

Understanding and Conceptualizing Transactional Sex in Sub-Saharan Africa

Presented to the LINEA Community of Practice
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Background

- Toward work with STRIVE consortium
- Purpose (s)
 - Review State of Knowledge on how transactional sex(TS) is understood or conceptualized in SSA
 - Especially among young women
 - Contribute to understanding of role of transactional sex for young women’s vulnerability to HIV
 - (for LINEA) Understand where exploitation fits within discourses on transactional sex

Transactional Sex

HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS

A history of “transactional sex” as a concept

- Emerged in context of anthropological research from sub-Saharan Africa
 - Within critique of role/meaning of CSW within SSA for HIV (e.g. de Zaldondo, 1991; Day, 1988; White, 1990; Standing, 1992)

*“The consumerist nature of sexual relationships at present is generally acceptable in Ghana, but what some Western researchers (Bleek 1976) find difficult to understand is that the **transactional** element involved is different from prostitution in the classic Western sense.”* (page 137) Ankomah, 1992



...A history of TS (2)

- ❁ Some literature also responded to notions of a promiscuous “African sexuality” (Caldwell, 1989)
 - Emphasized the role of poverty and gender inequality in structuring women’s involvement in exchange-based relationships (Schoepf, 1988; Standing, 1992)
- ❁ Efforts followed to distinguish ‘prostitution’ from more informal exchange-based relationships → “transactional sex”
- ❁ Research on TS has proliferated
 - Social science and critical public health have contributed to complex understanding of practice

Scope of Literature Review

- Examined all literature on ‘transactional sex’ and related terms within sub-Saharan Africa
 - 7 databases; 16 organizations; 12 specific journals
- In total under 12,000 titles of articles and reports were retrieved
 - Of these, just under 700 titles were retrieved for further review
 - In all, for studies on TS in SSA, we included:
 - 289 studies

STRIVE Working Definition

- ⊞ Reviewed definitions of transactional sex
- ⊞ Developed working definition:
 - *Transactional sex refers to a sexual relationship or act(s), outside of marriage or sex work, structured by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material benefit or status. While driven primarily by instrumental intentions, transactional relationships may also include emotional intimacy.*

Economic and Socio- Cultural Processes of Globalization

Distal

Poverty

Gendered labor markets

Change in Marriage and kinship systems

Women's Status in society

Economic Inequality

Consumer Culture

Proximate

Household Characteristics

Relationship Dynamics; Power

Family and parental Influence

Male Provider Norm

Peer Influence/ Pressure

Individual

Socio-Demographics; SE Endowments

Gendered Beliefs/ Expectations

Individual Risk profile, Experience

Transactional Sex

Gender Inequality

Main Themes

Themes (and Paradigms)	
Survival (poverty, subsistence)	Victim (vulnerability, coercion)
Consumption (consumer/ mobility)	Agency (power, agent/agency)
Income Inequality	Gender (Inequality, dynamics)
Love (affect, emotion, caring)	Masculinity (power, roles – provider)
Peers (pressure)	Intergenerational sex
Globalization	

Reducing themes to major Paradigms

- ❁ Reduced 11 themes into three major “paradigms” or “framings”
 - Also could be described as major facets of TS
 - Vulnerable victim : Victim, Survival (includes poverty)
 - Upwardly mobile sexual agent: Agency , Consumption, Globalization
 - Demonstration of Love: Love, masculinity
- ❁ Other themes cross-cutting: intergenerational sex, peers, gender inequality
- ❁ Note- victim versus agent not new (Silberschmidt & Rasch, 2001 and MANY others)

Part 5:

CONCEPTUALIZING TRANSACTIONAL SEX

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Vulnerable Victim:
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Paradigms: Vulnerable victim

- ❁ Emphasizes women's vulnerability, poverty, and reliance on TS toward accessing basic needs
- ❁ Sub-Themes
 - Gendered poverty- women's economic dependence on men → survival sex
 - Vulnerability in TS results from dominant or 'hegemonic masculinity'
 - Women as coerced into sex, and as victims of exploitation
 - Especially girls as victims of older male sexual predation
- ❁ Shift from Academia → Practitioner perspective
 - Reports from NGOs (Guttmacher, World Fish) or commissioned for Donors, Agencies (DFID, USAID, UNAIDS)
 - Papers assessing association b/t abuse/rape/forced sex and TS

...Vulnerable victim

Neema et al, 2007; Uganda (Guttmacher)

*“Profile of a **Coercive Transactional Relationship**”: A rural, out-of-school 17-year-old female related how the financial dependency that she had on her partner, who was 15 years older than she, **trapped her in a physically dangerous and emotionally damaging relationship***

Njue, 2011; Kenya (BMC Public Health)

*“Young girls are **coerced** into sexual activities with older men for **survival** and to access material goods. Sometimes the sexual exchange is to the benefit of the parent or guardian, and not the **victim** herself.”*

Lungu, 2010 - World Fish

*While 15% of women **reported** being coerced for sex by some fishermen in return for fish, 2.5% of women **admitted** having voluntarily requested sex in return for fish due to poverty and lack of food.*

The Vulnerable Victim

Increasingly Contested Discourse:

- Most react to this paradigm to suggest women have at least some agency

“The literature reviewed and presented here suggests that many girls ***[are] not entirely victims***, yet not entirely in control of their sexual relationships. There may be considerable sexual relationship bargaining, yet it ***occurs within a setting of significant gender power imbalance.***”
(Nancy Luke, 2003, SFP)

- Acknowledge highly constrained choice/ context of gender inequality

“The activities of flirting, partner selection and managing multiple boyfriends could suggest substantial agency and degrees of freedom that did not in fact exist. Within relationships women’s agency was highly constrained by the structural dimensions of their lives, including an overarching narrative of patriarchy, age hierarchy and the socio-economic context of severe poverty of the Eastern Cape.” (Jewkes and Morell, 2012)

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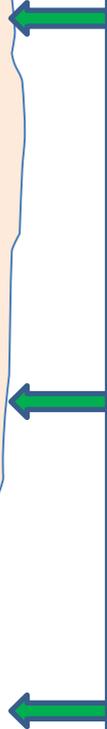
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Transactional Sex

Sexual Agent for Consumption

Gender Inequality



Paradigms: Upwardly Mobile Consumer

- ⊗ Emphasizes TS among not so poor young women who seek relationships to access modern goods toward socio-economic mobility
 - Related terms: consumerism, modernity, aspirations, globalization, relative deprivation, agency, erotic power
- ⊗ Challenges and Contests Vulnerable Victim Paradigm
 - Not just for survival and ‘basic needs,’ but ‘stuff of modernity’
 - Emphasis on women’s agency, as opposed to victimhood.
 - About social capital as well as economic capital
- ⊗ More common in more recent studies, but there are exceptions (e.g. Ankomah, 1998; Meekers and Calves, 1997)

... Upwardly Mobile Consumers

Groes-Green, 2012 (urban Mozambique)

- “...*transactional sexual relationships ...[are] said to be growing, as sexual economies expand in the wake of changing gender structures and deepening **social inequality** sparked by regional economic reforms (Groes-Green 2010; Cole 2004). Coming from poor backgrounds and entering Maputo’s **burgeoning consumer culture**, transactional sex ...was also a way for curtidoras to acquire a better standard of living and get **access to luxuries** like mobile phones, clothes, and accessories.”*

Leclerc-Madlala, 2002 (young women, urban South Africa)

- “*Using their sexuality to access goods and services is construed as a pragmatic adaptation to modern and costly urban life.*”

... Upwardly Mobile Consumers

- ☘ Draws into question morality – paradigm can be shaming

Kuate-Defo, 2004 (review of literature)

- “...sugar daddy girls **are not necessarily poor**, since they sometimes just **like to look fashioned and privileged** among their **peers** or pride themselves in sleeping with the most influential (financially or administratively) men of their communities..”
- Women transformed into consumers (Mojola, 2014)
- Importance of material symbols to afford social mobility (Cole, 2004; Hunter, 2010)

- ☘ Missing – Affect in these relationships

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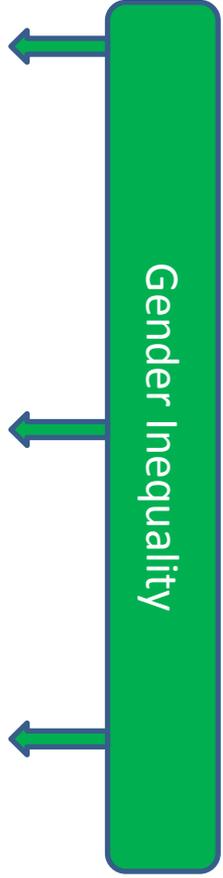
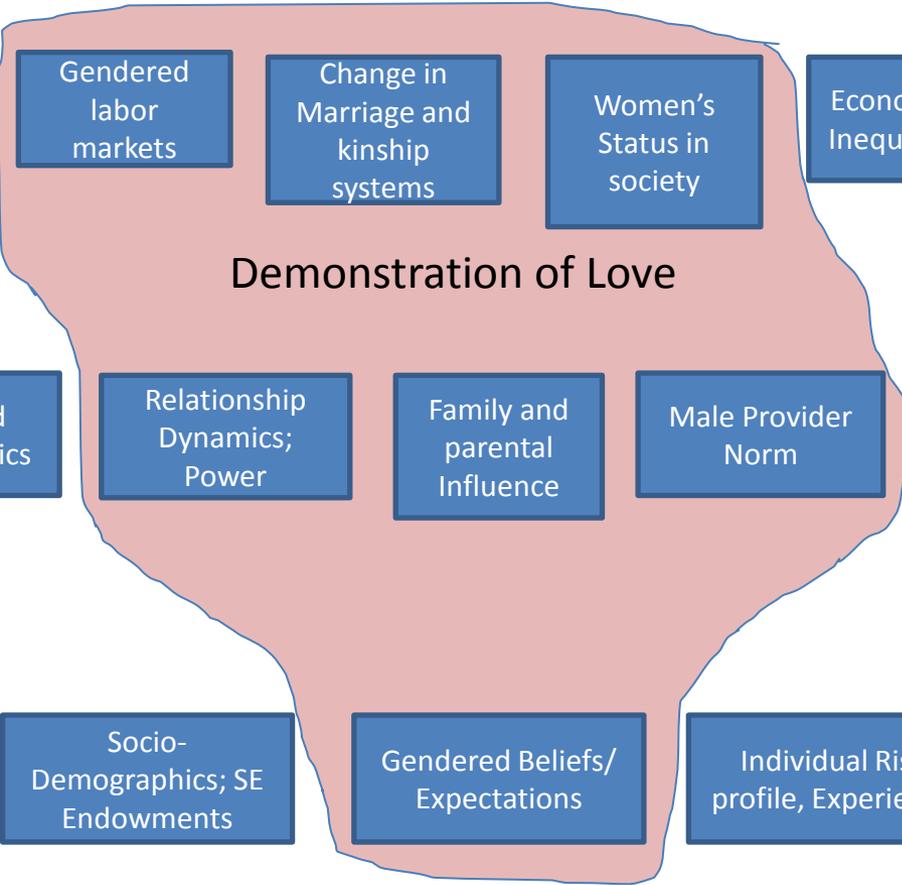
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Paradigms: Demonstrations of Love

- Emphases: men's provision of material and financial support is a symbol of commitment/gesture of love
- Re-introduces affect embedded in exchange relationships
- Assesses transactions in romantic relationships
 - Questions 'exoticism' of exchange in relationships in SSA
 - "...affection and material support are inseparable (to love is to give, and, without giving, love does not exist)" (Mains, 2013)
 - Everywhere! (Mojola, 2014)
 - Money is a language of love
 - *"How would I know he likes me if he does not buy me nice things?"* (Hoefnagel, 2012- University student, Uganda)
 - *"To show her I was the man of real love, I gave her almost K50 every week."* (from Poulin, 2007 – rural Malawi)

...Demonstrations of Love

Patriarchy and Provision

- “Patriarchal bargain” basis for exchange in relationships
 - Men provide material and financial support, women provide sexual and domestic services
- Masculinity = Provision
 - Men are expected to provide – how and in what ways has changed
 - Both men and women uphold male provider role : “Girls’ ideals of **love** are tied to their **aspirations towards middle-class consumerism**. Upholding **provider masculinity** is a strategic means to claim money, fashionable clothes and prestige. ...Love is produced by particular sets of economic and social circumstances through which **gender inequalities** are reproduced.” (Bhana, urban SA, 2011)

Limits to love

- Risks of contesting the patriarchal bargain:

*If he ... buys you stuff, he buys, he buys... and you always take it, and then he asks you...to have sex, and you refuse. You are obliged... In the end, he will force you because you always refuse, **you spent his money**. (Stoebenau et al, 2011)*

- ‘Putting men in a bottle’

Evoking forces of intimacy can make young women and their partners vulnerable to “falling in love,” which threatens their sense of control and shows that neither partner is immune to emotional aspects of sexual–economic liaisons. (Groes-Green, 2013)

Impacts on Interventions

UNAIDS, 2004 (South Africa) – Vulnerable Victims

The report provides recommendation "to create awareness campaigns on the **inappropriate, abusive** and often illegal character of relationships between older men and teenage girls, **promoting the shaming of 'sugar daddies'** while **protecting the identities of the girls** and reaffirming men who do not engage in such practices..."

Cockcroft, 2010 (Southern Africa)-Consumers/Agents

More promising approaches might include **making older men aware of the ridicule they attract** from the young women, and helping young women to find **alternative ways of financial support** and the self-worth needed to resist peer pressure .

Bhana, 2011; (South Africa)- Demonstrations of Love

"**Prevention programmes** for young people **must attend** not only to **social structures of power, gender norms** and **material inequalities**, but also to **young people's ideologies of love**, which are expressive of agency, constraint and enduring gender inequalities."

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Demonstration of Love

... for Consumption

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In Summary

- ❁ **Vulnerable victim or Powerful Agent; Victim and Agent**
 - Gender power imbalance, age disparity, victim, powerless
 - Agency, power, manipulation
 - Constrained agency, limited power

- ❁ **Poverty and survival or Inequality and relative deprivation; or both**
 - Sex for survival or basic needs, sex b/c there is no choice
 - Sex for social mobility in modern world; sex as powerful resource for social and economic status in unequal world

- ❁ **Money or Love; Money and Love; Money IS love**
 - Materiality, consumerism
 - Love, caring in capitalist space
 - Masculinity = provider; Provision = love