africa and the impact it has on women's disproportionately high HIV rate (Vetten & Bhana, 2001; Dunkle et al., 2003; Dunkle et al., 2004a; Abrahams, Jewkes, Hoffman & Laubscher, 2004; Amnesty International, 2008), I was very interested in investigating the quality of

the interviewees' relationships. How "common" is the occurrence of intimate partner violence in their partnerships? The background to this enquiry is the radical feminist argument that the system of male domination is deeply entrenched in intimate relationships between women and men, firstly, by the heterosexual norm and enculturation of the male sex-right and, secondly, by the use of violence and coercion (Daly, 1978; Rich, 1986a; MacKinnon, 1989). The first two sections (6.2 and 6.3) examine the quality of the participant's relationship as a possible space for agency. They provide an enquiry into the interviewees' personal understanding of what constitutes a "good" or "bad" partnership in a more traditional patriarchal environment and, in turn, how they assess their own partnership, what the major partnership problems are and how this is linked to women's agency. The following section (6.4) examines the central question of this study, that is, how decision-making on sex and condom use play out in different categories of relationships and how structural constraints impact on decision-making processes. I will also look at the issue of women's compliance with patriarchal rules and ethos in this context as well as whether women prefer to maintain secrecy about their relationship problems (6.5).

Secondly, I will explore the experiences of the different age groups and whether there is any indication of transformation in the established gender relations in terms of greater equality in sexual decision-making. The question touched on issues of stereotyped gender roles, old and new femininities and masculinities. Increasing male violence against women in South Africa has been interpreted as a crisis phenomenon of contemporary masculinity in the transition to a liberal democratic state, which also gives space to new notions of manhood (Morrell, 2001b; Walker, 2005). In the context of my research question I allied myself to Connell (2002) who believes that gender hierarchies can be subject to change on the small scale of personal relationships, particularly in a context of crisis – such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic – which generate contradictions and undermine current patterns so that new configurations of women's identity and practice, especially among younger women, occur. Indeed, on an interpersonal level, in intimate partnerships free of violence, change may come about first.

Finally, I will address how women (groups of women) can possibly attain more power. I concluded chapter 3 with the question of whether sexuality as an issue of politics at a very personal level can make space for a transformative process of self-reflection that leads to social action in an environment permeated by traditional beliefs and practices. In this context, the identity of woman and women remains a necessary foundation for effective political action. The sharing of experiences can be a source of power for women. Sharing experiences was a vibrant method of knowledge-building for 1970s radical feminists in uncovering the domination and control women are exposed to.

However, the main aim of this chapter is to explore spaces for sexual agency in different categories of intimate partnership and among different age groups and whether there is any indication of transformation within the established gender relations in terms of greater equality in sexual relations.

6.2 Relationship quality

Relationship quality is a core category in my evaluation since I hypothesise that the quality of the participant's relationship determines to a great extent her capacity for agency in an intimate partnership under given structural constraints. Relationship quality is closely linked to questions of power differentials in intimate relationships. In order to measure and assess relationship power dynamics and sexual behaviour, Pulerwitz, Gortmaker and DeJong (2000) developed what they refer to as the Sexual Relationship Power Scale (SRPS) with two conceptual dimensions of relationship power, namely 'Relationship Control' and 'Decision-Making Dominance', which was further adapted to women in South Africa by Jewkes et al. (2002b) and Dunkle et al. (2003; 2004a). In my own research using a qualitative approach, I did not work with these or similar pre-formulated items.

To capture the informant's personal view I began the interview by asking each woman to describe what "good" and "bad" partnerships meant to her in general. In this way the participant's own items were the basis for her assessment. By letting the interviewee

describe her understanding of a good and a bad partnership, I also introduced the participant to the field under investigation and opened the discussion in a more general way before referring to her individual experience. Later on, I asked her how she saw her own relationship, what she appreciated about her partner, what she expected from him and what relationship problems she had experienced. I was interested in exploring to what extent intimate partner violence is represented in the sample as a ‘common occurrence’ as so many other studies suggest, because I understand intimate partner violence to be a major constraint to women’s (sexual) agency.

In this chapter I sought to explore and uncover patriarchal social dynamics and relationships from the perspective of women as active agents. Since I was attracted by feminist standpoint epistemologies and their claim that “knowledge is born out of experience”, I wanted to construct knowledge from the insights of rural black women’s lives and experiences. Yet, I did not automatically assume the participants’ epistemic privilege, which would require some critical insight “that comes only through political struggle” (cf. Harding, 2004:9). I adhered to the idea of a situated woman with experiences and knowledge specific to her place.

The chapter deals with issues considered to be private and intimate. As noted in chapter 4, I had to be aware of signs by which the interviewee indicated emotional stress.

6.2.1 Notions of a good partnership

In the methodology chapter I stated that in order to operationalise what qualified a partnership as either “good” or “bad”, I would draw on the participants’ own assessments. The women in the sample had more or less similar ideas. In describing their individual understanding of a “good relationship” the following categories in different combinations stood out: caring, trust, respect, honesty, communication, and love, including the articulation of the absence of cheating, fighting, beating, or abuse:

In a good relationship, you should have someone who loves you, who cares about you, who doesn't cheat, and beats you or is abusive. ... Cause he can abuse you not physically but emotionally. So you should have someone who is not going to abuse you not at all and who loves you ..., so that you can be able to go on with the relationship. (Julia)

Between a man and a woman, in a good relationship, first of all, you have to trust your partner, you have to be faithful. I think that is the best thing to do in a relationship, because if you don't communicate you don't know what your partner is doing at all. ... And he never calls me names, he never beats me up. (Catherine)

It is all about honesty, true loving, trust. (Interpreter for Lisa)

I think a good relationship is based on trust, communicating, loving each other, respect, honesty. (Tshepiso)

In a good relationship, the man and the woman, they mustn't have a secret, they must be open. The man must be open to his woman and the woman must be open to her man. Everything they are doing, they must do it together. If there is something wrong, they must sit down and talk about it, communicate and fix that. And that's it, that's a good relationship between two people. (Emily)

Although not necessarily expected, very similar ideas were displayed across age groups as the various statements above demonstrate.

To clarify the understanding of the oft-used term and socio-cultural construct "caring", I asked interviewees to describe what it meant to them. It would appear that, in the participants' case, caring was internalised as a social norm constituting gender difference since it included the fact that traditionally it was the man's responsibility to work in order to provide for his girlfriend or family. Notwithstanding, caring entailed an idea of both emotional *and* material support as articulated by Elisabeth and Rose.

Caring is like if maybe I have a problem, so I go to him 'I have this problem', maybe my mother or my grandfather say things like – maybe she shouted at me, so I have to tell him 'I have a problem with my mother'. I need someone who can tell me what to do,

maybe I don't know what to do. (Elisabeth)

Rose linked material provision closely to love and respect. With such a concept she precluded a possible misuse of power based on men's financial potency (while her personal experience tells a different story).

Is to give care, is to give love, is to give respect to the family and to provide for the children, to provide for all the family, as a caring father should provide to each member of the family and give them love and give them respect. (Interpreter for Rose)

6.2.2 Notions of a bad partnership

In contrast, a "bad relationship" was conveyed with concepts relating to a context of abuse, including physical, sexual or emotional abuse, a context of infidelity and distrust, controlling behaviour, poor communication between the partners, the man not providing, and a lack of love, affection and commitment.

Elisabeth illustrated her view with the example of forced sex; Julia with controlling behaviour caused by jealousy:

A bad relationship is when maybe my boyfriend, he's beating me and who doesn't understand if he wants to sleep with me, like he wants to have sex with me [and] I'm not ready, so he just forces me, so we end up fighting and then he beats me, he says if I do not have sex with him that means I don't love him. (Elisabeth)

While the example Elisabeth gave was not her own partnership experience, Julia's example derived from her personal relationship problem, which she disclosed in the course of the interview, namely her boyfriend's distrust of her fidelity. As will be discussed later in the dissertation distrust was a major characteristic of many partnerships (see section 6.3.3).

A bad relationship, what could I say, a bad relationship is when someone doesn't trust you and thinks that you cheat or he thinks

that you are a cheater and you are a liar and even though you try by all means that you can prove to him that you are right - I think that is caused by jealousy. So a bad relationship is caused by all those things like when you have a boyfriend and that boyfriend lives far from your home and he thinks that where ever you are, maybe in your area, you have someone else. And when you sleep, he calls you 'what are you doing?' and all these things. He tries to find out where you are, what you are doing, are you sleeping or what. It's a little bit irritating cause you can't relax and he can't relax cause he always thinks that you are somewhere with someone ... (Julia)

Likewise, Catherine, Lisa and Dyondzeka stressed distrust, and physical and emotional abuse:

When a boyfriend beats you up, calls you names. (Catherine)

A bad relationship is all about not trusting each other, abuse, being unfaithful to each other. Yeah, that's it. (Interpreter or Lisa)

A bad relationship is the opposite of that thing, trust. You don't trust him. (Dyondzeka)

Maria like Julia referred to her personal experience giving an example of a partner's lack of love:

A bad relationship is when ... that partner doesn't see that you are showing your love. You try by all means to show him your love, you love him badly. Everything is just simple to him, ... even when you go to bed with him,... he doesn't have love that means his love is too small. (Interpreter for Maria)

Rose, however, related a bad relationship – the reverse of what she describes as a good partnership – to another aspect, that of not taking care of the family, a problem she had also personally encountered:

So, that is, when you [are] ... not respecting the family, not to give care. Because it's respect and taking care of the family. Then, if you don't do that, it's not a good relationship, it's a very bad relationship. (Interpreter for Rose)

In sum, interviewees across all age groups displayed fairly contemporary ideas of what constitutes a good partnership and a very clear understanding of what the core values for a successful relationship are. These contemporary partnership notions emphasised aspects of love and intimacy. Notions of violence and abuse, as well as distrust and cheating on the partner, were prominent in the women's conceptions of a bad partner relationship. This means that women, although socialised into a culture that tolerates or even favours men's right to exercise power over women, including customary rights of chastisement and to pursue multiple partnerships, did not necessarily subscribe to these norms. Instead, they were thoroughly critical of these norms, identifying them as factors contributing to a bad partner relationship. If compared with their own stories, one can see that participants' views and examples often derived from personal partnership experiences.

6.3 Assessing the own partnership

The introductory questions pertained to more general views on the characteristics of a "good" and a "bad" relationship. This was followed by questions about their own (existing or former) partnership in order to explore spaces for agency.¹²²

In response to the first question, that is, whether they enjoyed their relationship, more women (n= 12) replied that they were enjoying their relationship than those that said they did not (n= 7); one participant was ambivalent about her feelings. Some not only agreed that they enjoyed their partnership but stated explicitly that they enjoyed it "very much".

Since relationship problems are a normal part of relationships, I was also keen to learn what the problems were, how they were dealt with and how they were resolved in order to explore participants' capacity for making decisions and choices in a crisis situation. Therefore, I asked all the participants: *What is the most difficult thing for you in your relationship?* Only four women, all married (Mandisa, Karen, Christine and Margret), said that they experienced no current problems in their partnership although they had had

¹²² In the sample most women lived in long-term partnerships or marriages, only one woman was divorced, and three lived separated from their husbands. Some of the younger women were discussing marriage with their boyfriends of many years (e.g. five to eight years).

difficulties in the past. Four other women, Emily, Maria, Grace and Rose, also had no current problems because they live without a male partner.¹²³ The rest of the participants (n= 12) reported current difficulties in their partnerships. Individual cases differed considerably, particularly if one looks at the group that reported enjoying their relationship and those who maintained they were not enjoying it. The most repeatedly identified problem was that the interviewee shared or had had to share her partner with another woman (see section 6.3.3).

I have developed a classification of relationship quality to subsume the participant's diverse experiences. The classification considers age and marital status as important items for distinguishing between different groups of women with regard to their commonalities and differences of partnership experience:

¹²³ Emily is a widow, Maria is separated from her abusive husband, Grace is divorced from her abusive husband, and Rose is also separated from her husband.

Table 2: Relationship quality

Classification		Description	Age group/ marital status	Interviewee
Good	satisfied with partnership without any problems	women enjoying their partnership now, who mastered crises in the past; no current problems	married middle-aged or senior women, one widow	Karen, Mandisa, Christine, Margret, Emily
	satisfied with partnership despite some current problems	women enjoying their partnership despite some current problems	younger women between 19 and 28, unmarried except one	Nomsa, Julia, Gladys, Lorraine, Elisabeth, Catherine, Lisa
Bad	unsatisfied with the current partnership	women neither enjoying their current relationship nor previous partnership	women in their 30s, one is 40, different marital statuses	Kamohelo, Mona, Sheila, Dyondzeka, Tshepiso ¹²⁴
	unsatisfied with the previous partnership	women not having enjoyed their marriage now living without the husband. Do not have a new partner	women between 35 to 44, divorced or separated from the husband	Maria, Rose, Grace

In the following two sections I will give examples of the interviewees' assessments according to the above classification of good and bad partnerships. In doing so, I want to explore the way women relate to their partners and provide specific illustrations of agency or lack of agency in structures of domination predetermined by the local socio-cultural context.

6.3.1 Accounts of good partnerships – a space for agency?

The interviewees' positive accounts depicted their male partner as not dominant, authoritarian or forceful and show a different – in studies sometimes neglected – side of (South African) rural black men. Several participants highlighted the loving behaviour of their husband or boyfriend. The women's positive answers depicted the partner as caring,

¹²⁴ Tshepiso was ambivalent in the assessment of her partnership and described her partner's good and bad sides. I assigned her to this category according to my impression that her partner showed a considerable degree of oppressive behaviour towards Tshepiso.

loving and respectful.

Yeah, what I can say about him is that he is a loving person. He loves me. Although there are some ups and downs, but he is a loving husband and he cares.

How does he show this? Or how do you know this?

Ok, I do know that, because he is a person that gives a present ...
(Karen)

I enjoy it, because my husband loves me, he loves me ... and I enjoy that. ... He was doing everything. I look, was ok then ... (*a short discussion between Mandisa and interviewer*) – a good relationship now, I like it, I like it. (Mandisa)

Elisabeth and Catherine highlighted the fact that both their boyfriends gave them emotional care and support when they needed it:

What I like? Ok, what I like about my partner: he's wonderful, handsome and caring. So if maybe I am not feeling well, he can see that I am not ok. He is going to ask me 'what is wrong?' and then he can help me. (Elisabeth)

Mh, what can I say? He is caring. ... Ok, when there is a problem we sit down and talk about it. And he never calls me names, he never beats me up. (Catherine)

Lisa emphasised faithfulness and trust, Lorraine her boyfriend's positive attitude:

She likes the way he is loving her and then the faithfulness and trust.

And what do you think he loves about you?

I think he loves me faithfully, and I trust him. (Interpreter for Lisa)

Whatever, he has some nice wits. Yeah, and he can make you laugh. Whenever he comes, he turns, just says, 'here comes [your] man', smiling, to come and kiss you ... (Lorraine)

Julia and Christine put emphasis on sexual aspects. While Julia appreciated the way her boyfriend caressed her and did not force her to have sex with him, Christine enjoyed a

playful sexuality with her husband.

My boyfriend, my partner, well, I've said many things. The way he treats me. The way he kisses me. The way we have sex, when I say 'I don't want to have sex with you', he says 'ok I understand', then we will do it the next day. And we won't have sex almost everyday. It's like maybe once a week. Maybe once a week. (Julia)

They love each other and they've got the time just to play as a couple.

To play?

To play just to play.

What does that mean, I have got an idea but may be I'm wrong, what do you mean?

At least you caught one word, the play that she was talking about is to have those feelings and just have sex. (Interpreter for Christine)

A positive depiction of the partner or husband described his good qualities such as charm, honesty, faithfulness and humour, and loving behaviour such as emotional support, giving presents and the absence of forcing things out of the partner, acting against her will, and giving space for participants' choices. The participants endorsed affectionate relationships with a complexity of feelings involved. Expectations the women had of their partners related to material support, love and positive emotions and a good family life which included both. The participant's positive assessment corresponded with the criteria describing a good partnership in general. No age differences were detectable.

As a restriction, I must point out that in another part of the interview, when discussing HIV/AIDS risk, most of the initially positive relationship accounts were tarnished by reports of a significant lack of trust in the male partner's fidelity even in relationships deemed good. Since infidelity and distrust were repeatedly brought up as important categories characterising a bad relationship, it seems to me that a number of interviewees in some way adapted their partnership assessment in order to maintain their ideal of a good partnership.

Generally, communication, cooperation and commitment are seen as important factors for facilitating conflict resolution (cf. Donohue & Kolt, 1992) and indeed in partnerships assessed as ‘good’ there was a mutual interest in the partner, there was love and commitment, and communication took place.

But if we share, you see, communication - that’s why I said communication. You can know your partner better by communication [about] everything, the climate, everything, finances, everything and that’s why you can get trust from someone, you see, by communicating. (Nomsa)

In chapter 4 I have defined my understanding of agency for the purpose of this research as the subject’s capability to act independently and to make her own choices. In a crisis both partners were willing to deal with the problem and to find a solution. All middle-aged or senior women who said that they enjoyed their marriage and lived in long-term marriages having overcome a relationship crisis in the past involving severe problems such as infidelity, drinking or, in one case, beating. Yet the causes and circumstances differed considerably. What was common was that all of them wanted to maintain the marriage and took self-confident active steps – indicative of agency – in solving the problems (Margret with the help of her daughters) within the existing social context and without further emancipatory connotations. To illustrate the latter point I will give two examples:

Christine

Christine was a very traditional woman and compliant with traditional role expectations: “She is very much caring, doing everything in the household that is why the husband loves her” (interpreter for Christine). She had strong Christian values and saw her marriage as given by God. Some years ago, when Christine found out that her husband had a lover, she became very active in ending the affair. Whereas, according to her cultural context, she was actually expected to tolerate it, not to question her husband’s behaviour or to enquire about his whereabouts, Christine tackled the situation proactively, took her husband to the girlfriend to discuss the situation and then, as the traditional mediation route prescribed, involved the husband’s uncle. As a final step, Christine

convinced her husband's manager to hand over his salary to her so that her husband could not spend money on his girlfriend and so that she would lose interest in him.

There was a problem in 1999, she was very ill and then her husband got somebody outside, she even tried to take him away from her, but they tried to sort things out, everything is now resolved.

Can you explain to me if you don't mind, tell me how you sorted this problem out, what did you do?

Okay, she took her husband to the family, talked to the husband's uncle and they tried to resolve it. And ... firstly she took her husband to the girlfriend, the girlfriend and they were arguing but they tried to speak about everything. And then after that she took him to the uncle, after that she went to his work. She spoke to the manager about the problem and the manager said she has to come each and every month to collect his salary and that made the woman not to come again because when there is no money, then there is no relationship. (Interpreter for Christine)

Although her action was relatively unorthodox and displayed a great deal of agency in terms of decision-making and making choices, Christine stayed within the traditional boundaries and structures of domination, as she reveals when talking about her interaction with her husband.¹²⁵ Arguably she was strongly motivated and felt justified about acting in the way she did because of her belief in the value of monogamy in Christian teachings.

Karen

Karen, who had been married for more than 20 years, lamented the fact that her marriage was childless. She saw this as a major cause for the fact that both she and her husband had cheated on each other at some point in the past. Childlessness in her context, which sees a woman's central role in life as being a wife and mother, was certainly a major stress factor. Her account of how the conflict was resolved was a bit inconclusive, but the couple had stayed together as friends while having had other sexual partners. However, as

¹²⁵ As I previously quoted (see p. 198) Christine showed that she is contrite if she had an argument with her husband. When her husband shouted she remained silent.

the interview continued, Karen disclosed that she knew about her husband's affairs while he did not know about hers. Although the couple used to talk about problems it seems that neither disclosed his or her unfaithfulness to their spouse. Karen found out about her husband having affairs, while her own infidelity remained undisclosed. Clearly, Karen transcended gender role boundaries when she was unfaithful to her husband and challenged the (gendered) rules. If a woman is having an affair, or if her husband or male partner suspects she may be having an affair, such behaviour is in breach of traditional gender roles and even justifies domestic violence in a community characterised by customary rule (cf. Hargreaves et al., 2006:20). Karen had considered separation, but as women are held primarily (disproportionately) responsible for the success or failure of a marriage in traditional culture and a failed marriage is a sign of not being a 'real woman', she dropped the idea because it would bring shame and disgrace on her. Karen's decision-making in this respect was severely impacted and constrained by the patriarchal norms of the structure of the system in which she found herself.

But it never came to your mind to leave your husband? What did you think about it?

Sometimes, sometimes it came to my mind, that I should, but how (*aspirating*). Then it came again to me, that if I do that, then it's going to ruin something like (*short pause*) – it's something that puts you to shame. Then some of the things are not very easy. If somebody is doing that, ... then I am not succeeding like the other ones.

Yes, so you decided –

I decided to cool up a little and see how things are going to be.

Although she enjoyed having fun with other men, she also had a guilty conscience and questioned her own behaviour. She reached her moral limits (which were shaped by her Christian morality) and finally terminated her extra-marital affairs. Shame acted as an important regulator of prevailing social expectations.

Yeah, it's ok. Maybe [that is] what God wanted me to do, because, when I was busy, during those days, it was fun, what I was doing. Then it came to my mind, what have I done now. Because I was doing terrible things, you know. You know when you are married and go out with somebody, it's not right. It's very terrible, because

what can happen to you then.

Hm.

Yeah, it's very terrible. You're put to shame, to hell. It came to my mind, and then one day I just asked myself, what can I do. And until when am I going to do this.

And you think, if he had found out, he would have left you?

I don't know. (Karen)

Karen, like Christine, made a lot of decisions and choices for herself. What she was not capable of was leaving her husband, because the socio-cultural norms and her context were too powerful. What both examples illustrate is what Giddens (1986:19) described as the duality of structure: in social action the agent draws on the existing rules which are at the same time the means of reproducing the system.

These examples illustrate the fact that in partnerships assessed as good there was space for the female partner to make choices – within the confines of the overall structures and rules. In these relationships the absence of coercion and violence was important; the male partner was not perceived as dominant and relationship dynamics were not characterised by direct power strategies. Interviewees could experience having control over a situation. Both partners had an interest in each other; and in a crisis both partners were willing to look for a solution. How agency in good partnerships plays out in the sexual realm will be discussed in detail in section 6.4.

6.3.2 Accounts of bad partnerships – a space of non-agency?

Negative assessment of a partnership referred to the male partner's "uncommitted" behaviour or, in most cases to aggressive and violent behaviour. Sexual abuse was a repeated occurrence in these accounts. These specific issues could elicit emotional distress from the participant in the interview situation. All the problems that the participants specified here corresponded with the categories identified for a bad partnership in general. Those giving negative accounts had either left their partner/husband or had been left, were just about to separate or were still engaged in a bad relationship. Only one participant explicitly stated that she was going to stay in her

unpleasant relationship. Of the seven women who admitted to not enjoying their relationship, five related this to the present partner and two, who did not have a new partner, to the husband to whom they were still married but from whom they were separated. Tsephiso was ambiguous about her relationship (cf. footnote 124). She had experienced a bad relationship with her former husband who had already passed away and her new boyfriend displayed both loving and caring behaviour, as well as controlling, jealous behaviour, which became worse when he was drunk.

However, not all relationships deemed bad were characterised by violence but by very uncommitted behaviour. What impact did this have on women's agency?

6.3.2.1 Experiences of poor partner communication

Poor communication between the partners was identified by the participants as a characteristic of a problematic partner relationship. In accordance with this interviewees reported not to know or not to have known what the problem in the relationship was, what changed a partner's behaviour or what initiated the violence. While communication, cooperation and commitment were all part of the interviewees' notions of good partnerships, their absence indicated a problematic (bad) partner relationship. Lack of communication left the female partner in a vacuum not knowing what will happen next. Quina et al., (2000) have shown that communication within intimate relationships is determined by the power dynamics of the relationship. Poor partner communication, for instance, reinforces an atmosphere of fear and distrust.

In both her previous and her present relationship, Kamohelo encountered the problem of not knowing what was happening. Whilst previously she was exposed to severe partner violence, her present (married) boyfriend showed very uncommitted behaviour. For instance, he made promises he did not fulfil and he prevaricated. Kamohelo doubted his feelings for her and suspected that he might still have another relationship besides her and his wife. At the time of the interview she remained in a "stand-by" position.

Her present boyfriend is a married person. Now she is not sure whether the relationship is quite good or what. Cause he has got another partner as we know. But she got some difficulties in her partnership ...

He just promises that he loves her, but she thinks it is not true because he fails to fulfil the promises. (Interpreter for Kamohelo)

Similarly, Dyondzeka was engaged in a relationship that was about to break up after 19 months, although the couple had initially discussed marriage. At the time of the interview she thought her boyfriend was pretending: “I am not at his heart”. She actually did not want to separate from him but she felt that his behaviour was very disrespectful, arrogant and unfair to her. She suspected – but was not certain – that his changed behaviour was as a result of his parents’ negative influence. The boyfriend’s family was superstitious: because she was a widow they accused her of bringing misfortune on their family. Communication between the couple had broken down, but he still came to visit her because he wanted to have sex with her. Like Kamohelo, Dyondzeka remained in a stand-by position.

Now it is for 19 months. ... We are about to separate, but I’m not sure ... At first I enjoyed it very much, but now not. ... It changed, maybe after fifteen months. It’s not long ago, after fifteen months, it changed, because of his parents. I am a widow, my husband has passed away. ... So his parents said: ‘She’s a widow, why do you sit with a widow? You are going to have bad luck’. Many things.

So, you don’t communicate?

We didn’t communicate, we don’t do it (*laughing*).

Maybe he loves sex or what more. But I think he was loving sex. ... So I think maybe he loves my sex-style or what, I don’t know ... He is sitting and keeps quiet. (Dyondzeka) Maybe he loves sex or what more. But I think he was loving sex. ... So I think maybe he loves my sex-style or what, I don’t know ... He is sitting and keeps quiet. (Dyondzeka)

One extraordinary story was told by Rose. After many years of marriage Rose’s husband disappeared for seven years without a single word, then he returned all of a sudden to the family. Rose forgave him and agreed to a new start and they even had another baby.

Although hard to imagine, the husband left again for good shortly after the birth of the child as if merely going to work, leaving Rose again with the entire responsibility for taking care of and providing for the family. She suspected him of having a second family. She was never given an explanation.

Ok, they stayed together from 1980. At the moment he is not in contact with her. He left seven years ago but he came back last year. ... After seven years, he came back and gave her a present [another baby]. ... She said, now she doesn't like anything about him, nothing, she doesn't want to hear anything about him.

When he came back ... she forgave him for leaving her for so many years and they started again. Only to find, that he is still going to leave her.

Did he leave you again?

They only separated. You know, this is a very different case, because this guy, he hasn't said anything about leaving her, but just goes as if he is going to work. And then goes for ever.

... She says that he didn't say anything when he left. He promised that he'll come back as usual. She waited, but he didn't come back.

... Whenever she phoned, she finds that the phone is off. If it's not off, you can hear the cries of children. Maybe he has got another family that other side.

But you do not know?

She doesn't, she is not sure about that (*translation*). She is not sure about the family. But always when she phones, she will hear the cries, children crying around. (Interpreter for Rose)

For men having multiple sexual partners is a sign of successful masculinity and is not perceived negatively. Socio-culturally, it is in men's power to define the rules of the relationship, which often prevents communication between the two partners. Men who feel little commitment toward their female partner and/or who have a concurrent partner show little willingness or interest in communicating with the partner as in the above examples. They use their position of power to do what suits them. In addition, I can imagine that many interviewees lack the capacity of verbal assertion since culture has "silenced" them in various ways. All three women were not bereft of agency but did not display as much agency as, for instance, Christine and Karen even though Kamohelo and

Dyondzeka had the choice to terminate their unpleasant relationships.¹²⁶ In contrast to the interviewees who actively tackled their relationship problems, these women remained in a waiting position – waiting for clarification, waiting for change, waiting for the relationship to end – and left decisions to the male partner. Being patient was identified as a core rule for good conduct and may have been the underlying motive for the interviewees not putting pressure on their partners.

6.3.2.2 Experiences of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence is a major space for women's non-agency and as mentioned a major field of investigation for radical feminists resulting from the notion that "the personal is political". In total, nine women in the study reported previous and/or current incidences of violence and abuse. This constitutes almost half of the sample and reflects the high prevalence and "common occurrence" of intimate partner violence in the country.¹²⁷ As has been suggested, eight interviewees (Kamohelo, Mona, Sheila, Tshepiso, Dyondzeka, Maria, Rose, Grace) assessed their current and/or previous relationship as unsatisfying or bad and gave as major reasons for this the partner's lack of commitment, or partner violence and abuse. These experiences encompassed physical abuse (i.e. beating, slapping, sexual), as well as emotional and psychological abuse (i.e. shouting, insulting, threatening, and lack of affection) including death threats, forced sex and (marital) rape. Such behaviour violated the female partner's fundamental rights, such as the right to dignity, physical and psychological security and autonomy, undermined her agency and forced her into submission. It expressed a specific social process of gender bound to the materiality of the body. In the concrete situation of partner violence (e.g. battering, sexual abuse) women were powerless and bereft of agency, simply surviving through the situation. If she had the power and strength she could take action after the violation, which according to experience was an exception (cf. section 6.5 in this

¹²⁶ Poulin (2007:2391) emphasises female power with regard to relationship formation and termination and the fact that women can choose the partner they want. Although I did not enquire into the processes of relationship formation and termination, I would also assume this form of decision-making power applies to the participants in my study as well.

¹²⁷ Including Gladys who reported satisfaction with her partnership.

study). If disclosed, women commonly asked for the intervention of elderly family members and only involved the police or local authorities when resolving the conflict within the family had failed.

Kamohelo's former partner, to whom she was not married but by whom she had two daughters, acted very violently towards the family, particularly when in combination with heavy alcohol consumption. He terrorised the family who sometimes had to run away from his violence. When the beating became extreme, Kamohelo sought help from the police. It was very difficult for Kamohelo to speak about her experiences and she cried during the interview, which she nevertheless wanted to continue.

The father of her two daughters. He used ... to come home drunk and he was violent and when he comes home they have to run away from him. They have to go out through the windows because he was so violent and he was not providing as a father. ...

She says that the guy, that boyfriend, he was just abusive and he did not tell her what was the problem. He did not tell her what was causing him to do these things but he was abusive.

How could you help yourself? What did you do to protect yourself?

She left him. She is now staying with her parents. ...

And may I ask, did he also abuse you sexually?

Yes. He was abusing her. (Interpreter for Kamohelo)

Kamohelo did however act: firstly, by involving the police and finally when she left her abusive partner. The abusive situation itself was characterised by non-agency.

As in the examples of Maria and Sheila, violence needed not seemingly be ongoing. The mere threat of violence may have been sufficient to frighten women. Occasional kindness or expressions of empathy and affection encouraged the women to hope that things might change (cf. Ludsin & Vetten, 2005). Towns and Adams (2000) point out that love sways women to remain in relationships and to stay silent about men's violence, an observation confirmed by a study conducted in Johannesburg. Mashishi (2000) recorded fourteen women's experiences of marital violence at two shelters in Johannesburg. Among them the shortest period for staying in a marriage was two years, the longest 17 years. The majority stated that they stayed because they loved their partners and had hoped that they

would change. In my sample I found a similar tendency.

She did stay for long because of her love. Sometimes he used to come home without doing anything wrong. He stayed and nothing was wrong until the guy started again. And then she felt bad and said that this guy is abusing me, what is he doing, coming home, staying a week and going away things like that. (Interpreter for Maria)

The socio-cultural prescription to bear all suffering in marriage and not to return to the family of origin – as discussed in the focus groups – was an additional and significant restriction for Maria as well as the notion that a failed marriage is a source of shame for a woman.

Ok, she couldn't feel that pain when he started to do all these things because in her mind it was that each marriage is like this when you start and you experience the same thing. And as time goes on it is then that she realised that that was abuse.

She ... didn't want to feel shameful and when she got married, she was very young. But she felt very shameful to go back home. (Interpreter for Maria)

In the end Maria took action by involving the Chief in mediation, but as a result of this her husband threw her out and sent her back to her parents. At the time of the interview she had not formed a new relationship. Like Kamohelo Maria lacked agency in the abusive situation itself.

Likewise, Sheila endured humiliation and abuse for some years hoping that her husband would change. Her passivity may be read as indicative of the fact that she had been effectively silenced by the dynamics of oppression. In such a context Amaro (2000) refers to silencing as the actual loss of voice, and metaphorically the silencing or loss of the self.

Can you tell me about it?

The ex-boyfriend [husband] when she went to work and arrived

home late, the first thing he did was to feel her private parts with his hand and then tell her that ‘you have been sleeping around, lets go so that I can check because I can feel that you had a boyfriend during the day’.

For how long did this go on?

3 years.

He was also beating her up.

Did you leave him?

Yes.

How did you manage to cope with this?

She just told herself that it was going to be good and to see if he was going to change. She had a hope that he will change but unfortunately after three years she noticed he was not changing and she decided to leave.

When he hurt you, how did you defend yourself?

She didn’t, she just took it all. (Interpreter for Sheila)

Yet, Sheila was capable of leaving the abusive relationship. At the time of the interview she was engaged in a new relationship, which she described as highly problematic. She admitted to not liking the relationship but had no intention of giving it up. It would appear that Sheila – bereft of agency – surrendered to the power and aggression of men in her life and responded with submission and a lack of initiative. She did not disclose whether economic dependency made her stay in the relationship.

Do you enjoy it [the new partnership]?

No she doesn’t enjoy it.

Why?

The reason she is not enjoying it ... the relationship between him, her and the children is not perfect because he likes to shout, ‘don’t touch that, don’t do this, don’t do that’. She does not enjoy it because when the children see him, they want to flee. They feel frightened. (Interpreter for Sheila)

Grace’s husband of several years changed his behaviour when he wanted to take a second wife. This was totally unexpected and Grace disapproved. He then punished her with violence and sexual abuse, and she was afraid that he might even kill her. Finally he divorced her. Her husband’s violence and threats intimidated Grace and suppressed her deliberately, leaving no room for choice and agency.

He was abusive and when he came to the house and found that the family was in a conversation, he started to shout. ...

When she was speaking to the family [about the problems], most of the time they used to tell her to go to the police because they couldn't do anything, I think they were also afraid of him. He was threatening her that 'if you go to the police, I am going to burn down this house and you are going to burn with it'. ...

So did you think 'I should leave my husband, I should divorce him'?

She did think about it but she was afraid.

What were you afraid of?

She was afraid that maybe he will kill her.

He threatened you?

Hm. (Interpreter for Grace)

Mona, too, left a very violent, abusive partner who was the father of her only child. For three years she then cohabited with a new partner but she had recently moved in with her mother because of severe partnership problems. The continuous harassment of the former boyfriend had a very destructive impact on her new relationship, because the new partner did not understand the situation, was jealous and suspected that Mona was still involved with the former boyfriend. Yet, she claimed to love the (new) boyfriend and was unhappy about the separation.

Alright, first he [new boyfriend] treated me nicely you see, there's nothing he didn't do for me. Always when I asked for things he did it, but nowadays –

So do you know when he changed? What is the reason why he changed?

Mh! He changed because of this one [previous boyfriend, her child's father] ... He thinks maybe sometimes, I got a chance to talk with that guy, maybe I love him. I told him I don't love him that guy and I can't love him cause he stressed me first, he hurt me. Mh! 'No, no, I know you women, you think you are clever.' I said 'No, not like the way you think'.

There was no fighting between us before this guy comes on us, it was nice when he came from his job. (Mona)

Mona displayed a great deal of confusion during the interview when talking about her relationship experiences and her English was very difficult to understand. She appeared to me to be traumatised by the permanent violence, threats and terror she was exposed to

by the two men who both threatened to kill her.

‘I want you, you are the mother of my child. I love you, you know. ... I will kill you as long as I know where you stay. You can’t play around with a nice life’ [child’s father].

Did he [the new boyfriend] threaten you?

Sometimes when he beats me, he’ll say ‘I will kill you’. I’ll run cause you see when someone is drinking, when he is drunk and says ‘I will kill you’, you must run. Cause after he killed you, he will say ‘sorry’ when you are dead, you see. (Mona)

The brutal reality of such threats is that – as noted in the literature review – every six hours a woman in South Africa is killed by her intimate partner (Mathews et al., 2004). Living in a context of such terror undermines Mona’s self and her ability to act competently.

Partner violence affects or has affected many of the participants’ lives. As noted in the literature review, partner violence can be understood as a form of control using methods such as physical, sexual or psychological abuse (also in combination) or as a form of objectification (cf. Ludsin & Vetten, 2005:17–19) with severe physiological and psychological effects on the woman. There is a strong linkage between the ideology of male supremacy and domination, expectations of submissiveness and women’s risk of violence. The male partner puts gender ideology into practice when he asserts power and control often accompanied by sexual domination. As demonstrated in the above examples, participants living in partnerships characterised by violence were primarily bereft of agency within the violent situation. They were, however, able to act occasionally and to a limited extent outside the private sphere. In a social environment like Mmakaunyane, where traditional gender ideologies were alive and patriarchal structures were in place, a certain “tolerance” of violence is arguably to be expected.

The women reporting experiences of violence to me were all more or less able to speak about them reasonably calmly. In most cases the violence was retrospective. Only Kamohelo showed great distress but she nevertheless took time to recover and continued

with the interview. Again, my gender and my outsider position may have facilitated discussions on violence. The presence of the interpreter in some interviews seemed not to have resulted in the suppression of verbalising of bad experiences. On the contrary, it seemed very helpful that the women could talk about them in their mother tongue.

6.3.3 An overall relationship problem: infidelity and distrust

Trust has been an outstanding category in the portrayal of what characterises a good relationship and distrust as what characterises a bad partnership relationship. In the beginning of this section (6.3) I noted that I enquired into relationship problems and that one repeated core relationship problem in all groups is that the woman has, or once had, to share her partner, which also raised the issues of trust and distrust. Except for Nomsa, most women raised the issue of trust/distrust in conversations about HIV and AIDS and then not directly. At the time of the interviews this was the case with Gladys, Lorraine and Kamohelo. Their boyfriends were either still married to another woman or had a concurrent girlfriend. Rose suspected her husband of living with his second family. Infidelity had also been a concern for other interviewees earlier in their lives (Karen, Christine, Emily, Nomsa, Julia, Tshepiso, Maria, Grace). Of those who reported enjoying their partnership, several reported that their husbands or long-term boyfriends had had affairs previously; of those reporting that they did not enjoy their relationship some recounted their husband's infidelity and abusive behaviour.

Of particular significance is the fact that multiple partnerships, infidelity and promiscuity are major risk factors for HIV-infection. In the context of the conversations about HIV/AIDS, I asked interviewees if they were worried about becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. Research indicates that despite high levels of awareness, self-perceived risk is often low (Hartung, Nash, Ngubane & Fredlund, 2002). In terms of the matter of women's agency the question is highly relevant: it throws some light, firstly, on the level of trust in the partnership and, secondly, on the participants' negotiating and decision-making power in intimate partnerships in terms of protection against HIV infection.

The majority of women in the sample stated that they felt at risk for HIV infection. Julia expressed her views on the high HIV prevalence in the country and the general risk of HIV infection with the often heard comparison “it’s like flu”. Whilst a few participants did not further specify their fears, the overwhelming majority – both unmarried and married women – displayed great insecurity about their partner’s fidelity and thus to a great extent a lack of trust in their partners, even in relationships that were deemed good, as Lorraine’s and Nomsa’s stories demonstrated:

Are you worried yourself to get an infection?

Yes.

What is your worry? What do you think?

Sometimes I think, that maybe my partner can go around, maybe, if I am not around, and can get that from someone, and can give it to me.

Do you speak about it?

.... Yes. He enjoyed ... sex with condoms very much, because he doesn’t want to make another baby. Yeah, or some transmission of infections to others. (Lorraine)

I can give you this example because I did loose some trust because he betrayed me. He was cheating on me, we were not married yet, so I lost trust, really. Even now, I mean, I know, I love him, but because of the things he has done before – I forgave him but I never forget. Each and every time if I see some funny moves, I still remember those things. So you see, he breaks the thing of trust between us and that’s all I can say about trust. (Nomsa)

Nomsa never regained her trust in her husband, although the marriage seemed to be good. At the time of the interview the couple were planning a second child. Furthermore, the participant worked with HIV patients and therefore undertook regular HIV testing:

You have to watch your man and you see beside that you still remember, I told you about the trust. So I do have to check because right now he is here, at night time he is off. I don’t know what he is doing there, so I am worried.

You are worried about that?

Too much, too much. That is why ... I just went to hospital so that I can know my status exactly (Nomsa).

Five other women had been for testing after they had separated from their partner or suspected their partner's infidelity.¹²⁸ None of the women in the sample revealed a positive status in the course of the interview. The women either did not know their status, or else did not disclose it. All women who disclosed that they had been for testing maintained that they had tested negative.

After she realised, that she is pregnant, she went for HIV- and AIDS-tests and then they came up negative. After the husband left, she lost a lot of weight. She says that if she hadn't gone to test for HIV and AIDS, maybe she would have died, because she would be killed by shock. Because she was very very thin and maybe people were suspecting that she was infected or what ever. But thanks that she knew by then that she was HIV-negative. (Interpreter for Rose)

Yes. I did go for HIV tests. ... After I heard that my husband was sick I had to go because I saw him while we were going to court. Then I suspected the symptoms. Then I thought this is not good. I had to take these steps. Then after the court I went straight to the clinic. ... I just went there to check the test. Then it came negative. I went there four times because I was not sure about it, but now I am relieved. (Tshepiso)

My findings show a high awareness of a possible personal HIV infection risk among both older married and younger unmarried women based on a high level of distrust of the male partner's fidelity. The women were not reluctant to talk about it. This discovery is consistent with results in the study by Versteeg and Murray (2008:90), who also found that the majority of female participants did not trust their husbands. Yet, I did not necessarily expect that the majority of women in my sample would state they felt at risk from HIV infection. Although Fox et al. (2007) for instance found in their small sample of abused women that more than three quarters had direct knowledge that their partner had other partners, it was surprising for me that most of the women in my study admitted such great insecurity about their partner's fidelity. This revealed a significant lack of trust in their partners, even in relationships that were deemed good. This lack of trust was

¹²⁸ In contrast, the rural women in the study by Castle and Kiggundu (2007) were said to feel uncomfortable going to the clinic for an HIV test because they feared a "death sentence" and did not want being confronted with the results.

often accompanied by activities to establish some sort of “safety” in the sexual relationship, either through regular or inconsistent condom use (see section 6.4.2) or taking an HIV test – attesting for women’s need to maintain control and exercise some sort of agency over their well-being.

The interviewees’ concerns reflected the reality of the socio-cultural double standard of male and female sexuality in the country: while traditionally women are supposed to be sexually faithful, multi-partnership sexuality is naturalised as a part of male nature (Delius & Glaser, 2004; Arnfred, 2005b) and constitutes a major risk factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Among the participants the use of condoms was believed to be the most pragmatic option in an intimate partnership for safe sex and HIV prevention. However, whether condoms are really used depends on the power dynamics in the relationship. Generally it is suggested that in relationships where men exercise direct power over women, women are less likely to have sexual agency and to exercise choice.

6.4 Spaces for sexual agency in different categories of intimate partnership

6.4.1 The personal is political: male sex-right and female sexual agency – decision-making on having sex

In the context of the South African HIV/AIDS pandemic, sexual agency is, to put it bluntly, a question of life and death for many sexually active couples since there is still no cure for AIDS. Condoms are known to be the most reliable prevention measure to avoid HIV transmission during sexual intercourse. Yet there is a range of structural and socio-cultural factors – as discussed throughout this thesis – that inhibits (consistent) condom use in hetero-relations and free choice in male–female sexual interactions. To have agency implies being able to act and make choices, whereas the interconnection between structure and agency sets the parameters for an agent’s choices (Giddens, 1986). As I argued earlier, female agency in sexual activity encompasses the woman’s decision and control with regard to whom, when, where and how to have sex, negotiating and decision-making power in terms of protection, and negotiating individual sexual wants

and needs. An important insight drawn from radical feminism is that patriarchy has weakened women in their achievement of sexual agency because it gained control of women's bodies. Enjoying the full potential of one's body is an irreducibly – often violated – personal right. Therefore Machera asks “whose body is the female body?” and responds that the female body belongs to the social entity mainly for reproductive purposes with total disregard for women's pleasure. It is societal expectations, for example, not to deny the husband his right to sexual intercourse, which alienate women from their own sexuality (cf. Machera, 2005:165–166).

Discussing body/bodies can bring one close to essentialism, which I do not wish to be identified with. Considering the different understandings of the body in liberal, radical and postmodern feminist thought, I argued in chapter 3 in favour of radical feminism, and against the relativity of the postmodern perspective, for agency being rooted in the idea of embodiment and in the context of material forces. I make use of Connell's (1995:61) idea of embodied practice and understanding of bodies as “both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined” (ibid). Radical feminists see embodiment as a first-hand experience of the self and claim (privileged) knowledge deriving from this experience and praxis. In dealing with issues repressed by liberal feminism, radical feminism centres on issues of sexuality and sees sexuality as fundamental to women's subordination and male dominance. In this framework I was drawn to Miriam's (2007:225) argument that, in a male-supremacist gender order, male sex-right is the invisible background of power presupposed by women's choice to negotiate sex. Hence, for Miriam, the lived contradiction of choice and subordination is central to women's agency.

A traditional rule with far-reaching consequences for female autonomy and agency, since it gives a man full ownership over his partner's body, was revealed in the focus group discussions on good conduct: a wife was not allowed to refuse her husband sex. This leads to the conclusion that marital status (married/unmarried) is a decisive determinant in decision-making and negotiating processes with regard to having sex and condom use. The following sections set out to describe women's lived experience of sexual agency

within good and bad partnerships, as spaces for agency enabling choice or subordination. It investigates the central question of this study, that is, what capacity for agency in terms of their sexuality do women have in their intimate partnerships and are there differences among women in different age groups or in terms of different marital status in making free choices. It enquires into ways of decision-making in terms of sex as well as condom use in the women's intimate partnerships and asks how structural constraints impact on these processes. Finally, it explores Miriam's (2007:213) supposition that women's agency can only be looked at from a perspective where the female agent lives through her situation rather than overcomes domination. Such a view refers to a situation where a woman makes choices under given normative and social conditions of gender subordination and where women's agency rather reproduces than transforms structures of domination ("negotiating their own subordination", *ibid*:221). In terms of sexual agency this would refer for example to non-negotiable male sex-right and ways of strategising around unwanted sex.

In this study, all the younger women except Nomsa were unmarried and all the middle-aged and senior women were married (including those who lived apart from their husbands) or had been married (widowed, divorced); Nomsa was the only one who is young *and* married. Because all women below 30 happened to live in good partnerships, I expanded the age groups in the following way: When referring to age groups in the following section, I identify "young" women as belonging to the age group 18–34 (n= 11), while those identified as "middle-aged" belong to the age group 35–49 (n= 7); those who are older are "senior" women (n= 2).

6.4.1.1 Decision-making on having sex in bad partnerships

Power dynamics in bad partnerships have already been discussed in section 6.3.2. Partnerships assessed as 'bad' were in the majority of cases characterised by overt aggression or violence but not in all cases; for example Dyondzeka, Kamohelo and Rose. Dyondzeka's and Kamohelo's current relationships were characterised by a lack of commitment on the part of male partners and it was not clear whether their relationships

would be kept up or whether the partners would separate. Since at the time of the interview Kamohelo only spoke to her boyfriend on the phone and Rose was already separated from her husband, neither commented on current sexual interactions.

Dyondzeka revealed that she thought her current boyfriend only came to see her to have sex with her but that she did not want to sleep with him under such conditions. The rejection of her boyfriend's wish for sex suggested that Dyondzeka could make her own choices. She was unwilling to make herself an object even for the sake of continuing the relationship. Nor did she feel responsible for his sexual needs.

*But isn't it difficult then for you to sleep with him, if I may ask this?
Because of these things, you say, you don't trust him.
Last it I was that I was still feeling the same, but yesterday, I can't
sleep with him again (laughing). (Dyondzeka)*

While she admitted in another context her boyfriend had previously given her money when they had sex, it seems that Dyondzeka did not sleep with him for mere economic reasons. This would support what I explicated earlier (cf. section 5.3) that in this particular group money and gifts were viewed as a sign of commitment. Furthermore, in the context of a problematic relationship, agency may also lie in the decision-making power to terminate such an unsatisfying relationship. However, neither Kamohelo nor Dyondzeka had taken this step at the time of the interviews.

Sheila, who was previously in a violent marriage and, at the time of the interview, had an unhappy new relationship, stated that she did not like anything about her current boyfriend, although she had no intention of separating from him. She claimed not to be interested in sex but slept with her boyfriend as a duty if he wanted it – in contrast to Dyondzeka – without “feeling anything”.

..., women usually they are not after sex, it's only when your
boyfriend or your husband comes to you that ... you are able to
make love.
Do you enjoy sex with your boyfriend?
She does not feel anything, she is just doing it. (Interpreter for

Sheila)

As already pointed out above, Sheila lacked agency in both her previous as well as her current relationship. It appeared she had surrendered to the powerful interplay of the tacitly accepted male sex-right and male sex-drive construction which totally alienated her from her own feelings. The experience of victimisation in the past and the often aggressive behaviour of her new partner made her submit to male (sexual) dominance. She was deprived of her sexual rights and sexual autonomy – an autonomy she had most likely never experienced. What she had experienced with regard to her body is a continuously abused femininity.

Forced sex is the norm in an abusive relationship with no room for negotiation, as was the case with Maria, Grace and Sheila. Maria, representative of the other abused married interviewees, experienced beatings and sexual as well as emotional abuse by her husband. In the abusive situation she experienced his power and aggression first of all directly through the body (pain which then connects to the soul). In their interactions he also proved his dominance over her verbally with stories about other women he had had sex with, thus exposing Maria to the risk of HIV infection.

He was beating and abusing her violently and then he started to bring girls, girlfriends to the house.

So why do you think he treated you like that?

He loved women, he loved women but she didn't realise that until when this thing started.

May I ask did he abuse you sexually?

Yes, he used to do that, to abuse her sexually. And he came from all those other girls and he'll just come and say 'let's go and sleep' and when they got to the bedroom he is going to tell her about the other girlfriends 'you know, that girl and that other girl, they are mine', things like that. (Interpreter for Maria)

The space for female sexual agency in a bad partnership depended on the degree of violence that occurred in the relationship. As a result of force, the woman submitted to the male partner's dominance who then exercised control and decision-making power over the sexual encounter. An abused woman experienced male dominance directly through

her body. The chances of countering this violence or even showing resistance in the situation were small. Intimate partner violence remains the greatest direct constraint to female agency on an interpersonal level. It constitutes a gendered practice in the form of dominance–submission. While age is of no particular significance, marital status is of some significance because a husband’s entitlement to sexual intercourse against the woman’s will is guaranteed by traditional law and embedded in the patriarchal code of respect. If not married, as in Dyondzeka’s case, the woman’s capacity for sexual agency depended on the male partner’s level of aggression and left room for negotiation and choices.

The only option for escaping from a violent partnership is to leave the abusive partner. Kamohelo, Mona, Sheila, Tshepiso, Maria and Grace all experienced severe violence in their previous partnerships. While some engaged in a new relationship, others preferred to stay single. However, they all had the strength to leave the abusive relationship. The latter constituted a form of agency or even resistance in itself, because traditionally a woman was expected to stay in her marriage. All women who experienced violence disengaged from the abusive relationship, thus “reclaiming self”, which included the stages of counteracting abuse, breaking free, not going back and moving on (Ludsin & Vetten, 2005:86). Breaking free refers to the gradual process of disengaging from the abusive relationship. However, Ludsin and Vetten (ibid:61) note that leaving is not synonymous with safety and does not necessarily end the violence, as Mona’s example illustrated and was also pointed out by Focus Group 1 (enduring threats to kill the female partner).

6.4.1.2 Decision-making on having sex in good partnerships

Given what I set out in the chapter on economic constraints, namely that direct transactional sex is not evident in younger interviewees’ premarital relationships, I attempted to fathom young women’s capacity for agency in sexual decision-making in partnerships free of violence.

I found the accounts of Elisabeth and Julia most representative. Both reported quite frankly on sexual experiences. If Elisabeth did not feel like having sex with her boyfriend, she very directly said ‘no’. She appeared quite self-confident, her direct assertive communication – “if I say no, I say no” – suggested that she did not expect a negative response from her boyfriend:

And may I ask who makes the decision about sleeping with each other?

Decision? Ok, like, for instance, maybe sometimes I’m not feeling well, like if he says, he wants to sleep with me, then I say ‘no’. So he wants a reason why I don’t want cause maybe like yesterday, I didn’t sleep with him, I say ‘no’. If he asks me ‘why’, I say ‘I don’t feel well’

Hm.

So.

But you can make your own decision?

Yes. If I say ‘no’, I say ‘no’. Sometimes I say I don’t want to have sex with him, so he doesn’t understand me what I like or what I want. But I give him something and if I say ‘no’, I say ‘no, I’m not feeling ok’. So that is all.

Elisabeth described the way she negotiated with her boyfriend about his and her sometimes different sexual desires and again claimed that she was able to say ‘no’ to things she did not like thus exposing sexual agency:

Sometimes a man wants us to do what he wants. He doesn’t understand our feelings. I don’t want this. Or sometimes I don’t feel comfortable maybe doing what he wants.

And can you tell him?

Yes. If you don’t like something, you have to tell him ‘I don’t like this. So can you try this’. ... others can’t understand if you want this, you want this. That’s all.... But for my boyfriend – if I say ‘I don’t want this, I want this’, he just leaves me, then he sleeps. But maybe tomorrow he tells me ‘what happened last night?’ ‘So and so, I didn’t like it, so and so’ and then I give him my reasons one and one, then sort it out. ... He will understand me. If I say ‘no’, I say ‘no’. Sometimes he tells me I am very cheeky, things like that. ... Cause he’s too soft, and he’s loving, he is nice. (Elisabeth)

Elisabeth's boyfriend showed understanding of her feelings and did not dominate her in sexual matters. They discuss the issues and (sexual) communication takes place. Elisabeth has attained the power of sexual agency, since she was able to decide whether to have sex or not. She was also able to articulate her sexual desires and needs and could experience her own sexuality in a positive way. However, in an environment of male sexual dominance Elisabeth's scope for sexual agency depended on both her personality and her boyfriend's character. Nevertheless, her boyfriend displayed a more subtle form of dominance which Elisabeth revealed late in the interview: if she wanted to move outside his control by going her own way, he showed tendencies of jealousy and a kind of emotional blackmail. He may be seen as an example for a masculinity struggling between conventional and more modern male practices (cf. Walker, 2005:225).

Julia gave a more inconsistent account of how she negotiates having sex with her boyfriend. She was torn between wanting and not wanting sex and finally admitted – without giving details – that most of the time she did not like having sex: “I like kissing, not sex.” Julia's entire narrative gave proof of her reluctance (“I'm tired”, “it's boring”, “I'm not ready”, “I am not interested”) and her deference “I can't show him”. Although her boyfriend accepted that she sometimes did not want to have sex, he put pressure on her if she refused sex too often and it gave him a reason to suspect her of infidelity. Although they talked about the issue, Julia's boyfriend showed greater insistence than Elisabeth's boyfriend. He put emphasis on his sexual needs and seemed to appeal to her to provide release. Julia experienced her boyfriend's sexuality as always wanting sex. Her agency was more restricted than Elisabeth's owing to her boyfriend's presumed sex-right and the concept of distrust he forced on her.

So when you have to make decisions about where you want to go, what you want to do or even when you want to have sex. Who makes the decision in your partnership?

We. We both make the decision cause when he says ‘today I want to have sex with you’, I say, ‘no I am not ready today’. He says, ‘ok, then you'll decide, you decide when you're going to be ready’. And it is not like I am deciding most of the time, sometimes we both want it, ok, and it happens. Sometimes I'm tired, ish, you know, you know when you have a boyfriend and you know when you are in a

long relationship, you know him well so that ish – sometimes it's boring a little bit. There it goes again, you know. But it's fun, sometimes it's fun. But sometimes I'm not ready and I am not interested but I can't show him cause he thinks that I'm having sex with someone else.

So would you say, you enjoy having sex most of the time or better not?

I don't enjoy sex, having sex most of the time cause – I like kissing, not sex. Please, I like a kiss, not sex. I enjoy a kiss not sex. ... Cause he likes sex more than a kiss and I like a kiss more than sex. When he kisses me, I'm fine. I don't have a problem but when he kisses me, he is expecting to have sex and in my mind a kiss is a kiss and sex is sex. So we are different about that I think. Maybe. But we work it out.

Can you talk about this?

Yes. I talk sometimes. He knows that I like a kiss and he said 'hey, I love having sex'.

And then you give in?

Eh. So we understand the way we do things cause we come from one the same, being in the same time, you know. We have to be different.

In her last statement Julia reflected strongly on the male sex-drive and female chastity discourse. However, Julia made the argument, which I see as essential in my research context that, in her narrative she put great emphasis on the fact that she was not yet married to her boyfriend, "he is my boyfriend, not my husband ... whatever I'm doing to him is a favour". With this statement Julia implied that she did not have the ultimate duty to sleep with him, while as his wife she would have had no choice. For her there was still room for negotiation.

But sometimes he does what you want, I mean if you say 'please today I wouldn't like it', then he says 'ok'?

Yeah. He says 'ok' then.

Next time?

Next time and no argument. He says, it's fine cause he never wants to put one under pressure, you know ... Cause I can't do sex every day. I can't. No. It's not working. Cause I'm not married. He's still my boyfriend, he has to appreciate whatever I'm doing to him is a favour.

Ok, yes. He understands this?

Yeah. He understands. He is my boyfriend, not my husband. If he's a husband and he says 'I want a kid or a baby', I mean, you have to

think that we are married, ok and you have to look at your relationship whether your relationship is fine, so that your baby could be able to be raised in a happy relationship, you know. I'm not married so whatever I am having with him, it's fine for me cause I'm not, ish, his wife.

At the time of the interview he had proposed to her, but Julia had not yet agreed, although they were making plans. She appeared rather unenthusiastic, hesitating since she was aware that, once she was married, she would lose her freedom of choice as well as her scope for exercising agency. Her idea to put work first before starting a family expressed her wish for greater independence and autonomous experiences. However, given the economic constraints in the Mmakaunyane area, her chances of finding work were rather low and, owing to the high value marriage has in her culture, in the end she might agree to the marriage.

Are you planning to marry him?

Yes, I am planning it. In fact he is planning cause – he did propose, it was this year, this year where he felt, yes, at our anniversary, so he proposed and said 'some day will you happen to be my wife', I said 'we'll see about that' (*laughs*). I said that cause I couldn't answer that question, it was embarrassing in front of that people. I said we talk about that later. And we didn't talk about that cause when he started to talk about it, I changed the subject. Cause I think I have to go to school first and work and you know, I have to – before marrying. And my baby, you know – I have to work before everything, so that I could plan for my future and his future and my baby's future, you know. (Julia)

Julia made a clear distinction of being a wife or 'just' a girlfriend, suggesting greater autonomy for an unmarried woman *inter alia* in terms of sexual decision-making. As noted repeatedly throughout the thesis, for wives sex is a marital duty, a key rule that underpins the traditional concept of marriage. Duty by itself excludes choice and thus a married woman automatically lacks the rights to own her sexuality. In this context, Machera (2005:167) speaks of the "lack of 'bedroom power'".

Nomsa was the only one of the younger age group who was married. She was a very strong personality and drew a great deal of strength from her religious worldview. She

was also very open in her responses. She believed in the model of male headship and two distinct male/female gender roles and was fully compliant with the rule that it is a wife's duty to provide sex for the husband: "I have to provide 'yes' to my husband, hopefully no matter sexually". In contrast to other younger participants (in Focus Group 1) Nomsa did not feel manipulated by culture in this respect and indeed enjoyed her sexual relationship with her husband, who was the only man she had ever had sex with.

Even if I am stressed I can have sex, I'll be stressed less. I'll be stressed less after that. So I don't take sex as a work as such, as a heavy thing. (Nomsa, FG 2)

She acknowledged own feelings of sexual desire and lust but confined them to certain times depending on her biology, however, she perceived men as being "ready" all the time. Her biology enabled her to give *him* what *he* needs. Because of her what I would like to call "affirmative submission" she was experiencing her social 'duty' in congruence with her personal desires, thus as her own and not as a lack of "bedroom power" in respect of lack of agency.

You know, I'm just a woman and ... after those 10–11 days, 1, 2, 3, 4 days where I want my husband no matter what, even if he comes home whatever time I can just wake up and give him whatever he wants because that's the day of ovulation. ... I know ... when I want my husband the most and when is the right time to have sex. Sometimes you feel irritable you don't want anything, you see, so that's how I can answer the question. But to him, to a man I think everything is a ready day for him, he doesn't work like us women ... (Nomsa).

I received valuable information about decision-making on having sex in marriage from the older women in the focus groups. In the context of good and bad sexual conduct, Focus Group 2 started a discussion on the problem of what to do if the husband wants to have sex and the wife does not actually want it ("you don't feel like having it"). So what are the choices in negotiating unwanted sex in marriage?

FG 2 *Mandisa:* Maybe your husband said ‘just give me two minutes’. It’s daylight. You say ‘no, the children, I can’t do that now’, I wait after, you see, at night.’ And you have to give it now.

Emily: Yes!

Mandisa: So if you don’t give him what he wants - ah! (*African*). So if he wants now just give him now. Just close the door and do the job. Yes! You are not a prostitute, it’s your husband! Just do the job. Any time, yeah, eh. (*All speak*).

A bit later in the discussion:

Mandisa: You won’t enjoy [sex] every day. Sometimes you’re tired. So you don’t feel like having it. ... Maybe the man wants to have sex and you don’t want it. You won’t enjoy it. .. You won’t say ‘no’.¹²⁹

Nomsa: I’ve never experienced something like this.

Mandisa: You are going to experience it next time. ... Maybe you are tired and he wants to do that and you have to satisfy him. What are you going to do? You won’t say ‘no. I don’t want to give you’. If you don’t want to give him what is he going to do? He’s going outside! Yes! Or to the ‘baby’. Outside. ... So to avoid trouble. If he wants –

Emily: You must just give.

Mandisa: You don’t want, you don’t feel like it, just satisfy him, just sleep with him.

Emily: You are even enjoying it.

Nomsa: He is not going to enjoy it –

Mandisa: It’s better than saying ‘no, I don’t want’.

Nomsa: He’s not going to enjoy it.

The line of argument evident in the above conversation was revealed as tacit acceptance and compliance with cultural norms, “close the door and do the job”. The socio-cultural rule not to refuse sex to the husband backed up by the patriarchal code of respect was so deeply internalised that it erased all individual feelings of self-reflection. Parallels with possibly feeling like a prostitute were wiped out with the self-explanatory argument “it’s your husband”. In other words, a sexual situation which if outside the context of marriage would be labelled as prostitution or rape is normative in marriage. The ‘trick’ and common strategy for a woman to live through her total lack of sexual agency in terms of having sex or not was to interpret unwanted sex as wanted (cf. Miriam, 2007:222), here

¹²⁹ At this point Mandisa’s statement revealed strongly the contrast with Elisabeth’s and Julia’s experiences in their premarital relationships, where both were capable of deciding not to have sex with their respective boyfriends.

expressed with “you are even enjoying it”, which represented a full adoption of the male perspective. It culminated in the two different stances in the group represented by Nomsa on the one hand and Mandisa and Emily on the other: while the latter two advocated a somehow pragmatic just-do-it tactic, Nomsa worried about the man’s pleasure in such a forced situation. The question was not the least whether the *woman* was going to enjoy sex or not and make her own choices. She had to fulfil her marital duty and provide release to the husband’s natural sexual urges be it in the name of love, for the sake of marriage in order to avoid trouble or the ultimate threat and punishment that he will turn to another woman (“the baby outside”). The above conversation again illustrate how patriarchal structures that deny women their own sexuality and force male sexuality upon them (cf. Rich, 1986a) operate without using force and coercion just by controlling women’s consciousness.

In Focus Group 1 the arguments were more or less the same as in Focus Group 2 but took on a far more critical connotation: it was culture – embodied in the man – which undermined women’s sexual rights and even dictated what a woman must feel or not. These younger unmarried women appeared more critical of rules than the older married women and, contrary to Focus Group 1, the participants in this group did not insist that a wife “must do the job”. I suggest the different perceptions can be explained by two issues: firstly, the married women in Focus Group 2 discussing unwanted sex hold distinctive conservative worldviews, *inter alia*, they allocated gender differences to nature and took related phenomena as given, and therefore they lacked critical reflection and reproduced a male perspective. Secondly, younger women in Focus Group 2 did not claim the naturalness of the two genders. Thus they were able to challenge the givenness of a phenomenon from a subject perspective identifying culture as an oppressive force. And yet, they saw no alternative to unwanted sex than to submit (which I in common with Nomsa like to call ‘negative submission’) – the template was too strong. Furthermore, effective pressure on the woman was that, if she did not obey, he may look for another woman/other women and even take a second wife. Women usually had no power to object. The example of Christine, who very actively stopped her husband’s extra-marital affair, is probably an exception. As the male/female sexual double standard

permits multiple sexual partnerships for men, the “threat of the other woman” seems to be a very powerful tool for securing female compliance. Lindgren, Raskin and Raskin explain this phenomenon as the ease with which men can dispose of a wife and take a second wife (2005:81). The rivalry also explains the jealousy and lack of solidarity among women discussed in section 6.5.

FG 1 *I: What do you do if he wants to sleep with you and you don't want to?*
Tshepiso: Culture doesn't allow us. You have to. Even though you're saying 'no'.
Catherine: You have to sleep with him. You must not feel it's not right.
All: Yeah, you have to.
Tshepiso: They can even punish you for that.
I: They will punish you – why?
Tshepiso: Because you are married.
I: And what is the punishment?
Julia: Sometimes your husband goes to look for another woman. Without discussing that with you. And tomorrow you will be surprised that there is a woman in the house, a second wife. Because you do not obey the rules. That's the pressure. Then he will love that second woman more than you. Then you ... say anything.

Both groups agreed that discussion with the husband was not an option in the conflict and both groups could not present an alternative to the deeply rooted template that it is a husband's right to have sex with his wife whenever he wants it even in relationships free of violence. To me these conversations indeed revealed the women's lack of “bedroom power” and lack of sexual agency as well as a total alienation from their own sexuality (“you don't feel like it, just satisfy him”). They account for MacKinnon's argument that sexuality is a dimension along which gender occurs and through which gender is socially constituted. “Dominance eroticized defines the imperatives of its masculinity, submission eroticized defines its femininity” (MacKinnon, 1989:131). Men's alleged natural greater virility was central to the construction of male and female sexuality and gendered sexual scripts. Good conduct in a woman was related to her submissive attitude towards her husband, embodied in such practices as showing respect to him, obeying his rules and not questioning his behaviour, and was based on a patriarchal code of respect. In terms of

gender relations the patriarchal code of respect was founded on an assumed ‘naturalisation’ of the two genders and the natural superiority of the men over the woman. Socio-culturally, the claim of a greater natural male sex-drive was translated into men’s non-negotiable sex-right which, in the guise of a cultural norm, undermined women’s sexual agency to the fullest. The conversations reveal what Miriam (2007) argues in relation to US women: women experience agency only as the ability to negotiate the terms of a situation they take to be inevitable, a situation defined by men’s implicit right to have sexual access to them.

6.4.2 Decision-making on using condoms

In an environment ravaged by HIV and AIDS women’s potential for self-protection against infection is of major significance. The issue of protection against HIV-infection is raised in both interview types. *How can women be protected from HIV-infection?* was the final question of the focus group sessions. Participants in both groups were familiar with ABC-strategies,¹³⁰ and the suggestion to use condoms for protection was very prominent. Catherine even declared “I can’t start a relationship unless I use a condom”. The strategy of faithfulness was not regarded as reliable by the participants in Focus Group 1, since one could never be sure about one’s partner’s fidelity. To abstain from sex was not discussed further in this context and seemed to me not to be an option.

FG 1 I: How can women be protected from HIV-infection?

Julia: By using a condom.

Catherine: Abstain.

Julia: Or by being faithful to your partner.

Julia, Tshepiso: But sometimes you can be faithful but your partner sleeps around.

Tshepiso: Cause many women get infected by their – while they are faithful – husbands or boyfriends.

I: So if women are faithful and know their boyfriends sleep somewhere else, what are they going to do?

Gladys: Maybe not sleeping with him as soon as you find that.

Kamohelo: Use a condom.

Julia: That is not simple to find out your boyfriend has been

¹³⁰ This corresponds with the good level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS depicted in section 5.5.2.

cheating on you, it's not simple, because he can sleep somewhere, you don't know.

Catherine: When he comes home after sleeping somewhere and then he wants to have sex with you, you must use a condom or forget about it.

However, the participants in Focus Group 1 agreed on the fact that the majority of men do not like using condoms – consistent with a finding from Versteeg and Murray (2008) – and still disapprove when women suggest it. This was an indication that HIV/AIDS has had no further transforming impact on gender relations regarding greater equality in decision-making on safer sex.

FG1 *Julia:* It is not simple for men to use the protection. They don't like using condoms. It is not simple.

Kamohelo: They say you don't eat the sweets with a cover.

Julia: It's not easy for men. Men do not use a condom. Even though when you want to use a condom. It's not simple.

Tshepiso: They don't agree.

Julia: They don't agree.

Tshepiso: Even though they can see that HIV is killing you.

Julia: They say that they can't wear a rain coat when there is no rain (*laughter*). Yes, they are saying that. Cause, yes they are saying that it's true. So, few of them protect themselves.

Kamohelo: Maybe two percent.

Julia: Maybe two percent but I think 98 percent don't use a condom.

Versteeg and Murray (2008) assessed the accessibility of condoms in the North West Province and found that many barriers stand in the way of safer sex practices, but that accessibility to condoms is not one. However “[t]he problem remains the actual usage of the condoms” (ibid:93) and unfaithfulness is confirmed as a key problem (ibid:91). Indeed, both unmarried and married women in my study revealed in the individual interviews a lack of trust in their partner's fidelity as a major relationship problem, no matter the quality of the relationship and the fact that the majority of women in the sample felt at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Therefore, being capable of negotiating safer sex with a male partner and making a common decision would be indicative of the female partner's sexual agency and participants' potential for HIV self-protection

strategies in their intimate relationship.

6.4.2.1 Decision-making on condom usage in bad partnerships

In the literature review (chapter 2) I discussed partner violence as an issue of non-agency being responsible for women's increased vulnerability to HIV infection. It has been shown that condom use is highly unlikely in sexual encounters characterised by violence (Jewkes et al., 2002b; Dunkle et al., 2003; Dunkle et al., 2006; Kalichman et al., 2007; Amnesty International, 2008).

Women in this study were exposed to direct HIV/AIDS infection risk through forced or coercive sexual intercourse with a possibly HIV-infected husband; or more indirectly if their partner was engaged in sexual relations outside the marriage and refused condom use. Tshepiso, Maria, Rose and Grace disclosed that they had gone for HIV/AIDS testing on these grounds.

While Maria, Rose and Grace, all middle-aged, were not at the time of the interview engaged in a new partnership, Tshepiso was very concerned about HIV/AIDS transmission and had been for several tests because she suspected her former husband could have died of AIDS. However, her new boyfriend had declined her suggestion to go for testing and suppressed further discussion. Tshepiso was the only one among the informants who admitted that her boyfriend refused to use condoms:

Do you take protection?
He doesn't want to use protection.
Did you try to talk to him?
Yes.
I: What did he say?
He doesn't feel comfortable.

Because Tshepiso was economically fully dependent on her boyfriend (he supported her entire family), she gave in to his wishes. She saw no alternative, and commented with some resignation that "we have to sacrifice". In her case the link between economic

dependence and lack of negotiation power was evident.

Dyondzeka made an interesting point by referring to the link between alcohol consumption and carelessness in terms of sexual risk behaviour. In South Africa, heavy alcohol consumption is widespread and a major health concern (Morojele, Kachieng, Mokoko, Nkoko, Parry, Nkowane, Moshia & Saxena, 2006). Even if a couple agrees on using condoms, if drunk the good intentions may be easily forgotten or considered less important. Carelessness is not a specific characteristic of a bad relationship; however, alcohol consumption is not only associated with sexual risk behaviour but often with the risk of interpersonal and domestic violence (ibid; Jewkes, 2002) although this was not the case with Dyondzeka.

Maybe I agree with my partner, he uses a condom. When he is coming from the tavern, he is a drunkard maybe, and me, I'm a drunkard. And we are going just to sleep without a condom.
(Dyondzeka)

Kamohelo and Sheila stated they were using condoms regularly without giving details of the negotiation process, whilst Mona said that she was not. Mona displayed a rather fatalistic attitude towards a positive HIV diagnosis. Only if she knew she was HIV-positive, would she start using condoms. She submitted to higher powers (God) or authorities (medical personnel) giving her advice on what to do. Her attitude was understandable if one considers the violence and dominance both her partners exercised over her (including threats to kill her).

Only I get this thing then when I go to test. They say 'you are like this' [HIV-positive], I must accept and I must tell myself ok, if God, he doesn't like me to be on this planet. ... nothing I can do, he will guide me to do this, do this.

No, if they [medical personnel] told we must, I will use condom ... They told me I must use condom. I must. Nothing I can do. (Mona)

Sheila's short answer gave an impression of the tension in and overall forceful nature of her relationship.

How do you protect yourself?

By using a condom.

Do you discuss this with your boyfriend?

They usually speak about it. He says that if he sees her with pimples or a sore he will know she is infected. (Interpreter for Sheila)

Of the women who assessed their partnership as bad but were still involved with the partner, mainly unmarried women in their 30s, some were using condoms, some were not. There was a high awareness of infection risk and women seemed to care much more about it than men. As noted in the literature review, condoms are not used in sexual encounters characterised by violence (Wood, Mafohra & Jewkes, 1998; Dunkle et al., 2004a; Fox et al., 2007; Amnesty International, 2008). Therefore Tshepiso, Rose, Grace and Maria went for testing after they had separated from their husbands (cf. section 6.3.3). The circumstances are too different to draw an overall concluding statement. If condoms were used I think that using them consistently was a major problem. In partnerships labelled as bad I could not detect gender transformative practices, on the contrary, most of them were characterised by traditional dominant masculine gendered praxis.

6.4.2.2 Decision-making on condom usage good partnerships

Therefore the question of transformation in gender relations is may be better posed for women in good partnerships. In the problem-centred interviews most of the younger unmarried women reported using condoms with their partners – some consistently, others only inconsistently. However, it was always the woman who took the initiative. This finding corresponds with the perception discussed in Focus Group 1 that the majority of men would prefer sex without a condom. However, the majority of the interviewees' partners seemed to have accepted their girlfriend's wishes, even if they would prefer not to use a condom. To me this indicates a shift from traditional forms of dominant manhood to a more accommodating form. The primary reason given by the participants for suggesting condom use was to protect themselves from HIV transmission and less for contraception, which gives evidence of a high risk perception. In some cases condoms were chosen for both reasons. Catherine was still newly in love and she suggested using

condoms to her partner. First he disagreed but when Catherine argued that they were putting their lives at risk, he agreed: “He wanted not, then I said ‘no, because we will risking our lives’. Then he said ‘ok, fine’.” Similarly, Lisa was careful to prevent HIV-transmission: “I wanted not to have sex without a protection, to protect myself.” Elisabeth revealed great insecurity when it came to trusting her boyfriend’s faithfulness. In order to reassure herself, she pursued a strategy of sometimes making her boyfriend use a condom against his wishes. Because of the inconsistency this practice has to be regarded as futile in terms of protection. However, in terms of agency she might have developed a sense of having a choice and self-determination:

But sometimes my boyfriend is fighting. For eight years we’ve been together, so we know each other very well. So he says ‘there’s no use to use a condom’, cause he trusts himself, and then he trusted me. So he says ‘it’s not right for us to use condoms cause we trust each other’. ... Sometimes I say ‘no’, I just want to use it cause men are not trustworthy. ... So sometimes it ends up maybe that night we didn’t use it but maybe tomorrow if I feel somehow – maybe the other day I just say ‘we need to use a condom’. So he says ‘why, but last night we didn’t use it, what is wrong?’, things like that. I just feel like maybe something is not right. (Elisabeth)

Julia and her boyfriend use “condoms for most of the time” and both were planning to go for testing “because we want to take our relationship to the next level ... so that we can be able to trust each other”. Both seemed to be pragmatic about the subject: the significance of a negative test result as a precondition for getting married and starting a family reflected the severity and scale of the country’s HIV/AIDS epidemic in the perception of young age groups. The way Julia presented her view made the test result appear even more important than love.

May I ask, do you use condoms or are you thinking about it?

Yes. We use condoms for most of the time and we are going to test.

So you are worried?

Next month we are going to the test.

Why?

Because we want to take our relationship to the next level. Yes. It’s been a while. So that we can be able to trust each other.

Will you get married?

It's like when he wants to marry me, he will know that I am negative. And then I want to marry him, I'll know that he is negative. I mean these days marriage is a certificate of the test results. It's all about that now. Most of the people are talking about that, say they can't marry a person who has AIDS. No. You want a family, you want everything, you want many things from your partner, you know. So you have to be in a happy relationship with a happy, you know, status. You have to know each other well. (Julia)

Whereas the use of condoms in this couple's premarital relationship seemed pragmatic and unproblematic, this might change when married. It revealed once again the stronger values and norms which are associated with marriage. The unmarried couple expected marriage to be a safe place. If both tested negative and they are then married they would stop using condoms as a sign of love and trust. However, if the husband has unprotected sex outside the marriage, marriage is a context for considerable risk of HIV infection for women (cf. Baylies, 2000:11) or vice versa. As argued by Thornton (2002), 'having sex' in South African black culture is effectively defined in terms of the flow of sexual substance, in 'flesh to flesh' contact, a concept of sexuality which is particularly important in marital sexual relations. For instance, despite Nomsa's distrust of her husband after his betrayal, the couple never used condoms. However, as revealed in another context, she underwent regular HIV testing not least as a result of her job (where she was confronted with AIDS patients in the final stage).

FG 2 *Nomsa:* I've never used a condom before. I've never myself. Because I've never been into another relationship except this one. I don't know the difference between a condom and a – I don't know.

Participants in both focus groups believed that asking a husband¹³¹ to use a condom is very difficult, if not impossible. This doubt pointed toward the deep and persistent entrenchment of the African socio-cultural concept of sexuality as the patriarchal code of respect which assigns sole decision-making power to the husband to define the conditions under which sex will take place.

¹³¹ Although my question did not particularly enquire about husbands the participants related it to husbands.

- FG2* *Nomsa*: For myself it's a difficult one. As a married woman you cannot say to your husband 'use a condom'.
Emily: You must use a condom. The protection is the only one. But when you're married it's difficult.
Nomsa: It's not easy.
Mandisa: Is flesh-to-flesh.
Emily: The husband – [if you] say 'look here, use the condom' – he will think it must be something wrong in your mind. If you're married it's difficult.
- FG1* *Tshepiso*: Like your husband won't allow to use [a] condom because he tells you 'right now'.
Gladys: If you don't want to sleep with your husband, your husband will tell you that you've been cheating somewhere with someone.
Catherine: I think we must learn to say 'no'.
Julia, Kamohelo: That's not easy. When you're married it's not easy, how can you say 'no' –
Catherine: Yeah, it's not easy but if you say 'no' you say 'no' and then –
Tshepiso: To whom?
Catherine: To your husband!
Tshepiso, Julia, Kamohelo: Uh.
Elisabeth: He will leave you. He will move on. It's not simple to say that. He will move on while you are staying with him.

Catherine's suggestion to say "no" and thus refuse her husband sex if he did not agree to use a condom was more or less dismissed by the rest of the group and not mentioned in Focus Group 2. This exposed the women's somehow helpless acceptance of hegemonic masculine values and behaviours. To request condom use from a husband would be tantamount to rebellion and a questioning of doxa. However, Focus Group 1, the group containing the younger and unmarried participants, was more critical of the imposed rules and code of respect, maybe best expressed in the sentence "we must learn to say no".

When the focus groups participants discussed the difficulties of enforcing condom use to protect themselves from infection, the only solution both groups came up with was to trust the husband – surprising, because this contradicts the findings of the individual interviews, which revealed a great deal of distrust in most relationships. Again, the risk of unsafe sex was clearly perceived. However, there was no indication of gender

transformative practices within marriage in this local context. Women continue to lack sexual agency when married (“you don’t because of – you are married”).

- FG 1* *Tshepiso:* In a marriage we take vows before God, ... we make commitments, how can you say that. Within our marriages we don’t use condoms, we trust.
Julia: But sometimes it’s risky, it’s risky. It’s risky to sleep with your husband when he sleeps around. It’s not safe. You should wear a condom. I know it is not easy but it is risky.
Tshepiso: Yeah, it’s risky but it is not easy. It’s not easy.
Catherine: We as women pressurise ourselves because your husband doesn’t want to use a condom. You do it because of – you are married. It is like you are doing him a favour. But on the other hand you are going to die.
Julia: Yeah, doing it for the sake of marriage not for the sake of love. Because you don’t want your kids to stay confused. You want your kids to have a family. Even though it’s not a happy family.
Tshepiso: But most of us we are living in fear.
Catherine: And some of us we won’t believe when we see it.
Julia: We are living in fear.

Mandisa in particular believed that she would know if her husband were cheating on her and was confident – other than Nomsa – about having the power to discuss condom use with him. Quina et al. (2000) have shown that communicating with a sexual partner about potential risks is an important aspect of risk reduction and women who feel they have power in their sexual lives are likely to communicate their likes and dislikes to their partners. As depicted in the previous section, married women actually had little sexual agency so that I, like Nomsa, venture to doubt the successful negotiation of condom use. However, in Mandisa’s case her self-confidence is probably based on her long years of marriage and her husband’s predictable behaviour.

- FG 2* *Mandisa:* I think, you know your husband. You can see –
Nomsa: You can see in me I don’t trust him very well.
Mandisa: Trust is there, you’re going to trust each other, to be faithful to each other.
Other: Yeah, yeah
Mandisa: You know your husband. If your husband is ok, you can see [that] he is fine. Everything is going well at home, you see.
Emily: If he starts nonsense, you notice it very quickly. ...

Nomsa: If you see that your husband has started nonsense what will you do to protect yourself?

Mandisa: I'm going to talk.

Nomsa: You can talk but –

Mandisa: Yes! We can talk and then after that I'm going to tell him that – I'm going to use this [condom].

In both groups participants used the concept of trust in the husband as a strategy for coping with their fear of HIV infection through their partner's infidelity. Trust was an essential component of intimate love relationships or marriages, yet a rather fragile concept. If I consider the high level of distrust most interviewees' displayed in the problem-centred interviews, the idea of trusting the partner seems to differ substantially from the realities of everyday life. The participants in Focus Group 1 very clearly perceived the risk of HIV-infection where the husband had an extra-marital affair. The paradox in countering distrust with trust reveals to me the degree of helplessness and lack of agency in which the married women live in their daily lives since they are not in a position to make their own decisions about protection or about having sex. It is in in marriage in particular that women are forced to put their lives at risk.¹³²

For married women, who were more senior, HIV testing seemed to be the only possible "safety check" constituting a rather limited form of agency. Six of the women went for testing after they separated from their husband/long-term partner or suspected their partner's infidelity (knowledge of HIV status, however, does not necessarily lead to behaviour change).

The data suggest that to assert condom use is much easier for unmarried than married women. This finding is consistent with the Nelson Mandela/HSRC study which reported

¹³² The female condom may provide an alternative to the male condom. Negotiating the use of female-initiated methods can, however, be threatening for men and overstep local values (cf. Mantell, Dworkin, Exner, Hoffman, Smit & Susser, 2006: 2001; see also Susser & Stein, 2000). Mantell et al. (2006) argue that female-initiated methods are part of a changing state of gender relations and can be a catalyst for breaking norms of female sexual silence. Yet, in neither of the individual interviews, nor in the Focus Group 1 interview was the possibility of using this method mentioned. Only in Focus Group 2 was it briefly touched on without any further consideration or discussion. This 'ignorance' may to some extent be linked to the poor availability of female condoms in the North West Province. As Versteeg and Murray (2008:86) reveal in their study, female condoms are much less attainable than male condoms in the province's local clinics.

that participants who were single were considerably more likely to use condoms than those who were married (Shisana & Simbayi, 2002:76).¹³³ Among the participants in my study the fear of HIV-infection is omnipresent and results in unmarried women engaging in the negotiation of safer sex which enforces some gender transformative practices to greater equality within the partnership. Although the discussion in the focus groups implied that interviewees perceive only a few men as willing to use condoms, the majority of the younger women reported that their partners had given in – although sometimes reluctantly – if they asked for condom use. Distrust is a significant and rational concept in this respect: in new relationships the wish for condom use is a matter of not yet established trust; in long-term relationships it is a matter of distrust in the partner's fidelity. However, the problem in terms of protection is inconsistency of condom use.

In contrast, condom use in marriage was still deemed impossible by both younger and older participants. None of the married woman used condoms. Younger women who negotiated condom use with their boyfriends could not imagine doing so if married. In this respect the patriarchal code of respect is of major importance: to question the husband's authority in sexual decision-making seemed inconceivable. Therefore, in marriage an irrational ideal of trust as affirmation of love was kept up. The suggestion of one younger participant to learn to say no to condomless sex was not acted on. At the same time the women were aware of the high price they pay for their compliance. What is revealed here and has also been pointed out by Miriam (2007) is the lived contradiction

¹³³ Compared to 32.6% of single women in the age group 25–49, only 13.2% of women married under traditional law and 15.8% of women married under civil law report condom use at last sexual intercourse (Shisana & Simbayi, 2002:76.). Similarly, analysing data from the Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit National Youth Survey, Setsuko Hendriksen, Pettifor, Lee, Coates and Rees (2007) show that young adults who were married or had been involved in a relationship for six months or longer were significantly less likely to have used a condom during their most recent sexual intercourse. For married women it is likely that condoms are being used for contraception and less for HIV prevention (ibid:81). Maharaj and Cleland (2005b) conducted a cross-sectional survey among adult men and women in KwaZulu-Natal (n= 238) and discovered substantial discrepancies between husbands' and wives' reports of contraceptive use. This was partly due to a tendency of men to over-report condom use on the one hand and women's concealment of contraceptive use on the other. The dominant method used by women was injectables. Furthermore, the results suggested that wives often took the initiative by using a method of family planning without their husband's knowledge. Contrary to the belief that women are powerless in reproductive decision-making, they played a dominant role.

of choice and subordination as being central to women's agency.

6.5 Disclosing or hiding relationship problems?

An important question is whether women prefer to maintain secrecy about their relationship problems or whether they search for social and emotional support which may strengthen their self-confidence and enhance their agency. Jewkes (2002:1425), for example, understands social support as a source of power for women that can protect against partner violence; and social support from a woman's family in particular may be a source of practical assistance. However, to disclose abuse is not easy; traditionally the in-law family or traditional authorities have to be consulted.¹³⁴ After having been married traditionally, a woman is no longer regarded as a member of her family; she is therefore required to address problems with her in-law family. Only if the family is unable to resolve the problem, can she seek assistance from her parents (cf. Hargreaves et al., 2006:28).

Maria and Grace gave accounts of how they sought help from their in-law families and how these family members stood by the man marginalising and disempowering them. Rather unusually, her mother-in-law first stood by Maria but was blackmailed to withdraw her support so that Maria was confronted alone by her husband's siblings.

Her mother-in-law she used to stand with her and trusted her up to then until the family, the children didn't support her because she was an elderly, she was depending on her children to support her and then when she stands for this lady, they started not to give her

¹³⁴ In Hargreaves' et al.'s (2006) study, focus group participants gave the following reasons for why women, married and single, tend not to disclose abuse: marriage is regarded as a private family matter that is dealt with internally and not disclosed to the wider public; women's fear of shaming themselves and their family; especially because a woman is often blamed for causing the violence by flouting traditional and social rules, thereby bringing her husband, his family and her parents into disrepute; on marriage, women are advised to endure the problems and difficulties of marriage and not to leave even when circumstances are hard; the absence of a person women can talk to in confidence contributes to why women rarely talk about the abuse; young people conceal their dating relationships from their parents and elders which results in young women having few options for support when they confront violence in their relationships with young men; and the fear of the marital relationship breaking down, leaving women and their children without means of support (ibid:24).

any food and then she backed-off.

They fight verbally and together with other families, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, brother-in-law. They could just come and shout in her house and shout and shout and it was just like that and nobody stands for her, everybody was against her. (Interpreter for Maria)

Grace had a similar experience with her brother-in-law:

She tried to speak to her brother-in-law. Usually when there is a problem she tried to go to Mamelodi to speak to her brother-in-law and they did agree together. But once she leaves and then the husband comes, everything changes because his brother, her brother-in-law is going to stand now with her husband. (Interpreter for Grace)

If family interventions or the traditional mediation route prove insufficient, an alternative strategy is to seek protection from the law, usually by asking help from the police and applying for a protection order. South African post-apartheid legislation makes provision for the duties of the police in section 2 of the Domestic Violence Act (No. 116 of 1998) which is aimed at ensuring an adequate police response to domestic violence by making it obligatory for the police to assist complainants in domestic violence cases (Hargreaves et al., 2006:35–36). However, this is a major step because the problems then are taken to the public arena. Christine, for instance, stressed that she did not want to involve another institution outside the family.

And then they [clinic personnel] referred her to the social workers but instead she thought that she should try to solve this thing in the family. And then they tried to solve it. It is over now and she didn't go to welfare. (Interpreter for Christine)

In the problem-centred interview only Tshepiso revealed that she had applied for a protection order against her former husband. Yet, all the focus groups participants were well aware of such a procedure. It was suggested that if a woman wanted to leave she had either to involve the police in order to get legal protection, here termed a 'restraining order' (protection order), or to make herself financially independent in order to escape

from the abusive relationship. Again, in view of their own long-term unemployment, the participants knew about the difficulty of getting a sustainable job in the present economic situation of the country, an acute structural constraint to women's agency.

FG 1 Gladys: Some husbands – they don't take it serious. If you want something to go, you have to go to the police – to get a restraining order.

Gladys, Tshepiso: But if you have a job you should leave him.

...

Catherine: If you want to get out of the abusive relationship, you have to get a restraining order. Because – by yourself, you can't leave by yourself.

I: So you say, the best thing is to have a job?

All: Yeah.

Tshepiso: I think, it's the best way. Even though it won't be easy. I can find a job today but you won't go tomorrow, the work is over. You have to work first and see that your things are covered. And then take things slowly. Step by step.

Catherine: But some men they don't, even if we work –

Gladys: They will threaten you.

Tshepiso: Worse than that

Finally, participants indicated what I have already pointed out, namely that leaving does not necessarily end the violence. This is testimony to what radical feminists call sexual terrorism, that is, a system by which men frighten, and by frightening, control and dominate, women (Sheffield, 2004:410).

As Emily explained, in such a context of hiding or disclosure the collective silencing of women was an effective mechanism of oppression in that it discouraged women from expressing their experiences, in addition to the socio-cultural constraint that forbids women from returning to their home of origin or to seek help.

FG2 Emily: In our time when you got married, they said 'ok, you get married, that's what you like and then you stay there, you're not going to come back here because there's no more place for you to eat in this house. When you are in love, married, you will stay there no matter how hard it is'. You just said 'uh, I can't go back home'. That husband abuses you, beats you, does everything what he likes

with you. You know, you're not moving because you think of that words they said – you can't go back home. If you're married you must stand for your marriage. You don't even tell them, you don't tell your mother, your father 'it's hard here'. You never say a word ... but they will notice because they will see you. You changed. You can't tell that it's not nice in this marriage. But you won't tell. You won't tell. You must hide it – all your life and you keep on, saying, one day it's going to be all right. One day it's going to be all right. Some of them they come right, but some of them they never come right. You're not moving in that house. Stay there! Till you die there! (*laughs*)

Not much has changed since Emily's time; the prescription to conceal the abuse was still valid. Women were not only supposed to suffer in silence but also to endure an unhappy relationship (cf. Fox et al., 2007:593). In Focus Group 2 Nomsa referred to a rule of good conduct underlying the above statement, which was being patient in a relationship no matter how hard it was since it was the woman's duty to stick to her marriage: "... a married woman, a woman will say 'I'll have to make this marriage work' even though the man is abusive, [no matter] how abusive he is, 'I'll just have patience'". If women were struggling in an abusive relationship "they don't speak out" but instead are "trying to protect the silence" (Nomsa), or as Lorraine stated "you don't have to tell somebody, that your boyfriend, your husband is beating you". Therefore this group suggested that women should speak out and discuss problems with trustworthy friends – I will discuss the difficulties related to this suggestion further on in this section.

In the group under study all maltreated women managed to leave their abusive partner regardless of economic dependence, threats by the partner to kill them if they left or ongoing terrorising if they had left. With the decision to leave the abusive partner the participants still displayed agency. Deviating from the rule, Kamohelo, Mona, Tshepiso and Maria returned to their parent's home. I assume that the main reason for this was economic constraints; making ends meet is easier in a family household. Yet, except for Kamohelo, they also found comfort and emotional support in their families. Kamohelo's statement again demonstrates the mechanism of silence even within the family; she was not supposed to disclose her true experience but to keep up a facade.

Her parents, they did not trust her when she told them what was happening. After some time she kept quiet. She did not tell anyone because they thought she was lying. (Interpreter for Kamohelo)

An unexpected insight for me was that several participants found help and comfort through praying and singing:

Whenever she is feeling down, she always used to pray and then after praying then she receives and then, some hymns and songs. (Interpreter for Christine)

How did you cope, what helped you what gave you strength to cope with this?

When he was shouting she was afraid, because most of the time he was doing that during the night and then she couldn't answer or shout.

What helped her for relieve?

What she used to do is she prayed, she is a singer, she likes to sing very much that is when problems started, sometimes she just sang very loud. (Interpreter for Grace)

In the individual interviews I became very aware of the fact that a number of participants were unwilling or reluctant to share their personal problems with another person. Although most of the women had at least one person to share problems with, mostly with a friend or immediate family (mother, sister), still over one quarter stated that they did not share their problems with anyone. This fact led me to discuss the issue in the focus group sessions by asking the question: *Why do many women not share their experiences with other women?* In both groups the explanations were more or less the same and disclosed a very negative perception of other women. Participants explained the phenomenon as “gossip” and “jealousy”, for example: “I tell Gladys my experiences, then she goes to my boyfriend and tell[s] him: ‘your girlfriend said this and this and this’” (Catherine; FG1). Even as friends, women “backstab each other” (Tshepiso; FG1). Women feared that if they disclosed their problems to another woman, they would be in danger of betrayal: the other woman might tell her partner what she was told by her in order to alienate the man from his girlfriend or wife and thus to be in his favour. Women were perceived as untrustworthy and manipulative, and as enjoying ridiculing other women. Similar results

were reported from a study in Malawi (Lindgren, Rankin & Rankin, 2005).

FG2 Nomsa: They can manipulate you and you felt that those people were your friends. You've shared everything, you told about your husband's short dick, you tell them everything, you share with them everything. Which means they are going to tell your husband everything. So that is why. Because women we don't like each other. We don't. Because we do feel jealous of each other. That is why we are not being open to each other as such.

In a community where women have economically and ideologically no standing without a man, women are forced to compete for the gender with generally greater access to resources and higher social status, that is, men – as Lerner phrased it, economically less privileged women are “one man away from poverty” (Lerner, 1993:244). The negative perception of other women echoes a male perspective and is fatal in terms of solidarity and common interests. To turn women against each other is one of the most effective mechanisms of patriarchy for perpetuating male supremacy (Daly, 1978;¹³⁵ Lerner, 1986). From what the women in the study stated this mechanism was very much alive in their daily lives and undermined any solidarity among them. Most participants appeared very isolated although living in a collective culture.

To summarise: while some participants shared problems with close family members or friends, others kept the silence. What I unexpectedly found in this context was a general perception of women as untrustworthy and manipulative, rivals in the competition for men. From this I conclude that there is little or no solidarity among women in the community.

Some participants, however, clearly perceived the negative effects of keeping silent about problems and had started an initiative where they met on a regular basis to share their problems. The radical feminism of the 1970s in particular promoted consciousness-

¹³⁵ *Gyn/Ecology* is structured on the passages a woman must make in the “ec-statical” voyage of becoming. Daly’s voyage (of becoming) is an “Otherworld Journey” and both, a discovery and creation of a world other than patriarchy. Women should create their relationships (environment, mother, daughters, and other women) through themselves and not through a male perspective (Daly, 1978).

raising groups as a special – grassroots – practice of knowledge-building. In the sessions women got together in informal settings to talk about their lives and experiences. According to MacKinnon (1989), a first step is to connect, learn to trust and to create a respectful context for interchange. In contrast with the others, Nomsa, Karen and Mandisa had already put such an idea into practice; they met every Tuesday afternoon to share their problems. They intended to open their circle to other women as well in future.

FG 2 *Nomsa:* We are only three for now, it's Mandisa, Karen, and me. Yeah, and then we share problems like the way our husbands are giving us headaches, and the way children give us headaches. ... So we come up just raising our problems. Coming up with prayer points and then pray for example 'could you please pray for me, my husband has gone for an interview somewhere', 'please could you pray for me, we didn't get quiet yesterday, me and my husband we were fighting' and then 'I had a promise, somewhere they were promising me a job', something like that. Talk about it and give each other advices. ... We are only friends and we just thought we have to do something this year and then we will invite other women next year. We started from January because right now we are praying for it every Tuesday when we meet. So that we can ask God for guidance (*background talk*) – even cooking recipes. We did give each other, it's like a – I don't know, ... it's like, it's something which is only for an hour, so which means, when we are going to invite other maybe [then it will be] two hours, it's going to depend on how many we will be because we will give each woman a chance.

When asked about the contradiction with the above findings assessing women as untrustworthy and hostile, it was argued that this group had a specific religious background. Their spirituality enabled the three women to consciously fight against human nature, especially a woman's nature which is deemed to be "hostile" and "jealous", and to develop instead "the spirit of sharing":

FG2 *Nomsa:* You know why, it's not the same thing. We are Born-Again. Immediately, when I start to have that bad idea inside my mind I just have to crash it. This is not good. I mean, as a human you know what is good and what is bad. So if [you have] a bad idea – just slash your mind. You know it's wrong. This is my friend, she's my sister, she's everything and then I have to have pity for

her. You see ... as a Born-Again-person you don't have to be hostile. You have to have a spirit of sharing. That is what we are practicing. We have to have the spirit of sharing, a spirit of sympathy, everything which is good. But that is why I am saying that it's different and because of the human nature. The human nature, a woman's nature – what I tried to explain before about that jealousy and all those things. The slash is in your mind, you have to crash it with a positive something. That's how we are surviving.

As pointed out in the theory chapter, the specific idea behind consciousness-raising groups is that women speaking together create a shared reality and spaces within which women begin to move (cf. MacKinnon, 1989:101). However, as Clare Chambers argues, it would be wrong to suggest that group interaction is always transformative. “Traditional women's groups foster conformity just as radical groups encourage revolution. Nonetheless, the combination of the group setting with the shared desire to act reflexively can be a potent force for change” (Chambers, 2005:338). What is important is the development of a critical consciousness which may lead women to reflect critically on the conditions that shape their lives and to an insight that existing norms can be changed; in addition, to develop confidence in their power to resist dominant gender norms in the interests of being able to assert their, for instance, sexual health (cf. Campbell & McPhail, 2002). So far, in Nomsa, Karen and Mandisa's initiative, no critical reflection of women's social experiences had taken place; on the contrary, the group displayed fairly compliant stances with regard to the existing patriarchal order (cf. section 5.4.2). However, if the group is going to involve more women and gain greater diversity it is not out of the question in the future that it might provide a basis and a safe site for more solidarity and active participation in discussions on taboo subjects such as sexuality, HIV/AIDS and gender violence (cf. Haddad, 2006:136) generating critique of the givenness of so many discriminating experiences. Since I observed that the women all enjoyed their participation in the focus groups sessions, I believe a group setting could be an appropriate vehicle to free women of the local community from isolation and silence.

In order to strengthen women in their proximal environment, including their intimate partnerships, the AIDS crisis may become a vehicle for tackling the lack of solidarity among women in the community. As pointed out in section 5.5.2, many participants

experienced the infection and/or death of close relatives as a result of AIDS. Several actively supported People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), relatives as well as non-relatives, in a consciously non-discriminatory and non-stigmatising manner. As they all worried about themselves and their children, this may lay a basis for willingness to break the silence. Whether this can lead to greater solidarity among women in the community and even develop into a potent force for change, in particular if more women with diverse mindsets will be involved in future and open up the discussions, remains to be seen. Heise and Elias (1995) argue in this context that the involvement in collective activity may strengthen women's capacity to negotiate increased personal protection. Important in the group setting is to learn to analyse and reflect. However, whether power relations on the level of intimate partnerships can be transformed in the long run is also linked to questions of overwhelming material and social forces such as socio-cultural sanctions and structural inequalities.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined the linkages between partnership quality and the participants' capacity for sexual agency. I assumed that women are likely to have greater capacity for sexual agency and are in a better position to negotiate having sex and condom use in partnerships assessed as good compared to women in relationships assessed as bad. Although women's agency in partnerships assessed as good was indeed greater than in those assessed as bad, their agency was, however, still restricted primarily by socio-cultural constraints. I therefore looked at the participants' agency from a perspective where the female agent lives through her situation rather than overcomes domination as argued by Miriam (2007:213).

Most of the participants lived in long-term partnerships or marriages. Likewise, a majority of interviewees assessed their partnership as good and enjoyable, a few as bad, while one participant was ambivalent. It would seem that interviewees across all age groups had fairly contemporary ideas of what constitutes a good or a bad partnership and a very clear understanding of what the core values for a successful relationship were.

Among the reported relationship problems, the most repeated problem was that the interviewee has or once had to share her partner, reflecting the sexual double standard for men and women. As a result, a significant lack of trust in the male partner's fidelity, even in relationships deemed good, was revealed. Owing to this distrust there was a high awareness of a possible personal HIV-infection risk among the participants in partnerships assessed as good and bad, as well as among older married and younger unmarried women, raising the question of their capacity for sexual agency within their partnerships in terms of protection from HIV infection.

A second major problem reported was intimate partner violence, which almost half of the sample had experienced at one point in their lifetime. At the time of the investigation four interviewees disclosed that they were affected in varying degrees (shouting, slapping, threats to be killed). In the mostly retrospective examples given, men controlled their female partner/wife by aggressive and threatening behaviour. Patriarchal ideology set the frame for the abuse by positioning men superior to women. In the violent interaction the abuser established his dominant position; several men exploited their partners/wives sexually because they felt entitled to do so, whereas some survivors had no idea why the partner acted so violently. The space for female sexual agency in a bad partnership depended on the degree of violence exercised in the relationship. The chances of countering the violence or even showing resistance in the situation were limited and constrained; the women submitted out of fear. If the level of abuse was high it led to passivity and trauma. However, although these acts may appear as deviant behaviour in individual men, it is to the credit of radical feminist theory that the systematic character of the violation of women's bodily integrity, sexual exploitation and the issue of male violence against women has been exposed as being central to women's oppression. Intimate partner violence constitutes a specific gendered practice in the form of power/dominance–submission – and remains the greatest constraint to female agency on an interpersonal level. The only option if an abused woman is to regain agency is to leave the abusive partner.

In relation to the research question, a socio-cultural constraint with far-reaching consequences for female autonomy and sexual agency was brought to light, namely the traditional rule inscribed in the patriarchal code of respect that does not allow a wife to refuse her husband sex. This revealed the significance of marital status for the restricted capacity for sexual agency that a woman has in making free choices in terms of having sex – even in relationships free of violence. Whereas unmarried participants perceived that there was room for negotiation on whether or not to have sex and in fact negotiated this with their boyfriends, participants rejected the possibility of such an option within marriage. Married women in particular fully complied with the rule, did not question it, and instead took it for granted. A strategy for living through this situation was to reinterpret unwanted sex as wanted. These married participants fully identified with the husband's needs while suppressing their own sexuality completely. This demonstrates perfectly how structures constitutive of a particular environment produce habitus, which in turn generates and structures practice. Although younger unmarried participants demonstrated a far more critical attitude by recognising the oppressive impact of culture in this context neither married nor unmarried participants could suggest an alternative to this deeply internalised socio-cultural template. This supports Bourdieu's (2001) argument that the efficacy of habitus is durable and deeply embedded in the body in the form of dispositions. It implies that change in gender relations is not likely to occur.

I also aimed at investigating the interplay of subordination and individual choices in order to probe (South African) rural black women's potential for HIV-protection strategies in their intimate partnerships. The fear of HIV-infection was all-pervading. Women in this study were exposed directly to the risk of HIV/AIDS infection through forced or coercive sexual intercourse with a possibly HIV-infected male partner; or indirectly if their partner was engaged in sexual relations outside the marriage and refused condom use. Some interviewees disclosed that they went for HIV/AIDS testing on these grounds. Overall, the data suggest that to assert condom use was much easier for unmarried than married women. Unmarried women were capable of negotiating condom use with their boyfriends, whereas both married and unmarried women said to assert condom use in marriage is impossible.

Most of the unmarried younger women used condoms with their boyfriends, yet consistency remained a problem. Trust and distrust played a significant role in this respect: in fairly new premarital partnerships the interviewee's wish for condom use was linked to not-yet established trust; in long-term premarital and marital partnerships it was linked to doubts about the partner's fidelity. However, as highlighted by Baylies (2000:11) and Maharaj and Cleland (2005a:25–26), condom use within marriage is not enforceable because it would introduce an element of distrust into the marriage. Furthermore, as I have suggested, the South African concept of sexuality as outlined by Thornton stresses the importance of a physical as well as a spiritual flow of substances between people (Thornton, 2002:4; 9) and is of particular importance in a marriage. In premarital relationships, however, such connotations may be less essential and may allow for condom use. In marriage the circumstances are far more distorted: distrust was suppressed and instead an irrational ideal of trust as an affirmation of love was maintained while at the same time interviewees were aware of the high price they pay for their suppression of fears.

Owing to the internalisation of the patriarchal code of respect, married women in this case study felt they had no space to negotiate safe sex and were forced to put their lives at risk. Unmarried women had greater although not endless choices in this regard. The omnipresent fear of HIV-infection caused young rural black women, who were not yet married, to discuss their wants and needs and to negotiate responsible sexual behaviour and HIV/AIDS prevention with their partners. However, greater mutuality put men's power to define sexual practice at stake and the capacity for agency of these younger women depended on the male partner's good will. It seemed that several boyfriends were willing to accommodate their girlfriends' wishes, thus representing a less traditional masculinity. This was the only indication of transformation within gender relations I found. However, once married this may change because of the powerful socio-cultural template. It would thus appear that marital status (married/unmarried) has the greatest impact on women's capacity for agency in their intimate partnerships in the local socio-cultural context of the study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Since the end of apartheid in 1994 South Africa has been in a society in transition. One major area of institutional change is the advancement of gender equity and equality in the country. Since South Africa's Constitution is liberal, legislation and gender policies reflect a liberal feminist position. However, in respect of civil matters South Africa has a parallel system of law for black South Africans that recognises traditional African forms of customary law and local government and which remains rooted in the politics of traditionalism.

Changes in the political, social, and socio-economic spheres, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic have also generated change in the field of sexuality and, post 1994, South Africa has undergone rapid sexual liberalisation. It has been suggested that HIV/AIDS has accelerated liberal sexual discourse in the country and has broken old taboos and silences. Today, post-apartheid South Africa is characterised by a gap between the progressive character of public gender and sexual equality discourses on the one hand, and a conservative backlash against gender and sexual transformation on the other (Robins, 2008), a gap that concerns rural black women's lives in particular. Despite all the legal advances that have taken place since 1994, South African rural black women are still discriminated against in many spheres of life, including their homes and communities. Numerous studies have focused on issues surrounding their vulnerability to gender-based violence, sexual abuse and increased risk of HIV/AIDS infection owing to their lack of "bedroom power" (Machera, 2005). All this drew my attention to the private sphere of intimate partnership dynamics and the question of women's capacity for agency in the face of overwhelming socio-economic and socio-cultural inequalities.

This study aimed to explore spaces for South African rural black women's (sexual) agency in intimate partnerships at a time of transition and amidst an HIV/AIDS pandemic to provide some local, empirical evidence for what is a common perception, namely the lack of agency that rural black women have in negotiating their sexual relationships. It also sought to find out whether there was any indication of transformation to be found in

the gender relations between different age groups.

I deemed a case study as the appropriate research design for understanding both constraints to South African rural black women's sexual agency in a patriarchal social order and possible gender transformative processes in an environment permeated by traditional beliefs and practices. The rural community chosen represented a setting of the 'typical' life conditions of many rural black women in South Africa. Traditional practices are still in place; no initiatives for poverty alleviation have taken place since democratisation in 1994 and economic life is dominated by households living on the brink of abject poverty. HIV prevalence among women in the area was around 30 percent in 2005 when I conducted the fieldwork.

Working as a white European woman on the experiences of South African rural black women did, however, require reflection on the question of representation, for example, whether white women can speak about the experiences of black women at all. This issue has been much contested – yet affirmed if the research meets the requirements of feminist research (Gouws, 1993). In following the general principles of feminist research and enquiry, I reflected on my involvement in the research process (in particular the power dynamics between me and the research participants in the interview situation) and how it affected the outcomes of the research. My particular concern in this study was constructing knowledge from the insights of women's experiences of oppression; to research the lived experiences of a group of African black women living in a rural South African community within a 'moderate' frame of standpoint epistemology. I took women's experiences as the starting point in order to explore and uncover patriarchal social dynamics and relationships from a perspective of women. In the tradition of standpoint research, I focused on women's knowledge as emerging from women's situated experiences and it is precisely this gap between lived experience and the prevailing patriarchal value systems that can lead to the development of new insights. However, as has been suggested by Doucet and Mauthner (2007:419), the analysis of the data took place back in the office away from the participants so that the research outcome is to some extent a product of my own subjective understandings and location.

I sympathise with the position that argues that “it is an illusion to think that, in anything short of a participatory research project, participants can have anything approaching ‘equal’ knowledge to the researcher” (Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994:37 cited in Millen, 1997:no page number; cf. Pels, 2004). Millen (1997) points out that theoretical ideas have been explored by the researcher before conducting the research, and that it is a practical necessity to do this if we are ever to have any knowledge at all. I venture to say that, as with the women in my study, people may not always have a full awareness of the systems which surround and constrain them. Researchers therefore may take the “responsibility to illuminate these systems using their experiences, and illuminate their experiences using these systems” (ibid:no page number). In this context Pels (2004:286) introduced the term “reflexive elitism”: standpoints need reflexive spokespersons, as it is their work that ultimately defines the situation for situated knowledge. In principle it is not necessary to have lived the experience of oppression in order to understand other oppressed identities. Knowledge or critical thought may emancipate itself from all situational determination (ibid:282–284).

The research question contains highly political categories. Throughout this research I have referred to a feminist paradigm and principles of feminist research which are linked to feminist politics. Politics is, however, one of the main contested areas of the paradigm shift from modern more political theories to postmodern theories with their focus on the symbolic-cultural production of gender. Since the HIV pandemic has brought women’s shared harmful experiences in the sexual realm, which cut across class, to the fore I believe that HIV/AIDS and its impact on African black women highlight a particular vulnerability that results from the category of gender and the fact of being female. Such a claim is political because it comprehends gender inequality as a material social relation of power and women’s liberation from male domination as a persisting aim of feminist politics. To counter gender-based violence and sexual abuse of women remains a top priority in the fight against women’s discrimination.

An objective of the research was to make a theoretical and empirical contribution to the feminist silence around HIV/AIDS and related gender issues; in this research in particular

the issue of rural black women's sexual agency. While feminism in the West underwent a depoliticisation of women's critical analyses of patriarchy through the 'linguistic turn' in postmodernism at the expense of the material power relations of oppression, African feminists seldom engaged with crucial variables in accounting for women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, including African traditional cultures, sexuality, gender-based violence and male domination. My findings therefore reflect a particular interest in, and attention to, these variables as constraints to rural black women's agency.

In terms of theory, I have borrowed from radical feminist theories to account for unequal gender dynamics in the private domain as a rather neglected area of South Africa's gender transformative policies with its prevalent liberal paradigm and focus on the public sphere. In using a framework of modern feminist thought I had to beware of not slipping back into 'white solipsism' and I have integrated insights of the postcolonial critics and masculinity studies into my research as these were very useful in avoiding essentialism and universalism and instead tries to account for women's agency in a historically, socially and culturally specific way. The comprehension of gender in the radical feminist tradition as a system of male domination of women's bodies and minds is, however, an important feature in my study. Applying key aspects of radical feminist theory to the analysis was useful for investigating feminine commonalities of experience and interests in a community ravaged by HIV and AIDS; where having capacity for sexual agency or not is a deciding factor in whether one lives or dies. I have therefore rejected the notion of radical feminist analytical concepts, which include MacKinnon's (1989) concept of the enculturation of male sex-right and Rich's (1986a) concept of compulsory heterosexuality, as being outdated. Consistent with my theoretical framework I have contextualised agency within power relations and have presented conceptualisations of agency through the idea of embodiment and as inseparable from social practice.

The most striking and, as such, the most unexpected result of my study was only revealed by the use of radical feminist concepts in the analysis of the data. The data suggested that, because of the powerful cultural template of male sex-right in marriage, it is marital status that constrains rural black women's agency the most both in terms of decision-

making on having sex as well as their potential for HIV self-protection strategies. In the Mmakaunyane community male sex-right is a key underlying force in intimate partnerships particularly in marriage. It is inscribed in the patriarchal code of respect together with other rules of obedience restricting female sexual agency to the fullest. The pattern was so powerful that no options could be considered. Women's compliance was essential in this context. Older and married participants adhered to traditional values, defended the African concept of respect and were suspicious about its erosion. Beliefs in the natural order of men's superiority over women were partly linked to orthodox Christian belief systems. On the basis of this I suggest that women's compliance is an important component for explaining why, in the private domain, patriarchal norms and values remain largely unaffected.

One of the assumptions I made in my research was that age is a critical variable because of the changing dynamics of time figurations in gender practice. Indeed, the younger women in this study showed greater discontent with the socio-cultural norms that guide their lives and constrain their agency. These younger women reflected critically on the patriarchal code of respect, regarding it as oppressive and discriminating against women and women's autonomy and put the 'naturalness' of the hierarchical gender order tentatively into question. Younger women provided accounts which displayed having greater, though not endless, choices in negotiating sex and condom use with their partners. In this particular group of young unmarried women, condom use with long-term boyfriends was also fairly common although consistency remained a problem. However, there were indications that the use of condoms would cease if a relationship turned into a marriage and that refusing sex to a husband was untenable. Given these findings I see marital status and not age as the decisive variable for a woman's capacity for agency.

In chapter 3 I referred to the duality of structure (Giddens, 1986), that is, the notion that structure and action exist as a result of each other, and structures can be modified by the agency of individuals. However, as Bourdieu (1977) so convincingly states, the more stable structures are and the more reproduced they are in the agent's disposition, the greater the extent of the field of *doxa* of that which is taken for granted, and the fewer the

moments of critical thinking and the acts of resistance which are a necessary precondition for change. In the interviewees' accounts there was a great deal of evidence of taking things for granted, but also some evidence of individual acts of resistance. However, none of these personal actions had any further impact on the dominant context, that is, structures.

For a questioning of *doxa*/change in structures both Bourdieu (1977) and Connell (2002) see crisis as being a necessary condition for the production of critical discourse and change. Connell's (1987; 1995; 2002) gender theory in particular comprehends agency as the cause of transformation in gender relations. In the context of my study I therefore proposed that the AIDS pandemic is a crisis in its own right which may lead to critical insights in the existing gender relations and to behaviour change among the participants.

Sexuality was a taboo subject in the community and characterised by secrecy and evasion. Most participants therefore lacked proper sexual education. They developed sexual experience in their relationships with men and were attuned to the heterosexual norm and the male-sex drive discourse. However, this is not unique to the community under study and happens elsewhere. In spite of the community's veil of silence over sexuality and HIV/AIDS, the participants showed great awareness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, had sufficient knowledge about ways of transmission and protection and, most strikingly, exposed changed behaviours in their immediate personal environment. Among the interviewees signs of a changing attitude were emerging: because HIV/AIDS threatens the lives of their children and grandchildren, several women had broken taboos and had started to speak about sexuality and HIV protection to their children. A few even displayed a critical attitude towards marriage – the central institution in traditional gender arrangements.

Access to education and employment was seen by the study participants as necessary preconditions for enhancing women's chances in life, their independence and their options for marriage. Improvements in education had been experienced personally by the younger interviewees, yet the impact of economic underdevelopment in the community

on the participants' lives was so severe that it did not allow for making choices, at least as long as they remained in Mmakaunyane. Unmarried women relied heavily on their boyfriend's material support. Yet, there was no evidence of transactional sexual relations among the married and unmarried participants. In this local context money and gifts were a symbol of the quality of the relationship and embedded in love conceptions. The exchange principle did not necessarily preclude the sexual agency of unmarried women. In marriage there was a variety of behaviours in terms of decision-making on spending, yet none was indicative of greater equality among spouses. Married women's sexual agency was constrained by their marital status. Generally, there was a lack of a vision for change in the gender order. Instead, participants emphasised the ideal of consummate love, which has to be understood in terms of their life contexts as a desire for the abdication of pervasive gender-based violence. I suggest that this expressed a desire for new, less dominant notions of manhood and more equal gender relations.

Spaces for female sexual agency depended on the marital status and on the quality of the partnership. Participants displayed contemporary ideas about what constitutes a good and a bad partnership. They highlighted aspects of love and intimacy to describe good partnerships and aspects of violence and abuse to describe bad partnerships. The women revealed two major partnership problems, namely firstly, their partner being engaged in multiple partnerships (now or in the past) and secondly, intimate partner violence (in retrospective for the most parts). While violence was usually absent in partnerships deemed good, infidelity was not. This resulted in a high level of distrust in the male partner among most participants and in all types of partnership and lead to a high awareness of a personal HIV-infection risk for women. Women in partnerships deemed good had more agency compared to partnerships characterised by overt power or even abuse. In relationships characterised by violence women were bereft of agency in the violent situation, they could take action – if at all – only afterwards. However, women were socialised to stay in the marriage and to endure all hardships. Their love for their partner and hope that his abusive behaviour would change also made them stay. Nevertheless, all women concerned managed at one point to leave the abusive relationship which is not always the case with abused women and can be interpreted as

agency.

In my research context and in terms of my research question, Miriam's (2007) notion of agency that distinguishes between an agency defined by choosing the terms of a given historical/sexual situation (defined by women's subordination) and a freedom defined by women's ability to transform this historical/sexual situation was of central importance. The perpetuation of and compliance with male sex-right, most characteristically expressed by one interviewee with the phrase "close the door and do the job", remains a contested socio-cultural prescription in terms of equality and seeing women as sexual agents in their own right. These findings attested to an agency defined at best by choosing the terms of a given situation, as for instance strategising with unwanted sex. This contains a political implication, namely that this is a patriarchal socio-cultural construction involving severe violations of women's human and sexual rights since it defers their consent to sexual intercourse. To some extent the backlash of traditionalist men against changes in gender relations and women's advancement may be connected to this "unnamed" privilege.

I would conclude that the capacity for agency, in particular the sexual agency of the rural black women who participated in this case study, was always restricted by the sexist norms and values of a traditional socio-culture which is based on women's subordination and was constitutive of the structures of their community. Although poverty was a further severe constraint, in terms of life chances I view socio-cultural constraints as more powerful in undermining women's agency and autonomy because they affect their mindsets and lead to compliance with the sexist gender order.

A fundamental feminist method for activating the collective resistance of women and a transformation from silence to voice is consciousness-raising groups, which radical feminists implemented during second-wave feminism in the 1970s. Sharing experiences can be a source of power for women, may raise critical thinking and fire ambition to change existing discriminating practices. One powerful effect of *habitus* was reflected in the lack of solidarity between the women in the community under study. The women

displayed, unexpectedly in my view, a rather negative perception of other women, describing them as untrustworthy, manipulative and always competing for other women's partners. And yet there was an idea that breaking the silence and sharing problems with other women would be desirable. A kind of women's support group that three of the respondents have set up for themselves was already in place and could develop into a space where women might be encouraged to speak out on issues that concern women. This could raise the question as to what the context is within which associations of support are generated and implemented and how the HIV/AIDS crisis can be a vehicle for gradually building up solidarity among women in the community.

Since the majority of participants had been confronted with the illness or even the death of close relatives as a result of AIDS, shared experiences of HIV/AIDS may be a good starting point in establishing trust. Since HIV/AIDS is linked to personal relations/intimate partnerships the group could broaden its discussions and include issues concerning partnerships, relations of power, conflict and so on. However, whether such group meetings would lead to a more critical understanding of women's gendered experiences and the reconstitution of their meaning in a transformed way must remain an open question for the time being. So far compliance with patriarchal rule is a survival practice. And yet, it is only through collective action that power relations can be changed.

This study has several limitations. Arguments against case study research often refer to its lack of rigour and that it provides no basis for scientific generalisation since it uses only a small sample (Yin, 2002). However, case study research is seen as useful as an exploratory tool and useful for theory development (George & Bennett, 2005). For the purpose of trustworthiness in my study I made the research process transparent by broadly outlining the background for the research, the sampling method, the method of data collection and data analysis. I reflected on epistemological issues, the role of the researcher and general ethical issues and fleshed out my own values. Furthermore, in my data analysis I reflected on the relationship between interviewer (my role defined as an outsider) and interviewee as an important criterion for the status of the interview data. Nevertheless, this case study, as with case studies in general, cannot make claims to be

representative of some larger population.

One particular limitation in this study was the language constraints experienced on both the side of the researcher and of the research subjects. For this reason an interpreter assisted in some of the interviews. How strongly this limitation biased the responses I cannot really say but generally it is certainly desirable for researcher and participant to have the same first language. Overall, I had the impression that the participants were really interested in the research and willing to share their experiences. It would seem that the fact that I conducted “outsider” research did not impact negatively on the investigation. Due to the study’s parameters such as one rural community as the case under study, a small sample size and the focus on sexuality, one could prompt further investigation of aspects of women’s agency in intimate partnerships in non-violent relationships in particular.

I suggest the following considerations for future research to build on the findings of this study: The lack of research on South African rural black women’s agency in intimate partnerships seems to demonstrate a need for further studies in rural environments. Further research could strengthen this study’s findings by for instance investigating, firstly, whether in other rural settings marital status impacts in the same way on rural women’s capacity for agency in non-violent partnerships or what the differences are; secondly, whether a lack of solidarity among women is also prevalent in other rural communities or what the parameters for greater collective actions of women are.

Another important and interesting question for further investigation is whether cultural constraints and marital status have the same impact on female agency in potentially less traditional, more urban settings, or what other factors either increase or decrease female agency. Most desirable would be a comparative study of my study of women’s agency in intimate partnerships, for example among township women of different age groups. I would hypothesise that township women struggling between tradition and modernity are as equally constrained as rural women but less compliant.

In order to research these questions I would also suggest researching highly educated South African black women (with university degrees) separately. I would hypothesise that middle-class black women who are economically independent still lack full sexual agency in their intimate partnerships owing to the powerful socio-cultural template of male sexual dominance but that they have far more options than rural women for alternative ways of life.

Following from my study I would like to make the following recommendations:

Considering my key conclusion that marital status has the greatest impact in constraining South African rural black women's sexual agency in a non-violent intimate partnership when it comes to unwanted sex and condom usage, I suggest that activities targeting South African rural black women's empowerment – be it local community activities or comprehensive (national or international) HIV/AIDS (prevention) programmes – work deliberately along the lines of marital status. Conventional prevention messages seem particularly inappropriate for married women. Yet women's empowerment is also not an adequate answer because several (married) women in my sample felt neither disempowered nor oppressed in their intimate partnership.

Changing (harmful) socio-cultural norms, such as male sex-right, which constrains women severely in their autonomy and freedom of choice, is rather unlikely as long as challenges do not arise from the collective action of groups of women, who, according to Connell (2002:72), as the main group subordinated in patriarchal power structures, have a structural interest in change. Bourdieu (2001) instead suggests a relative permanence of sexual structures, which are difficult to change because the relationship of domination of men over women appears as natural and is imbued in the habitus of agents (men and women) as schemes for perception, thought and action. This research provides evidence that supports Bourdieu's suggestion that sexual structures have a relative permanence.

Therefore the promotion of initiatives which could strengthen women's power through collective activity would be advisable. Women must develop their own ideas from their

situated knowledges. The AIDS crisis could become a vehicle for tackling the lack of solidarity among women in the community which may lead to greater solidarity amongst them. It may have in the long run the potential to develop into a force for change in the *habitus* of women on the grassroots level.

In a way, these recommendations address a problem which is identified in the literature as interventions imposed on communities from the outside and programmes that facilitate or strengthen local community responses (cf. Nair & Campbell, 2008:46). Grassroots community involvement is acknowledged as a key dimension of effective HIV-prevention and AIDS-care, particularly in marginalised communities (ibid:52) and is considered as a fundamental for this study. However, it is important to notice that key concepts that underpin community-based initiatives must be adequately detailed in a context-specific manner (Mansuri & Rao, 2004:31) since it has been proven in many worldwide community-based and community-driven projects that any wholesale application of best practices is unlikely to be useful and that there is no single approach that can be universally prescribed (ibid; cf. UNAIDS/ Department of Policy, Strategy and Research, no year).

Furthermore, a study on community involvement in health through community partnerships in South Africa found that “[t]he failure of many community development programmes can be traced to neglecting to use local skills, experience and expertise of local communities” (El Ansari, Phillips & Zwi, 2002:156) and that therefore professionals and academics need to increase their valuation of indigenous proficiencies inherent in their community partners. It is on the grassroots level that local providers develop and deliver tailor-made activities that they believe will be convincing in persuading the community members to change their risky behaviours, where HIV infection is concerned (Lamboray & Skevington, 2001:517–518). From their research in a rural South African community on effective community-led HIV/AIDS management and building contexts that support effective community responses Campbell, Nair & Maimane (2007:362) for instance draw the conclusion that it made little sense to the women involved in the project to tackle gender inequalities directly, although it were key

drivers of the epidemic, and to openly challenge men but to work around it and rather concentrate on practical day to day struggles with HIV/AIDS.

These insights are essential to the data presented and recommendations suggested here. In a community whose local norms and views can be expected to be different in many ways to that of outside experts/researchers, “[p]rojects are far more likely to succeed when goals are formulated by, and make sense to, community residents than by outsiders seeking to impose abstract theories of social and political change on people whose priorities and concerns are far more immediate” (ibid). In other words, a tangible first step for the women involved in this study to find their own spaces and their own ways of breaking the silence in terms of sexuality, sexual behavior and HIV/AIDS could be to either build a new group setting – as I have suggested along the lines of marital status – where they can meet and share experiences of their daily lives or join the already existing small initiative in Mmakaunyane. The creation of networks through such group activities may eventually help building greater solidarity among women in the community.

Bibliography

Abrahams, Y. 2001. Learning by doing. Notes towards the practice of womanist principles in the 'new' South Africa, *Agenda, African feminisms I*, 50:71–76.

Abrahams, N., Jewkes, R., Hoffman, M., & Laubscher, R. 2004. Sexual violence against intimate partners in Cape Town: prevalence and risk factors reported by men, *Bulletin World Health Organisation*, 82(5):330–337.

Abrahams, N., Jewkes, R. & Laubscher, R. 1999. “*I don’t believe in democracy in the home*”: men’s relationships with and abuse of women. Cape Town: MRC Technical Report.

Acker, S. 2000. In/out/side: positioning the researcher in feminist qualitative research, *Resources for Feminist Research*, 28(1/2):189–208.

Aida, Y. & Falbo, T. 1991. Relationships between marital satisfaction, resources, and power strategies, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 24(1/2):43–56.

Allen, K. R. 2004. Janet Saltzman Chafetz plenary: discussant comments, *Journal of Family Issues*, 25(7):984–989.

Amaro, H. 1995. Love, sex and power. Considering women's realities in HIV prevention, *American Psychologist*, 50(6):437–447.

Amaro, H. & Raj, A. 2000. On the margin: power and women's HIV risk reduction strategies. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, April [Online]. Available: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_/ai_65576718 [12 May 2008].

Amnesty International 2008. *I am at the lowest end of all’: rural women living with HIV face human rights abuses in South Africa*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.amnesty.org> [25 April 2008].

Amoateng, A.Y. & Richter, L. 2003. The state of families in South Africa. In Daniel, J., Habib, A. & Southall, R. (eds.). *State of the nation: South Africa 2003–2004*. Cape Town: HSRC Press, p. 242–267.

Anchonulu, C. 1995. *Motherism: the afrocentric alternative to feminism*. Owerri, Nigeria: Afa Publications.

Anderson, E. 2004. Feminist epistemology and philosophy of science, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (summer 2004 edition). [Online]. Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2004/entries/feminism-epistemology/> [1 April 2005].

Andersson, N., Ho-Foster, A., Matthis, J., Marokoane, N., Mashiane, V., Mhatre, S., Mitchell, S., Mokoena, T., Monasta, L., Ngxowa, N., Salcedo, M. P. & Sonnekus, H. 2004. National cross sectional study of views on sexual violence and risk of HIV infection and AIDS among South African school pupils, *British Medical Journal*, 329(7472):952, October 23.

Armas, H. 2007. *Whose sexualities count? Poverty, participation and sexual rights*. IDS Working Paper 294, November. Institute for Development Studies, Brighton, Sussex, England.

Arnfred, S. (ed.) 2005a. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 2nd ed. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri AB.

Arnfred, S. 2005b. Rethinking sexualities in Africa: Introduction. In Arnfred, S. (ed.) 2005a. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 2nd ed. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri AB, p. 7–29.

Arnfred, S. 2005c. African sexuality/sexuality in Africa: tales and silences. In Arnfred, S. (ed.) 2005a. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 2nd ed. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri AB, p. 59–76.

Ashforth, A. (2002). An epidemic of witchcraft? The implications of AIDS for the post-apartheid state, *African Studies*, 61(1):121–143, July.

Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. 2005. *The practice of social research*. Fourth impression. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Baber K.M. 2004. Building bridges: feminist research, theory and practice. A response to Janet Saltzman Chafetz, *Journal of Family Issues*, 25(7):978–983, October.

Bakilana, A. 2005. Age at sexual debut in South Africa, *African Journal of AIDS Research*, 4(1):1–6, May.

Barnett, T. & Whiteside, A. 2002. *AIDS in the twenty-first century. Disease and globalisation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Barry, K. 1979. *Female sexual slavery*. New York: New York University Press.

Baylies, C. 2000. Perspectives on gender and AIDS in Africa. In Baylies, C. & Burja, J. with the Gender and AIDS Group (eds.). *AIDS, sexuality and gender in Africa. Collective strategies and struggles in Tanzania and Zambia*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 1–24.

- Baylies, C. & Burja, J. 2000. The struggle continues: some conclusions. In Baylies, C. & Burja, J. with the Gender and AIDS Group (eds.). *AIDS, sexuality and gender in Africa. Collective strategies and struggles in Tanzania and Zambia*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 174–198.
- Baylies, C. & Burja, J. with the Gender and AIDS Group 2000. Preface. In Baylies, C. & Burja, J. with the Gender and AIDS Group (eds.). *AIDS, sexuality and gender in Africa. Collective strategies and struggles in Tanzania and Zambia*. London and New York: Routledge, p. xi–xiv.
- Benjamin, S. 2007. The feminization of poverty in post-apartheid South Africa: a story told by the women of Bayview, Chatsworth, *Journal of Developing Societies*, 23(1–2):175–206.
- Bennett, T. W. 2004. *Customary law in South Africa*. Landsdowne.
- Bentley, K. 2004. Women’s human rights & the feminisation of poverty in South Africa, *Review of African Political Economy*, 31(100):247–261.
- Berelson, B. R. 1952. *Content analysis in communication research*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press.
- Beresford, B., Schneider, H. & Sember, R. 2008. South Africa – constitutional authority and its limitations. In Parker, R., Petchesky, R. & Sember, R. (eds.). *SexPolitics. Reports from the front lines*. Sexuality Policy Watch, p. 197–246. [Online]. Available: <http://www.sxpolitics.org/frontlines/book/pdf/sxpolitics.pdf> [7 April 2008].
- Bhavnani, K.-K. (ed.) 2001. *Feminism & ‘race’*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Boikanyo, E. 1992. So much for women-sensitive sexual relations – the use of vaginal potions, *Agenda*, 15:3–6.
- Bourdieu, P. 2001. *Masculine domination*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Richard Nice Polity Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bozzoli, B. 1991. *Women of Phokeng. Consciousness, life strategy, and migrancy in South Africa, 1900–1983*. Portsmouth NH: Heinemann & London: James Currey Ltd.
- Bozzoli, B. 1983. Marxism, feminism and South African studies, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9(2):139–171, April.

- Brayton, J. 1997. *What makes feminist research feminist? The structure of feminist research within the social sciences*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.unb.ca/PAR-L/win/feminmethod.htm> [1 April 2005].
- Bridges, D. 2001. The ethics of outsider research, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 35(3):371–386.
- Brittan, G.H. & Maynard, A.C. 1984. *Sexism, racism and oppression*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Brownmiller, S. 1975. *Against our will. Men, women and rape*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Burja, J. 2000. Targeting men for a change: AIDS discourse and activism in Africa, *Agenda*, 44:6–23.
- Butler, J. 2003. Performative acts and gender constitution: an essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In McCann, C. R. & Kim, S.-K. (eds.). *Feminist theory reader. Local and global perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 415–427.
- Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. 1990. *Gender trouble. Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Byrnes, R.M. (ed.) 1997. *South Africa: a country study*. [Online]. Available: <http://countrystudies.us/south-africa/48.htm> [22 April 2008].
- Caldwell, J.C., Caldwell, P. & Orubuloye, O. 1992. The family and sexual networking in Sub-Saharan Africa. Historical regional differences and present-day implications, *Population Studies*, 46:385–410.
- Caldwell, J., Caldwell, P. & Quiggin, P. 1989. The social context of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, *Population and Development Review*, 15(2):185–234.
- Campbell, C. 2003. *Letting them die: why HIV/AIDS prevention programmes fail*. Indiana University Press/James Currey/Juta Doublestorey.
- Campbell, C. 2001. ‘Going underground and going after women’: masculinity and HIV transmission amongst Black workers on the gold mine. In Morrell, R. (ed.). *Changing men in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press. p. 275–286.
- Campbell, C. 1990. The township family and women's struggles, *Agenda*, 6:1–22.

- Campbell, C. & MacPhail, C. 2002. Peer education, gender and the development of critical consciousness: participatory HIV prevention by South African youth, *Social Science & Medicine*, 55(2):331–345, July.
- Campbell, C., Nair, Y. & Maimane, S. 2007. Building contexts that support effective community responses to HIV/AIDS: a South African case study, *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 39:347–363.
- Castle, J. & Kiggundu, E. 2007. Are rural women powerless when it comes to HIV & AIDS risk? Implications for adult education programmes in South Africa, *Perspectives in Education*, 25(1):45–58, March.
- Chambers, C. 2005. Masculine domination, radical feminism and change, *Feminist Theory*, 6(3):325–346.
- Chant, S. 2004. Dangerous equations? How female-headed households became the poorest of the poor: causes, consequences and cautions, *IDS Bulletin*, 35(4):19–26, October.
- Clark, J. 2006. “Looking back and moving forward”: gender, culture and constructions of transition in South Africa, *Agenda*, 68:8–17.
- Cliffe, L. 2004. From ‘African Renaissance’ to re-empowering Chiefs, *Review of African Political Economy*, 31(100):354–356.
- Code, L. 1995. How do we know? Questions of method in feminist practice. In Burt, S. D. & Code, L. (eds). *Changing methods: feminists transforming practice*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, p. 13–44.
- Collins, P.H. 1991. Learning from the outsider within: the sociological significance of Black feminist thought. In Fonow, M. J. & Cook, J. A. (eds). *Beyond methodology: feminist scholarship as lived research*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, p. 35–59.
- Collins, P.H. 1990. *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Commonwealth Secretariat 2002. *Gender Mainstreaming in HIV/AIDS: taking a multisectoral approach*. London.
- Compion, S. & Cook, S.E. 2006. Young ‘women of Phokeng’: strategies for survival in contemporary South Africa, *Agenda*, 68:95–103.
- Connell, R.W. 2002. *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R.W. 1995. *Masculinities*. Berkley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.

- Connell, R.W. 1987. *Gender and power*. Sydney, Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Connell, R.W., Hearn, J. & Kimmel, M.S. 2005. Introduction. In Kimmel, M. S., Hearn, J. & Connell, R. W. (eds.). *Handbook of the studies of men and masculinities*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publication, p.1–12.
- Connell, R.W. & Messerschmidt, J.W. 2005. Hegemonic masculinity. Rethinking the concept, *Gender & Society*, 19(6):829–859, December.
- Correa, S. & Petchesky, R. 2003. Reproductive and sexual rights: A feminist perspective. In McCann, C.R. & Kim, S.-K. (eds.). *Feminist theory reader. Local and global perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 88–102.
- Creswell, J. W. 1998. *Qualitative inquiry and research design. Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Crothers, C. 2001. Social factors and HIV/AIDS in South Africa: a framework and summary, *Society in Transition*, 32(1):5–21.
- Curran, E. & Bonthuys, E. 2004. *Customary law and domestic violence in rural South African communities*. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. October. [Online]. Available: <http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/papers/papclaw.htm> [19 May 2008].
- Daly, M. 1978. *Gyn/Ecology. The metaethics of radical feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Daly, M. 1973. *Beyond God the father: toward a philosophy of women's liberation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Davenport, T.R.H. 1987. *South Africa: a modern history*. Johannesburg: Macmillan.
- Davis, A.Y. 1981. *Gender, race, and class*. New York: Random House Inc.
- De Beauvoir, S. 1953. *The Second Sex*. New York: Alfred Knopf Inc.
- Delius, P. & Glaser, C. 2005. Sex, disease and stigma in South Africa: historical perspectives, *African Journal of AIDS Research*, 4(1):29–36.
- Delius, P. & Glaser, C. 2004. The myth of polygamy: a history of extra-marital and multi-partnership sex in South Africa, *South African Historical Journal*, 50:84–114.
- Delius, P. & Glaser, C. 2002. Sexual socialisation in South Africa: a historical perspective, *African Studies*, 61(1):27–54, July.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) 2005. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications

- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2005. Introduction: the discipline and practice of qualitative research. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S (eds.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 1–32.
- De Vos, A.S. 2005. Qualitative data analysis and interpretation. In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delpont C.S.L. (eds.) 2005. *Research at grass roots. For the social sciences and human service professions*. 3rd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, p. 333–349.
- De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delpont C.S.L. (eds.) 2005. *Research at grass roots. For the social sciences and human service professions*. 3rd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Dilraj, A., Abdool-Karim S.S. & Pillay, S. 2007. Challenging racial stereotyping of AIDS in South Africa with prevalence of HIV in pregnant women, *South African Medical Journal*, 97(1):42–44.
- Di Stefano, C. 1990. Dilemmas or difference: feminism, modernity and postmodernism. In Nicholson, L.J. (ed.). *Feminism/postmodernism*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 63–82.
- Donohue, W.A. & Kolt, R. 1992. *Managing interpersonal conflict*. Newbury Park, California/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications Inc.
- Donovan, J. 2001. *Feminist Theory. The intellectual traditions*. 3rd ed. New York, London: Continuum.
- Doucet, A. & Mauthner, N.S. 2007. Feminist methodology and epistemology. In Bryant, C.D. & Peck, DL. (eds.). *21st century Sociology. A reference handbook, Volume 2*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 36–42.
- Dunkle, K L., Jewkes, R.K., Brown, H.C., Gray, G.E., McIntyre, J.A. & Harlow, S.D. 2004a. Gender-based violence, relationship power, and risk of HIV in women attending antenatal clinics in South Africa, *The Lancet*, 363(9419):1415–1421, May 1.
- Dunkle, K.L., Jewkes, R.K., Brown, H.C., Gray, G.E., McIntyre, J.A. & Harlow, S D. 2004b. Transactional sex among women in Soweto, South Africa: prevalence, risk factors and association with HIV infection, *Social Science and Medicine*, 59(8):1581–1592.
- Dunkle, K., Jewkes, R., Brown, H., McIntyre, J., Gray, G. & Harlow, S. 2003. *Gender-based violence and HIV infection among pregnant women in Soweto. A technical report to the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)*. [Online]. Available: www.mrc.ac.za/gender/women.pdf [30 November 2004].

- Dunkle, K.L., Jewkes, R., Nduna, M., Jama, N., Levin, J., Sikweyiya, Y. & Koss, M.P. 2007. Transactional sex with casual and main partners among young South African men in the rural Eastern Cape: prevalence, predictors, and associations with gender-based violence, *Social Science and Medicine*, 65(6):1235–1248.
- Dunkle, K.L., Jewkes, R.K., Nduna, M., Levin, J., Jama, N., Khuzwayo, N., Koss, M.P. & Duvvury, N. 2006. Perpetration of partner violence and HIV risk behaviour among young men in the rural Eastern Cape, South Africa, *AIDS*, 20(16):2107–2114, October 24.
- Du Plessis, V., Behiri, R. & Bollman, R.D. 2002. *Definitions of “rural”*. Statistics Canada Agriculture Division, Agriculture and Working Paper Series, Working Paper No. 61, December. [Online]. Available: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/21-601-m/2002061/4224867-eng.pdf> [24 April 2009].
- Dworkin, A. 1974. *Woman hating: a radical look at sexuality*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Dyck, I. 1997. Dialogue with difference: a tale of two studies. In Jones, J.P. III., Nast, H.J. & Roberts, S.M. (eds.). *Thresholds in feminist geography: difference, methodology, representation*. Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield, p. 183–202.
- Eaton, L., Flisher, A.J. & Aarø, L.E. 2003. Unsafe sexual behaviour in South African youth, *Social Science & Medicine*, 568(1):143–165.
- El Ansari, W., Phillips, C.J. & Zwi, A.B. 2002. Narrowing the gap between academic professional wisdom and community lay knowledge: perceptions from partnerships, *Public Health*, 116:151–159.
- England, K. 1994. Getting personal: reflexivity, personality, and feminist research, *Professional Geographer*, 46(1):80–89.
- Evans, J. 1995. *Feminist theory today*. London, Thousand Oaks, Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Faludi, S. 1991. *Backlash. The undeclared war against American women*. New York: Crowne.
- Farmer, P. 1992. *AIDS and accusation. Haiti and the geography of blame*. Berkley/Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Finch, H. & Lewis, J. 2003. Focus Groups. In Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (eds.). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 171–198.
- Firestone, S. 1971. *The dialectic of sex: the case for feminist revolution*. New York: Bantam.

- Flax, J. 1990. Postmodernism and gender relations in feminist theory. In Nicholson, L. (ed.). *Feminism and postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, p. 39–62.
- Flick, U., Von Kardorff, E. & Steinke, I. (eds.) 2004. *A companion to qualitative research*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. 2005. The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.). *The Sage Handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 695–728.
- Fouché, F. 1993. Nigerian conference revisited, *Agenda*, 16:39–41.
- Fox, A.M., Jackson, S.S., Hansen, N.B., Gasa, N., Crewe, M. & Sikkema, K.J. 2007. In their own voices: a qualitative study of women's risk for intimate partner violence and HIV in South Africa, *Violence Against Women*, 13(6):583–602, June. [Online]. Available: yaw.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/13/6/583 [7 February 2008].
- Fox, S., Nkosi, Z. & Kistner, U. 2003. *Gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS in South Africa. A bibliography*. Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CADRE) for the Department of Health, South Africa, Johannesburg. [Online]. Available: http://www.cadre.org.za/files/Womens_biblio.pdf [28 August 2006].
- Freire, P. 1993. *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: Continuum.
- Friedan, B. 1963. *The feminine mystique*. New York: Norton.
- Frye, I. 2006. *Poverty and unemployment in South Africa*. National Labour & Economic Development Institute. [Online]. Available: <http://www.naledi.org.za/docs/Poverty%20and%20unemployment%20in%20South%20Africa%20Feb%202006.pdf> [15 November 2008].
- Frye, M. & Hoagland, S.L. 2000. Introduction. In Hoagland, S.L. & Frye, M. (eds.). *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 1–25.
- Funani, L. 1993. The great divide, response to Fouché's "Nigerian conference revisited", *Agenda*, 17:55–57.
- Funani, L. 1992. Nigerian conference revisited, *Agenda*, 15:63–68.
- Gamble, S. 2001. *The Routledge companion to feminism and postfeminism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- George, A.L. & Bennett, A. 2005. *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Gevisser, M. 2007. *Thabo Mbeki. The dream deferred*. Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

Giddens, A 1992. *The transformation of intimacy. Sexuality, love & eroticism in modern societies*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. 1986. *The constitution of society. Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Gilbert, L. & Walker, L. 2002. Treading the path of least resistance: HIV/AIDS and social inequalities – a South African case study, *Social Science & Medicine*, 54(7):1093–1110.

Gildemeister, R. 2004. Gender studies. In Flick, U., von Kardorff, E. & Steinke, I. (eds.). *A companion to qualitative research*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 123–128.

Glaser, B.G. & Strauss A.L. 1967. *The discovery of grounded theory. Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine.

Gorelick, S. 1991. Contradictions of feminist methodology, *Gender and Society*, 5(4):459–477, December.

Gouws, A. 1993. The angry divide, *Agenda*, 19:67–70.

Gqola, P.D. 2001. Ufanele uqavile: blackwomen, feminisms and postcoloniality in Africa, *Agenda*, 50:11–22.

Greef, M. 2002. Information collection: interviewing. In De Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouché, C.B. & Delport, C.S.L. (eds.). *Research at grass roots for the social sciences and human service professions*. 2nd edition, Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, p. 291–319.

Greene, K. 1997. Fear and loathing in Mississippi: the attack on Camp Sister Spirit, *Women and Politics*, 17(3):17–37.

Greer, G. 1970. *The female eunuch*. London: MacGibbon and Kee.

Guma, M. & Henda, N. 2004. The socio-cultural context of child abuse: a betrayal of trust. In Richter, L., Dawes, A. & Higson-Smith, C. (eds.). *Sexual abuse of young children in Southern Africa*. HSRC, p. 95–109.

Guitierrez, L., Joo Oh, H. & Rogers Gillmore, M. 2000. Toward an understanding of power for HIV/AIDS prevention with adolescent women – em – ment – statistical data included, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, April. [Online]. Available: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_ai_65576712 [12 May 2005].

Haddad, B. 2006. Living it out. Faith resources and sites as critical to participatory learning with rural South African women, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 22(1):135–154.

Haggard, R. 1885[1994]. *King Solomon's Mines*. Penguin.

Haile, B.J., Chambers, J.W. & Garrison, J.L. 2007. Correlates of HIV knowledge and testing: results of a 2003 South African survey, *Journal of Black Studies*, 38(2):194–208.

Hallman, K. 2005. Socioeconomic disadvantages and unsafe sexual behaviors of young women and men in South Africa, *African Journal of AIDS Research*, 4(1):37–50.

Hallman, K. 2004. *Socioeconomic disadvantages and unsafe sexual behaviors among young women and men in South Africa*. Population Council, Policy Research Division, Working Papers 2004 No. 190. [Online]. Available <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/wp/190.pdf> [2 June 2005].

Hallett, R. 1984. Desolation on the Veld: forced removals in South Africa, *African Affairs*, 83(332):301–320, July.

Hamilton, R. 2007. Feminist theories. In Bryant, C.D. & Peck, D.L. (eds.). *21st century Sociology. A reference handbook, Volume 2*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 43–53.

Haralambos, M. & Holborn, M. 2000. *Sociology. Themes and Perspectives*. 5th ed. London: Harper Collins.

Haraway, D. 1988[2003]. Situated knowledges: the science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective, *Feminist Studies*, 14(3):575–599. Reprinted in McCann, C.R. & Kim S-K (eds.) 2003. *Feminist Theory Reader, Local and Global Perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 391–403.

Harding, S. 2004. Introduction. In Harding, S. (ed.). *The feminist standpoint theory reader. Intellectual and political controversies*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 1–15.

Harding, S. 1991. *Whose science? Whose knowledge? Thinking from women's lives*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Harding, S. (ed.) 1987a. *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Harding, S. 1987b. Introduction: is there a feminist method? In Harding, S. (ed.). *Feminism and methodology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 1–14.

Harding, S. 1986. *The science question in feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Hargreaves, S., Vetten, L., Schneider, V., Malepe, L. & Fuller, R. 2006. “*Marriage is Like Sitting on Red Coals*”: a case study of domestic violence in four villages of the Moretele District, Tshwane Metropole. Centre for the Study for Violence and Reconciliation. September. [Online]. Available: <http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/papers/papharet.htm> [19 May 2008].
- Hartley, J. 2004. Case study research. In Cassell, C. & Symon, G. (eds.). *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research*. London: Sage, p. 323–333.
- Hartmann, H. 1981. The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: towards a more progressive union. In Sargent L (ed.). *Women and revolution: a discussion of the unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism*. Boston: South End Press.
- Hartsock, N. 1990. Foucault on power: a theory for women? In Nicholson, L.J. (ed.). *Feminism/postmodernism*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 157–175.
- Hartsock, N. 1987. The feminist standpoint: developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism. In Harding, S. (ed.). *Feminism and methodology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 157–180.
- Hartsock, N. 1983. *Money, sex and power. Toward a feminist historical materialism*. New York/London: Longman.
- Hartung, T.K., Nash, J., Ngubane, N. & Fredlund, V.G. 2002. AIDS awareness and sexual behaviour in a high HIV prevalence area in rural northern Kwazulu–Natal, South Africa, *International Journal of STDs & AIDS*, 13(12):829–832.
- Hassim, S. 2005. Terms of engagement: South African challenges [1], *Feminist Africa*, 4. [Online]. Available: <http://www.feministafrica.org/index.php/terms-of-engagement> [24 February 2009].
- Hassim, S. 2003. Representation, participation and democratic effectiveness: feminist challenges to representative democracy in South Africa. In Goetz, A.M. & Hassim, S. (eds.). *No shortcuts to power. African women in politics and policy making*. London, p. 81–109.
- Hawkesworth, M.E. 1989. Knowers, knowing, known: feminist theory and claims of truth, *Signs*, 14(3):533–557, Spring.
- Heise, L. 1997. Violence, sexuality and women’s lives. In Lancaster, R.N. & Di Leonardo, M. (eds.). *The gender sexuality reader: culture, history, political economy*. New York: Routledge, p. 411–433.
- Heise, L. & Elias, C. 1995. Transforming AIDS prevention to meet women’s needs: a focus on developing countries, *Social Science and Medicine*, 40(7):931–943.

- Herdt, G. 2004. Sexual development, social oppression, and local culture, *Sexual Research & Social Policy*, Journal of NSRC, 1(1):39–62, January.
- Hesford, W.S. & Kozol, W. 2001. *Haunting violations: feminist criticism and the crisis of the “real”*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Hesse-Biber, S., Gilmartin, C. & Lyndenberg, R. (eds.) 1999. *Feminist approaches to theory and methodology*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Yaiser, M.L. 2004. Difference matters: studying across race, class, gender and sexuality. In Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Yaiser, M.L. (eds.). *Feminist perspectives on social research*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 101–120.
- Hite, S. 1976. *The Hite report: A nationwide study of female sexuality*. New York: MacMillan.
- Hoagland, S.L. & Frye, M. (eds.) 2000. *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Daly*. The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- hooks, b. 1992. *Black looks: race and Representation*. New York: Routledge.
- Hoosen, S. & Collins, A. 2004. Sex, sexuality and sickness: discourses of gender and HIV/AIDS among KwaZulu-Natal women, *South African Journal of Psychology*, 34(3):487–505.
- Human Rights Watch 2003. *Policy paralysis: a call for action on HIV/AIDS-related human rights abuses against women and girls in Africa*. [Online]. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/africa1203/africa1203.pdf> [2 June 2006].
- Human Rights Watch 2001. *Scared at school: sexual violence against girls in South African schools*. [Online]. Available at <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/safrica/> [2 June 2006].
- Hunter, M. 2002. The materiality of everyday sex: thinking beyond ‘prostitution’, *African Studies*, 61(1):99–120.
- Jaggar, A. 1983. *Feminist politics and human nature*. Lanham: Rowman & Allenhead.
- Jaggar, A.M. & Rothenberg, P.S. 1993. *Feminist frameworks. Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men*. 3rd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc.
- Jeffreys, S. 1996. Return to gender: post-modernism and lesbianandgay theory. In Bell, D. & Klein, R. (eds.). *Radically speaking: feminism reclaimed*. London: Zed Books, p. 359–374.

Jenkins, S.R. 2000. Toward theory development and measure evolution for studying women's relationships and HIV infection, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, April. [Online]. Available: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_2000_April/ai_65576719/pg_24 [12 May 2005].

Jensen Krige, E. & Comaroff, J.L. 1981. *Essays on African marriage in Southern Africa*. Juta and Company Limited: Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Jewkes, R. 2004. Child sexual abuse and HIV infection. In Richter, L., Dawes, A. & Higson-Smith, C. (eds.). *Sexual abuse of young children in Southern Africa*. HSRC, p. 130–142.

Jewkes, R. 2002. Intimate partner violence: causes and prevention, *The Lancet*, 359(9315):1423–1429, April 20.

Jewkes, R. & Abrahams, N. 2002. The epidemiology of rape and sexual coercion in South Africa: an overview, *Social Science & Medicine*, 55(7):1231–1244, October.

Jewkes, R. & Abrahams, N. 2000. *Violence against women in South Africa: rape and sexual coercion*. Crime Prevention Research Resources Centre, CSIR. Pretoria.

Jewkes, R., Dunkle, K., Koss, M.P., Levin, J.B., Nduna, M., Jama, N. & Sikweyiya, Y. 2006a. Rape perpetration by young, rural South African men: prevalence, patterns and risk factors, *Social Science & Medicine*, 63(11):2949–2961.

Jewkes, R., Dunkle, K., Nduna, M., Levin, J., Jama, N., Khuzwayo, N., Koss, M., Puren, A. & Duvvury, N. 2006b. Factors associated with HIV sero-status in young rural South African women: connections between intimate partner violence and HIV, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 35(6):1461–1468.

Jewkes, R., Levin, J., Mbananga, N. & Bradshaw, D. 2002a. Rape of girls in South Africa. *The Lancet*, 359(9303):319–320, January 26.

Jewkes, R., Levin, J. & Penn-Kekana, L. 2002. Risk factors for domestic violence: findings from a South African cross-sectional study, *Social Science & Medicine*, 55(9):1603–1617.

Jewkes, R.K., Nduna, M., Jama, N. & Levin, J.B. 2002b. *Measuring relationship power: adaptation of the SRPS for South Africa*. XVI. International AIDS Conference 2002, Barcelona. [Online]. Available: http://www.aids2002.com/Program/ViewAbstract.asp?id=/TCMS_Content/Abstract/20020629075034159.xml [18 February 2004].

Jewkes, R., Penn-Kekana, L., Ratsaka, M. & Schrieber, M. 1999. *He must give me money he mustn't beat me. Violence against women in three South African Provinces*. Medical Research Council Technical Report. Medical Research Council, Pretoria.

Jewkes, R., Penn-Kekana, L. & Rose-Junius, H. 2005. "If they rape me, I can't blame them": reflections on gender in the social context of child rape in South Africa and Namibia, *Social Science & Medicine*, 61(8):1809–1820.

Jewkes, R., Vundule, C., Maforah, F. & Jordaan, E. 2001. Relationship dynamics and teenage pregnancy in South Africa, *Social Science & Medicine*, 52(5):733–744.

Jobson, M. 2004. The intersection of gender and HIV/AIDS and human rights. In Welpel, I., Thege, B. & Henderson, S. (eds.). *The Gender perspective. Innovations in economy, organisations and health in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, p. 314–353.

Jolly, S. & Cornwell, A. 2007. Preface. In Armas, H.. *Whose sexualities count? Poverty, participation and sexual rights*. IDS Working Paper 294, November. Institute for Development Studies. Brighton, Sussex, England, p. 7.

Jungar, K. & Oinas, E. 2005. Preventing HIV? Medical discourses and invisible women. In Arnfred, S. (ed.) 2005a. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 2nd edition. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri AB, p. 97–111.

Kadalié, R. 2005. The personal remains political. Elaine Salo speaks with Rhoda Kadalié. *Feminist Africa. Sexual cultures*, 5:112–121.

Kalichman, S.C., Simbayi, L.C., Cain, D., Cherry, C., Henda, N. & Cloete, A. 2007. Sexual assault, sexual risks and gender attitudes in a community sample of South African men, *AIDS CARE*, 19(1):20–27.

Kaufman, C.E. & Stavrou, S.E. 2002. "Bus fare, please": the economics of sex and gifts among adolescents in urban South Africa. Population Council, Policy Research Division, Working Papers, No. 166. [Online]. Available: <http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/wp/166.pdf> [2 June 2005].

Kayongo-Male, D. & Onyango, P. 1984. *The sociology of the African family*. New York: Longman.

Kehler, J. 2001. Women and poverty: the South African experience, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 3(1): 42–54, November.

Kelly, L., Burton, S. & Regan, L. 1994. Researching women's lives or studying women's oppression? Reflections on what constitutes feminist research. In Maynard, M. & Purvis, J. (eds.). *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective*. London: Taylor and Francis, p. 27–48.

Khau, M. 2007. 'But he is my husband! How can it be rape?': exploring silences around date and marital rape in Lesotho, *Agenda*, 74:58–66.

Kimmel, M.S., Hearn, J., & Connell, R.W. (eds.) 2005. *Handbook of the studies of men and masculinities*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Kohlbacher, F. 2006. The use of qualitative content analysis in case study research. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [Online Journal], 7(1). Available: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqstexte/1-06/06-1-21-e.htm> [5 December 2007].

Kongolo, M & Bamgose, O.O. 2002. Participation of rural women in development: a case study of Tsheseng, Thinta, and Makhalaneng Villages, South Africa, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 4(1): 79–92, November.

Korte, A.-M. 2000. Deliver us from evil: bad versus better faith in Mary Daly's feminist writings. In Hoagland, S.L. & Frye, M. (eds.). *Feminist interpretations of Mary Daly*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 76–111.

Kracauer, S. 1952. The challenge of qualitative content analysis, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 16(4):631–642.

Krippendorff, K. 2004. *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kritzinger, A. 2003. *The status of feminism and feminist theory*. Institute for Women's and Gender Studies of the University of Pretoria, Occasional papers 4.

Kuumba, B.M. 2006. African women, resistance cultures and cultural resistances, *Agenda*, 68:112–121.

Kvale, S. 1989. *Issues of validity in qualitative research*. Lund, Sweden: Chartwell Bratt.

Lamboray, J.-L. & Skevington S.M. 2001. Defining AIDS competence: a working model for practical purposes, *Journal of International Development*, 13(4):513–521, May.

Langen, T.T. 2005. Gender power imbalance on women's capacity to negotiate self-protection against HIV/AIDS in Botswana and South Africa, *African Health Sciences*, 5(3):188–197, September.

Leclerc-Madlala, S. 2003. Transactional sex and the pursuit of modernity, *Social Dynamics*, 29(2):213–233.

LeClerc-Madlala, S. 2001. Demonising women in the era of AIDS: on the relationship between cultural constructions of both HIV/AIDS and femininity, *Society in Transition*, 32(1):38–46.

- Lee, R.M. 1993. *Doing research on sensitive topics*. London: Sage.
- Lekgoathi, S.P. 2003. Chiefs, migrants and North Ndebele ethnicity in the context of surrounding homeland politics, 1965–1978, *African Studies*, 62(1):53–77.
- Lerner, G. 1993. Reconceptualizing differences among women. In Jaggard, A.M. & Rothenberg, P.S. (eds.). *Feminist frameworks. Alternative theoretical accounts of the relations between women and men*. 3rd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., p. 237–248.
- Lerner, G. 1986. *The creation of patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lesch, E. & Kruger, L.-M. 2004. Reflections on the sexual agency of young women in a low-income rural South African community, *South African Journal of Psychology*, 34(3):464–486.
- Lewis, D. 2001. Introduction, *Agenda, African feminisms I*, 50:4–10.
- Lewis, J. 2003. Design issues. In Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (eds.). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 47–76.
- Liebenberg, S. 1995. Social and economic rights: a critical challenge. In Liebenberg, S. (ed.). *The Constitution of South Africa from a gender perspective*. Community Law Centre, University of the Western Cape: David Phillip Publishers.
- Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. New York: Sage.
- Lindgren, T., Rankin, S.H. & Rankin, W.W. 2005. Malawi women and HIV: socio-cultural factors and barriers to prevention, *Journal of Women and Health*, 41(1):69–86.
- Longino, H. E. 2002. *The fate of knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Longino, H. E. 1990. *Science as social knowledge: values and objectivity in scientific inquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lorde, A. 1984. *Sister outsider. Essays and speeches by Audre Lorde*. The Crossing Press Feminist Series.
- Ludsin, H. & Vetten, L. 2005. *Spiral of entrapment. Abused women in conflict with the law*. Johannesburg: Jacana Media Ltd.
- Luke, N. & Kurz, K.M. 2002. *Cross-generational and transactional sexual relations in sub-Saharan Africa: Prevalence of behaviour and implications for negotiating safer sexual practices*. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women (ICRW).

- Luyt, D. 2008. Governance, accountability and poverty alleviation in South Africa. *Paper delivered at the United Nations Social Forum on 2 September 2008 in Geneva, Switzerland*. [Online]. Available: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/docs/sforum/spresentations/D.Luyt.pdf> [3 November 2008].
- Machera, M. 2005. Opening a can of worms: a debate on female sexuality in the lecture theatre. In Arnfred, S. (ed.) 2005a. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 2nd edition. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri AB, p. 157–170.
- MacKinnon, C. 1993. Sex equality: differences and dominance. In Jaggar, A.M. & Rothenberg, P.S. (eds.). *Alternative theoretical accounts of the relation between women and men*. 3rd edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., p. 182–186.
- MacKinnon, C. A. 1989. *Toward a feminist theory of the state*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press.
- MacKinnon, C. 1987. *Feminism unmodified: discourses on life and law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- MacPhail, C. & Campbell, C. 2001. ‘I think condoms are good but, aai, I hate those things’: condom use among adolescents and young people in a Southern African township, *Social Science & Medicine*, 52(11):1613–1627.
- Mager, A. 1996. Sexuality, fertility and male power, *Agenda*, 28:12–24.
- Maharaj, P. & Cleland, J. 2005a. Risk perception and condom use among married or cohabiting couples in KwaZulu–Natal, South Africa, *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 31(1):24–29, March.
- Maharaj, P. & Cleland, J. 2005b. Women on top: The relative influence of wives and husbands on contraceptive use in KwaZulu–Natal, *Women & Health*, 41(2):31–41.
- Mama, A. 2005. Editorial, *Feminist Africa*, 4. [Online]. Available: <http://www.feministafrica.org/index.php/terms-of-engagement> [24 February 2009].
- Mama, A. 2004. Demythologising gender in development. *Feminist Studies in African contexts*. *IDS Bulletin*, 35, (4):121–124, October.
- Mama, A. 2001. Talking about feminism in Africa. Interview with Elaine Salo, *Agenda, African feminisms I*, 50:58–63.
- Mama, A., Pereira, C. & Manuh, T. 2005. Editorial: sexual cultures, *Feminist Africa. Sexual cultures*, 5:1–8.

Maman, S., Campbell, J., Sweat M.D. & Gielen A.C. 2000. The intersections of HIV and violence: directions for future research and interventions, *Social Science & Medicine*, 50(4):459–478.

Mansuri, G. & Rao, V. 2004. Community-based and -driven development: a critical review, *The World Bank Observer*, 19(1):1–39.

Mantell, J. E., Dworkin, S. L., Exner, T. M., Hoffman, S., Smit, J. A. & Susser, I. 2006. The promises and limitations of female-initiated methods of HIV/STI protection, *Social Science & Medicine*, 63(8):1998–2009.

Manzini, N. 2001. Sexual initiation and childbearing among adolescent girls in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, *Reproductive Health Matters*, 9(17):44–52.

Mashele, P. 2004. Traditional leadership in South Africa's new democracy, *Review of African Political Economy*, 31(100):349–354.

Mashishi, A. 2000. Wife battering: an exploration of the abuse of African women at two shelters in Johannesburg, *Society in Transition*, 31(1):82–88.

Mathews, S., Abrahams, N., Martin, L. J., Vetten, L., Van der Merwe, L. & Jewkes, R. 2004. "Every six hours a woman is killed by her intimate partner": a national study of female homicide in South Africa. MRC Policy brief, No. 5, June.

Maynard, M. 1994[2001]. 'Race', gender and the concept of 'difference' in feminist thought. In Afshar, H. & Maynard, M.: *The dynamics of 'race' and gender. Some feminist interventions*. London: Taylor and Frances, p. 9–25. Reprinted in Bhavnani, K.-K. (ed.) 2001. *Feminism & 'race'*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 121–133.

Mayring, P. 2005. Neuere Entwicklungen in der qualitativen Forschung und der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse. In Mayring, P. & Glaeser-Zikuda, G. (Hrsg.). *Die Praxis der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse*. Weinheim und Basel: Beltz, p. 7–19.

Mayring, P. 2003. *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken*. 8. Auflage. Weinheim und Basel: Beltz.

Mayring, P. 2000. *Qualitative content analysis. Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [Online Journal], 1(2), June. Available: <http://qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-e/2-00inhalt-e.htm> [15 September 2005].

Mayring, P. 1993. *Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung, Eine Anleitung zu qualitativem Denken*. 2. überarbeitete Auflage. Weinheim: Beltz.

Mayring, P. & Glaeser-Zikuda, G. (Hrsg.) 2005. *Die Praxis der qualitativen Inhaltsanalyse*. Weinheim und Basel: Beltz.

- McCann, C. R. & Kim, S.-K. (eds.) 2003. *Feminist theory reader. Local and global perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge.
- McCosker, H., Barnard, A. & Gerber, R. 2001. Undertaking sensitive research: issues and strategies for meeting the safety needs of all participants. *Forum Qualitative Social Research* [Online Journal], 2(1), February. Available: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-01/1-01mccoskeretal-e.pdf> [29 May 2007].
- McFadden, P. 2003. Sexual pleasure as feminist choice, *Feminist Africa*, 2:50–60.
- McFadden, P. 1992. Sex, sexuality and the problem of AIDS in Africa. In Meena, R. (ed.). *Gender in Southern Africa: conceptual and theoretical issues*. Harare: SAPES Books, p. 157–195.
- McNay, L. 2003. Agency, anticipation and indeterminacy in feminist theory, *Feminist Theory*, 4(2):139–148.
- McNay, L. 2000. *Gender and agency. Reconfiguring the subject in feminist and social theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press & Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- McNay, L. 1999. Gender, habitus and the field: Pierre Bourdieu and the limits of reflexivity, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 16(1):95–117.
- Meintjes, S. 2004. The implications of institutionalising gender mainstreaming: Will it mainstream or sidestream gender issue? In Welpé, I., Thege, B. & Henderson, S. (eds.). *The Gender perspective. Innovations in economy, organisations and health in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, p. 214–223.
- Meintjes, S. 1993. Dilemmas of difference, *Agenda*, 19:37–42.
- Merkens, H. 2004. Selection procedures, sampling, case construction. In Flick, U., Von Kardorff, E. & Steinke, I. (eds.). *A companion to qualitative research*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 165–171.
- Michie, J. & Padayachee, V. (eds.) 1997. *The political economy of South Africa's transition: policy perspectives in the late-1990s*. London: Dryden Press.
- Mikell, G. 2003. African feminism: toward a new politics of representation. In McCann, C. R. & Kim, S.-K. (eds.). *Feminist theory reader. Local and global perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 103–112.
- Mikell, G. 1997. *African Feminism: The politics of survival in sub-Saharan Africa*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

- Miles, L. 1992. Women, AIDS, power and heterosexual negotiation: A discourse analysis, *Agenda*, 15:14–27.
- Miles, M. & Crush, J. 1993. Personal narratives as interactive texts, *Professional Geographer*, 45(1):84–94.
- Millen, D. 1997. Some methodological and epistemological issues raised by doing feminist research on non-feminist women, *Sociological Research Online*, 2(3). Available: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/3/3.html> [22 February 2007].
- Millett, K. 1970. *Sexual politics*. New York: Avon Books.
- Minh-ha, T. 1989. *Woman, native, other. Writing, postcoloniality and feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Miriam, K. 2007. Toward a phenomenology of sex-right: reviving radical feminist theory of compulsory heterosexuality, *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 22(1):210–228.
- Mogford, S.A. 2000. The murder of the Goddess in everywoman: Mary Daly's sado-ritual syndrome and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In Hoagland, S.L. & Frye, M. (eds.). *Feminist interpretations of Mary Daly*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 132–163.
- Mohanty, C.T. 2004. *Feminism without borders. Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*, 3rd ed. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Mohanty, C.T. 1991. Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourse. In Mohanty, C.T., Russo, A. & Torres, L. (eds.). *Third world women and the politics of feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Morojele, N.K., Kachieng, M.A., Mokoko, E., Nkoko M.A., Parry, C.D.H., Nkowane, A.M., Moshia, K.M. & Saxena, S. 2006. Alcohol use and sexual behaviour among risky drinkers and bar and shebeen patrons in Gauteng province, South Africa, *Social Science & Medicine*, 62(1):217–227.
- Morrell, R. (ed.) 2001a. *Changing men in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- Morrell, R. 2001b. The times of change: men and masculinity in South Africa. In Morrell, R. (ed.). *Changing men in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, p. 3–37.

- Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K. & Spiers, J. 2002. Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2). [Online]. Available: http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/1_2Final/pdf/morseetal.pdf [2 September 2008].
- Msimang, S. 2002. Reflections on politics made personal, *Agenda, African feminisms II*, 54:3–15.
- Mugambe, L. 2006. Rethinking culture in the face of HIV/AIDS in East Africa, *Agenda*, 68:73–78.
- Municipal Demarcation Board 2007. *Capacity Assessment Report for the 2006/07 Period, District Municipality Report Bojanala District Municipality (DC37), North West*. [Online]. Available: http://www.demarcation.org.za/powers_functions2006/DCReports/2006-2007%20Capacity%20report%20DC37.pdf [26 March 2007].
- Muyinda, H., Nakuya, J., Pool, R. & Whitworth, J. 2003. Harnessing the senga institution of adolescent sex education for the control of HIV and STDs in rural Uganda, *AIDS CARE*, 15(2)159–167.
- Nadar, S. 2005. Searching the dungeons beneath our religious discourses: the case of violence against women and the ‘unholy trinity’, *Agenda*, 66:16–22.
- Nair, Y. & Campbell, C. 2008. Building partnerships to support community-led HIV/AIDS management: a case study from rural South Africa, *African Journal for AIDS Research*, 7(1):45–53.
- Naples, N.A. 2004. The outsider phenomenon. In Hesse-Biber, S.N. & Yaiser, M.L. (eds.). *Feminist perspectives on social research*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 373–381.
- Narayan, U. 1997. *Dislocating cultures. Identities, traditions, and third-world feminism*. New York and London: Routledge.
- National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2007. *HIV & AIDS and STI Strategic Plan for South Africa 2007–2011*. [Online]. Available: http://data.unaids.org/pub/ExternalDocument/2007/20070604_sa_nsp_final_en.pdf [4 February 2009].
- Nattress, N. 2004. *The moral economy of AIDS in South Africa*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Neuman, W. L. 2000. *Social research methods. Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Boston: Allyn Bacon.

- Nicholson, L.J. (ed.) 1990. *Feminism/postmodernism*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Nicholson, L.J. & Fraser, N. 1990. Social criticism without philosophy: an encounter between feminism and postmodernism. In Nicholson, L.J. (ed.). *Feminism/postmodernism*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 19–38.
- Niehaus, I. 2004. “Now everyone is doing it”: conceptualising transformations of sexual violence in the South African Lowveld. In Welpé, I., Thege, B. & Henderson, S. (eds.). *The Gender perspective. Innovations in economy, organisations and health in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, p. 368–401.
- Niehaus, I. 1992. Disharmonious spouses and harmonious siblings: conceptualising household formation among urban residents in Qwaqwa, *African Studies*, 53(1):115–135.
- Oakley, A. 1981. Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms. In Roberts, H. (ed.). *Doing feminist research*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 30–61.
- Oakley, A. 1972[1985]. *Sex, gender and society*. London: Temple Smith. Reprinted with new Introduction, London: Gower, 1985.
- Office of the Status of Women no year. *South Africa’s National Policy Framework for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality no year*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/policy/gender.pdf> [15 February 2009].
- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. 1994. STIWANISM: feminism in an African context. In Ogundipe-Leslie, M. *Re-creating ourselves. African women and critical transformation*. New Jersey: Trenton, p. 207–241.
- Ogunyemi, C. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary Black female novel in English, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 11(1):63–80.
- Olesen, V. 2005. Early millennial feminist qualitative research: challenges and contours,. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.). *The Sage Handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 217–278.
- Orubuloye, I.O., Caldwell, J.C. & Caldwell, P. 1993. African women’s control over their sexuality in an era of AIDS. A study of the Yoruba of Nigeria, *Social Science and Medicine*, 37(7):859–872.
- Osha, S. 2004. Unravelling the silences of black sexualities, *Agenda, Sexuality in Africa*, 62:92–98.
- O’Sullivan, L.F., Harrison, A., Morrell, R., Monroe-Wise, A. & Kubeka, M. 2006. Gender dynamics in the primary sexual relationships of young rural South African women and men, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 8(2):99-113.

- Oyewùmi, O. 2003a. Abiyamo: theorizing African motherhood, *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*. [Online]. Available: www.jendajournal.com/jenda/issue4/oyewumi.html [8 December 2004].
- Oyewùmi, O. 2003b. The white woman's burden: African women in Western feminist discourse. In Oyewùmi, O. (ed.). *African women & feminism. Reflecting on the politics of sisterhood*. Asmara: Africa World Press Inc., p. 25–43.
- Oyewùmi, O. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Parikh, S. 2004. Sex, lies and love letters: rethinking condoms and female agency in Uganda, *Agenda*, 62:12–20.
- Parker, R. 2001. Sexuality, culture and power in HIV/AIDS research, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30:163–179.
- Parker, R.G. & Aggleton, P. (eds.) 2007. *Culture, society and sexuality. A reader*. 2nd ed., New York and London: Routledge.
- Parker, R.G., Easton, D. & Klein, C. 2000. Structural barriers and facilitators in HIV prevention: a review of international research, *AIDS*, 14(Suppl. 1):S22–S32.
- Parsons, S. 1991. Feminist reflections on embodiment and sexuality, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 4(2):16–28.
- Pateman, C. 2002. Self-ownership and property in the person: Democraticization and a tale of two concepts, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 10(1):20–53.
- Pateman, C. 1988. *The sexual contract*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Pels, D. 2004. Strange standpoints, or how to define the situation for situated knowledge. In Harding, S. (ed.). *The feminist standpoint theory reader. Intellectual and political controversies*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 273–289.
- Pettifor, A.E., Measham, D.M., Rees, H.V. & Padian, N.S. 2004a. Sexual power and HIV risk, South Africa, *Emerging Infectious Diseases* [serial on the internet], 10(11):1996–2004, November. Available: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol10no11/04-0252.htm#cit> [11 April 2008].
- Pettifor, A.E., Rees, H.V., Steffenson, A., Hlongwa-Madikizela, L., MacPhail, C., Vermaak, K. & Kleinschmidt, I. 2004b. *HIV and sexual behaviour among young South Africans. A national survey of 15–24 year olds*. Johannesburg: Reproductive Health Research Unit (RHRU), University of Witwatersrand.

- Posel, D. 2005. The scandal of manhood: 'baby rape' and the politicization of sexual violence in post-apartheid South Africa, *Culture, Health & Sexuality, African Sexualities*, 7(3):239–252, May.
- Posel, D. 2004. “Getting the nation talking about sex”: reflections on the discursive constitution of sexuality in South Africa since 1994, *Agenda*, 62:53–63.
- Posel, D., Kahn, K. & Walker, L. 2007. Living with death in a time of AIDS: a rural South African case study, *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 35(3):138–146.
- Poulin, M. 2007. Sex, money, and premarital partnerships in southern Malawi, *Social Science and Medicine*, 65(11):2383–2393.
- Prata, N., Morris, L., Mazive, E., Vahidnia, F. & Stehr, M. 2006. Relationship between HIV risk perception and condom use: evidence from a population-based survey in Mozambique, *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 32(4):192–200, December.
- Public Service Commission 2007. *Report on an audit of government's poverty reduction programmes and projects*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.psc.gov.za> [3 November 2008].
- Pulerwitz, J., Gortmaker, S.L. & DeJong, W. 2000. Measuring sexual relationship power in HIV/STD research, *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, April. [Online]. Available: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_2000_April/ai_65576714 [12 May 2005].
- Quina, K., Harlow, L.L., Morokoff, P.J., Burkholder, G. & Deiter, P.J. 2000. Sexual communication in relationships: when words speak louder than actions; *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, April, [Online]. Available: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2294/is_/ai_65576710 [12 May 2005].
- Rakoczy S. 2004. Religion and violence: the suffering of women, *Agenda*, 61:29–35.
- Ramazanoglu, C. & Holland, J. 2002. *Feminist methodology: challenges and choices*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ramphela, M. 1989. The dynamics of gender politics in the hostels of Cape Town: another legacy of the South African migrant labour system, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15(3):393–414, April.
- Ratele, K. 2001. Between ‘Ouens’: Everyday makings of black masculinity. In Morrell, R. (ed.). *Changing men in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, p. 239–253.
- Reddy, V. 2004. Sexuality in Africa: some trends, transgressions and tirades, *Agenda*, 62:3–11.

- Rehle, T., Shisana, O., Pillay, V., Zuma, K., Puren, A. & Parker, W. 2007. National HIV incidence measures – new insights into the South African epidemic, *South African Medical Journal*, 97(2):194–199.
- Reid, G. & Walker, L. 2005. Editorial introduction: Sex and secrecy: a focus on African sexualities, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 7(3):185–194, May.
- Reid, G. & Walker, L. 2004. Sex then and now: exploring South Africa’s sexual histories, *South African Historical Journal*, 50:77–83.
- Reinharz, S. 1992. *Feminist methods in social research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rich, A. 1986a. Compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence. In Rich, A.. *Blood, Bread, and Poetry. Selected prose 1979–1985*. New York & London: Norton & Co Ltd., p. 23–75. (Original article written in 1980).
- Rich, A. 1986b[2003]. Notes toward a politics of location. In Rich A. *Blood, Bread, and Poetry. Selected prose 1979–1985*. New York & London: Norton & Co Ltd., p. 210–231. Reprinted in McCann, C.R. & Kim S-K (eds.) 2003. *Feminist Theory Reader, Local and Global Perspectives*, New York and London: Routledge, p. 447–459.
- Richards, L. 2005. *Handling qualitative data. A practical guide*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications
- Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (eds.) 2003. *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. & Elam, G. 2003. Designing and selecting samples. In Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (eds.). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 77–108.
- Ritchie, J., Spencer, L. & O’Connor, W. 2003. Carrying out qualitative analysis. In Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (eds.). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 220–262.
- Ritsert, J. 1972. *Inhaltsanalyse und Ideologiekritik. Ein Versuch über kritische Sozialforschung*. Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Robins, S. 2008. Sexual politics and the Zuma rape trial, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(2):411–427, June.
- Rogerson,, C.M. 1999. Local economic development and urban poverty alleviation: the experience of post-apartheid South Africa, *HABITAT INTERNATIONAL*, 23(4):511–534.

- Rose, D. 2001. *Revisiting feminist research methodologies: A working paper*. [Online]. Available: http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/revisiting/revisiting_e.pdf [22 February 2007].
- Rouse, J. 2004. Feminism and the social construction of scientific knowledge. In Harding, S. (ed.). *The feminist standpoint theory reader. Intellectual and political controversies*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 353–374.
- Rubin, G. 1975. The traffic in women: notes on the “political economy” of sex. In Reiter, R. (ed.). *Toward an anthropology of women*. New York: Monthly Review Press, p. 157–210.
- Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I.S. 2005. *Qualitative interviewing. The art of hearing data*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Russell, M. 2003. Understanding black households: the problem, *Social Dynamics*, 29(2):5–47.
- Russell, M. 1994. Do Blacks live in nuclear family households? An appraisal of Steyn’s work on urban family structure in South Africa, *South African Sociological Review*, 6(2):56–67.
- Sakala, F. 1998. Violence against women in Southern Africa. In McFadden, P. (ed.). *Southern Africa in transition. A gendered perspective*. Harare: Sapes Books, p. 27–65.
- Salo, E. & Gqola; P.D. 2006. Editorial: Subaltern sexualities, *Feminist Africa*, 6:1–6.
- Saltzman Chafetz, J. 2004. Bridging feminist theory and research methodology, *Journal of Family Issues*, 25(7): 963–977, October.
- Sathiparsal, R. 2005. ‘It is better to beat her’: male youth in rural KwaZulu-Natal speak on violence in relationships, *Agenda*, 66:79–88.
- Schmidt, C. 2004. The analysis of semi-structured interviews. In Flick, U., Von Kardorff, E. & Steinke, I. (eds.). *A companion to qualitative research*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 253–258.
- Schoeman, M. 2004. Volume introduction: where are the women and how are they today? An overview of the SADC region. In Welpel, I., Thege, B. & Henderson, S. (eds.). *The Gender perspective. Innovations in economy, organisations and health in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, p. 10–33.
- Schoepf, B.G. 2001. International AIDS research in anthropology: taking a critical perspective on the crisis, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30:335–361.

- Schoepf, B. 1995. Culture, sex research and AIDS prevention in Africa. In ten Brummelhuis, H. & Herdt, G. (eds). *Culture and sexual risk: Anthropological Perspectives on AIDS*. Amsterdam: Gordon Breach, p. 29–51.
- Selikow, T.A., Zulu, B. & Cedras, E. 2002. The ingagara, the regte and the cherry: HIV/AIDS and youth culture in contemporary urban townships, *Agenda*, 53:22–32.
- Serote, P., Mager, A. & Budlender, D. 2001. Gender and development. In Coetze, J.K., Graaf, J., Hendricks, F. & Wood, G. (eds.). *Development, theory, policy and practice*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, p. 155–172.
- Setsuko Hendriksen, E., Pettifor, A., Lee, S.-J., Coates, T.J. & Rees, H.V. 2007. Predictors of condom use among young adults in South Africa: the Reproductive Health and HIV Research Unit National Youth Survey, *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(7):1241–1248.
- Sharma, R. & Bilimoria, P. 2000. Where silence burns: sati (suttee) in India, Mary Daly's gynocritique, and resistant spirituality. In Hoagland, S.L. & Frye, M. (eds.). *Feminist interpretations of Mary Daly*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, p. 322–348.
- Shefer, T. & Foster, D. 2001. Discourses on women's (hetero)sexuality and desire in a South Africa local context, *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 3(4):375–390.
- Sheffield, C. 2004. Sexual terrorism. In Kimmel, M.S. & Plante, R.F. (eds.). *Sexualities. Identities, behaviors, and society*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 409–424.
- Shisana, O. & Simbayi, L. 2002. *Nelson Mandela/HSRC study of HIV/AIDS. South African national HIV prevalence, behavioural risks and mass media. Household survey 2002*. Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council Publishers.
- Silberschmidt, M. 2005. Masculinities, sexuality and socio-economic change in rural and urban East-Africa. In Arnfred, S. (ed.) 2005a. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 2nd edition. Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri AB, p. 233–248.
- Silverman, D. 2001. *Doing qualitative research. A practical handbook*, 2nd ed. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Simone, A. 1998. *Prospects for local economic development strategies in Winterveld. Case Studies on LED and Poverty*. Department of Constitutional Development, Isandla Institute, Pretoria, p. 271–299.
- Smith, D. 1987. *The everyday world as problematic*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Snape, D. & Spencer, L 2003. The foundations of qualitative research. In Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (eds.). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 1–23.

South Africa. Department of Education 2006. *Monitoring and evaluation report on the impact and outcomes of the education system on South Africa's population: evidence from household surveys*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.education.gov.za/dynamic/dynamic.aspx?pageid=329&catid=10&category=Reports&legtype=null> [17 November 2008].

South Africa. Department of Education 2000. *Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment*. Quality Assurance and National Institute for Lifelong Learning Development. [Online]. Available: <http://www.education.gov.za/dynamic/dynamic.aspx?pageid=329&catid=10&category=Reports&legtype=null> [17 November 2008].

South Africa. Department of Health 1999. *The 1998 South African Demographic and Health Survey. Full Report*. Pretoria: South African Department of Health.

South Africa. Department of Health 2007. *Report national HIV and syphilis prevalence survey South Africa 2006*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/reports/2007/hiv/index.html> [23 October 2007].

South Africa. Department of Health 2006. *National HIV and syphilis antenatal seroprevalence survey in South Africa 2005*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/reports/2005/hiv.pdf> [29 August 2008].

South Africa. Department of Land Affairs 1997. *Rural Development Framework*. May. [Online]. Available: <http://www.anc.org.za/rdp/rdevframe.html> [24 April 2009].

South Africa. The Presidency 2008. *Towards a fifteen year review*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/main.asp?include=docs/15year/main.html> [28 April 2009].

Spelman, E. V. 1988[2001]. Gender & race: the ampersand problem in feminist thought. In Spelman, E. V. (ed.). *Inessential women*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 114–132. Reprinted in Bhavnani, K.-K. (ed.) 2001. *Feminism & 'race'*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 74–88.

Spivak, G. 1988. Can the subaltern speak? In Nelson, C. & Grossberg, L. (eds.). *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*. London: Macmillan, p. 271–313.

Stake, R. E. 2005. Qualitative case studies. In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S (eds.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 443–466.

- Stake, R. E. 1995. *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Statistics South Africa 2009. *Quarterly Labour Force Survey Quarter 4, 2008*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02114thQuarter2008.pdf> [28 March 2009].
- Statistics South Africa 2008. *Community Survey 2007. Basic results: municipalities*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.statssa.gov.za> [27 April 2009].
- Statistics South Africa 2005. Census 2001: stages in the life cycle of South Africans. [Online]. Available: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/HTML/C2001Stages.pdf> [25 April 2009].
- Statistics South Africa 2003. Census 2001, Census in Brief. [Online]. Available: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/CInBrief/CIB2001.pdf> [9 November 2007].
- Stetz, M.D. 2003. Wartime sexual violence against women: a feminist response. In McCann, C.. & Kim, S.-K. (eds.). *Feminist theory reader. Local and global perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 138–145.
- Steyn, A. F. 1993. *Family structures in the RSA. Co-operative research programme on marriage and family life*. HSRC, Pretoria.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J.M. 1990. *Basics of qualitative research, grounded theory, procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park/London/New Delhi: Sage.
- Sunde, J. & Bozalek, V. 1993. (Re)searching difference, *Agenda*, 19:29–36.
- Susser, I. & Stein, Z. 2000. Culture, sexuality, and women's agency in the prevention of HIV/AIDS in southern Africa, *American Journal of Public Health*, 90(7):1042–1048.
- Tamale, S. 2005. Eroticism, sensuality and “women's secrets” among the Baganda: a critical analysis, *Feminist Africa. Sexual cultures*, 5:9–36.
- Tellis, W. 1997. Introduction to case study, *The Qualitative Report. An online journal dedicated to qualitative research and critical inquiry*, 3(2), July. <http://0-www.nova.edu.innopac.up.ac.za/ssss/QR/QR3-2/index.html> [3 April 2007].
- Thege, B. 2007. Aspects of the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS in Kenya. In Welpe, I. & Owino, P. (eds.). *The intersection of human capital, gender and HIV/AIDS in the African context*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, p. 15–39.
- Thege, B. 2004. Introduction to Gender Mainstreaming and organisations. In Welpe, I., Thege, B. & Henderson, S. (eds.). *The Gender perspective. Innovations in economy, organisations and health in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, p. 160–175.

Thege, B. 2002. Gender Mainstreaming in the EU. In Institute for Women's and Gender Studies of the University of Pretoria. *Gender Mainstreaming Practices 1. Examples from the EU and South Africa*, Occasional Paper No 2, p. 3–23.

Thornton, R. 2002. Flows of 'sexual substance' and representation of the body in South Africa. *Unpublished paper presented at a conference in Arusha, Tanzania*, 8–12 April. Cited with permission of Prof Thornton.

Thorpe, M. 2002. Masculinity in an HIV intervention, *Agenda*, 53:61–68.

Ting-Toomey, S. 1999. *Communicating across cultures*. New York: The Guilford Press.

Ting-Toomey, S. & Oetzel, J.G. 2001. *Managing intercultural conflict effectively*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Titscher, S. Meyer, M., Wodak, R. & Vetter, E. 2000. *Methods of text and discourse analysis*. London: Sage.

Tladi, L.S. 2006. Poverty and HIV/AIDS in South Africa: an empirical contribution, *Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS*, 3(1):369–381, May.

Tong, R.P. 1998. *Feminist thought: a more comprehensive introduction*. 2nd ed. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Towns, A. & Adams, P. 2000. "If I really loved him enough, he would be okay": women's accounts of male partner violence, *VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN*, 6(6):558–585.

UNAIDS/Department of Policy, Strategy and Research no year. *Local responses to HIV/AIDS: the global agenda*. [Online]. Available: http://data.unaids.org/publications/IRC-pub03/keynote_en.htm [16 July 2009].

UNAIDS/WHO 2008. *Sub-Saharan Africa AIDS epidemic update 2007. Regional Summary*. [Online]. Available: http://data.unaids.org/pub/Report/2008/jc1526_epibriefs_ssafrica_en.pdf 29 August 2008].

United Nations Development Programme 2000. *South Africa Human Development Report*. [Online]. Available: <http://www.undp.org/povertyreport/countryprofiles/safrica1.html> [9 November 2007].

Van Marle, K. 2004. A tentative response to Gender Mainstreaming inspired by some feminist reflections. In Welpe, I., Thege, B. & Henderson, S. (eds.). *The Gender perspective. Innovations in economy, organisations and health in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, p. 198–213.

- Van Vuuren, A. 1997. Family structure in black informal settlements. *In* The strengths and problems of black families in informal settlements. Pretoria, HSRC.
- Varga, C.A. 1997. Sexual decision-making and negotiation in the midst of AIDS: youth in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, *Health Transition Review*, Supplement 3, 7:45–67.
- Varga, C.A. & Makubalo, L. 1996. Sexual non–negotiation, *Agenda*, 28:31–38.
- Versteeg, M. & Murray, M. 2008. Condom use as part of the wider HIV prevention strategy: experiences from communities in the North West Province, South Africa, *Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS*, 5(2):83–93, July.
- Vetten, L. & Bhana, K. 2001. *Violence, vengeance and gender: a preliminary investigation into the links between violence against women and HIV/AIDS in South Africa*. Centre for the Study of Violence & Reconciliation (CSVr). Johannesburg.
- Walby, S. 1990. *Theorizing patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Walker, A. 1983. *In search of our mother's gardens*. San Diego: Harcourt Press.
- Walker, L. 2005. Men behaving differently: South African men since 1994, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 7(3):225–238, May.
- Walker, L., Reid, G. & Cornell, M. 2004. *Waiting to happen. HIV/AIDS in South Africa – the bigger picture*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books.
- Weedon, C. 1999. *Feminism, theory and the politics of difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wharton, A.S. 1991. Structure and agency in socialist–feminist theory, *Gender and Society*, Special Issue: Marxist Feminist Theory, 5(3):373–389, September.
- Whelehan, I. 1995. *Modern feminist thought. From the Second Wave to 'post–feminism'*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Whisson, M. 2004. AIDS in Africa – the mystification of a disease. *In* Welpe, I., Thege, B. & Henderson, S. (eds.). *The Gender perspective. Innovations in economy, organisations and health in the Southern African Development Community (SADC)*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, p. 354–367.
- White, C., Woodfield, C. & Ritchie, J. 2003. Reporting and presenting qualitative data. *In* Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (eds.). *Qualitative research practice. A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 288–320.

WHO/World Health Organisation 2005. *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*. Switzerland (Summary report). [Online]. Available: www.who.int/gender/violence/who_multicountry_study/summary_report/summary_report_English2.pdf [16 March 2007].

WHO/World Health Organisation 2004. *Intimate partner violence and HIV/AIDS – violence against women and HIV/AIDS: critical intersections*. Information Bulletin Series, Number 1.

Williams, M. & May, T. 1996. *Introduction to the philosophy of social research*. London: UCL Press.

Witzel, A. 2000. The problem-centered interview, *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [Online Journal], 1(1), January. [Online]. Available: <http://qualitative-research.net/fqs> [15 September 2005].

Wolf, D. (1996). *Feminist dilemmas in field work*. Boulder, Oxford: Westview Press.

Wood, K. & Jewkes, R. 2006. Blood blockages and scolding nurses: barriers to adolescent contraceptive use in South Africa, *Reproductive Health Matter*, 14(27):109–118.

Wood, K. & Jewkes, R. 2001. Dangerous love: reflections on violence among Xhosa township youth. In Morrell, R. (ed.). *Changing men in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, p. 317–340.

Wood, K., Maforah, F. & Jewkes, R. 1998. “He forced me to love him”: putting violence on adolescent sexual health agendas, *Social Science & Medicine*, 47(2):233–242.

Yin, R. K. 2003. *Applications of case study research*. Second edition (Applied Social Research Methods), Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. K. 2002. *Case study research. Design and methods*. Third edition. (Applied Social Research Methods), Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Zalewski, M. 2000. *Feminism after postmodernism. Theorising through practice*. London, New York: Routledge.

Ziehl, S. 2001. Black South Africans do live in nuclear family households – a response to Russell. *Paper presented at SASA*, 1–4 July 2001, Unisa, Pretoria.

Zinn, M.B. & Dill, B.T. 2003. Theorizing difference from multiracial feminism. In McCann, C.R. & Kim, S.-K. (eds.). *Feminist theory reader. Local and global perspectives*. New York and London: Routledge, p. 353–361.

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Quality of current relationship

- Can you describe your understanding of a good relationship? ... and a bad?
- What do you expect from a relationship?
- Are you having a relationship?
- For how long now?
- Do you enjoy the relationship? Why (not)?
- What do you appreciate about your partner?
- What do you expect from your partner?
- What is the most difficult thing for you in your relationship?
- Is there something like a turning point in your relationship when it became either better or worse, what happened?

Power strategies used in current intimate relationship

- When it comes to decision-making (e.g. about money) who makes the decision, how do you make decisions?
- What happens if you have a different opinion as your partner?
- How do you clear your conflicts?
- How would you describe where you are stronger in the relationship and where your partner?
- When you are down, what helps you, what gives you strength (back)?
- With whom can you speak about what happens in your home?

Knowledge about sexuality, personal experiences

- What do you think is important for a woman in a sexual relationship? ... for a man?
- Can you tell me who taught you about sexuality?
- What did this person/those persons tell you?
- If you think about your daughter (if you had a daughter) what wishes do you have for her when it comes to her sexual experiences?
- With whom do you talk about sexual matters?

Experience of sexual violence

- Have you ever had a bad sexual experience?
- Would you like to tell me what happened?
- Could you tell anybody about that experience/s?

HIV/AIDS

- What do you know about HIV/AIDS?
- Does HIV/AIDS have an impact on your life?
- Do you worry about getting HIV?
- Do you worry about your children?
- Do you speak with them about HIV/AIDS, what do you tell them?

Final question:

- Can you make a statement of what you think about the relationship between women and men in general?

Is there anything left you would like to say?

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

The focus groups discussed the following questions:

- What do you regard as appropriate behaviour for a woman/wife in your culture?
- What do you regard as misbehaviour?
- What do you see as proper female sexual conduct?
- Why do women not leave abusive husbands/boyfriends?
- What can a woman do to get out of an abusive relationship?
- Why do many women not share their experiences with other women?
- If a woman wants to lead a life on her own, what will she do?
- Why is HIV/AIDS still a hidden issue in many SA communities?
- How can women be protected from infection?

Appendix C: Biographical Questionnaire

1. Which ethnic group do you belong to? _____

2. What is your age in years? _____

3. What is your current marital status?

- married, legally
- married under customary law,
 - polygamous union
- never married
- widowed
- divorced
- cohabiting
- single

4. Do you have children?

- yes
- no

5. If yes how many? _____

6. Who lives currently in your household?

6. What is your highest educational qualification?

- Grade 1 & 2 & Std 1
- Std 2
- Std 3
- Std 4
- Std 5
- Std 6
- Std 7
- Std 8
- Std 9
- Std 10
- Std 10
- Bachelor/Honours
- Master's
- PhD
- Other _____

7. To what church/faith do you belong? _____

8. What is your average household income per month?

- None
- Less than R200
- R200 – R399
- R400 – R599
- R600 – R799
- R800 – R999
- R1 000 – R1 199
- R2 000 – R1 399
- R1 400 – R1 599
- Other _____

9. Occupation: _____