

## ACRONYMS

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



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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Literature Review**

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Map of Zimbabwe showing the major cities in the country



Source: CIA World Factbook

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

## **Research Methodology**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

### **Outline of Thesis**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## Chapter Two

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Between laughs, she explained:

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

Saru’s take on the issue was simple:

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Me: Really?

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

Me: And it works?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Conclusion**

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

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

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



### Chapter 3

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

Relationships of exchange have long excited anthropologists, resulting in the seminal works of Mauss (1954), Malinowski (1961) and Sahlins (1965), among others. However, it is those that entail exchanges in women, and indeed exchanges in women’s bodies, that continue to baffle and intrigue (Levi-Strauss 1969; Rubin 1975; also Strathern 1988). In this chapter, I focus on sexual-economic exchange relationships—which are popularly referred to as ‘transactional sex’ relationships in the HIV and AIDS literature—which exist at the UZ. My intention in this regard is two-fold: to examine what exactly is ‘transacted’ (or exchanged) in transactional sex, other than—or in addition to—sex and money; and to examine how the transacting parties manage the ‘exchange’ relationship. Women’s sexual agency and the association of sex with adventure and power, themes that I introduced in the previous chapter, continue to be the subjects of primary interest in this chapter. Only this time my analysis goes beyond female students’ pursuit of sexual pleasure to examine other aspects of active female sexuality as exhibited by female students at the UZ. In the last sections of the chapter I examine the phenomenon of pimping<sup>5</sup> at the institution in order to illustrate what happens when a third party enters what is typically considered a ‘dyadic transaction between self-interested individuals’

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sugar daddies, at the UZ as elsewhere, seem to be unpopular with everyone else but the young women that they date. Sugar daddies evoke negative emotions in many people, as they are viewed as predators who will readily prey on unsuspecting and gullible young woman in order to satisfy their own selfish sexual needs (Niekerk 2001; Kim et al 2001); they are also often seen as primarily responsible for the high rates of HIV infections among teenage girls (Joint Report by UNAIDS, UNFPA and UNIFEM 2004). At the UZ, Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* are unpopular among male students for a number of reasons. First, they are seen as ‘stealing’ potential sexual and romance partners away. Second, many Big *Dharas* and *NABAs* are either politicians within the ruling party, ZANU-PF, or they are businessmen with close ties to the ruling party<sup>6</sup>. Most male students strongly resent the presence of ZANU-PF on the UZ campus because of the party’s repressive policies and autocratic mode of governance. However, whereas most people see Big *Dhara/NABA* relationships purely in terms of exploitation, the discussion that follows clearly shows that the parties involved often experience the exchange relationship in much more complex ways.

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

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

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



“I don’t even know what drove me to be in that relationship, ‘coz my mother’s sister [owns] a salon. She always says if you want to have a new hairstyle, come to me. If you have got something you need [sic], come to me. My brother works for some NGOs<sup>7</sup> [and he also says] if you have anything, some problems, come to me. I’ll give you anything that you need. My mother is a teacher, of course, but she’s [also] a florist. She always sends me money. Of course, I just need to be flashy on campus. That’s what I wanted” – Tendai, 2<sup>nd</sup> year Arts student

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

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

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<sup>7</sup> i.e. non-governmental organisations

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

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

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



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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

### **Big *Dharas* and Pimp-mediated transactional sex**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

From my various conversations, it seems that most male students were introduced to pimping by Big *Dharas* and *NABAs*, after which the former then recruited their male friends. The male student I met at the Catholic discussion forum, for instance, claimed that a Big *Dhara* once offered him a ride from the city centre to the UZ campus. When they got to campus, the Big *Dhara* had apparently asked him for help in finding a girlfriend on campus. The Big *Dhara* further explained that the male student's assistance would not go unrewarded. The Catholic student explained, 'I did not take him up on his offer, but that is just how easy it is to get involved in this practice'. He was also of the opinion that it was mostly those men who were unfamiliar with the UZ who engaged the services of a pimp. Other students, like Jabu, had relatives who were in politics or in business and so had relatively easy access to influential and wealthy men<sup>8</sup>. Jabu claimed to have six cabinet ministers among his clientele and this was corroborated by Justice, who pointed out that Jabu's brother had connections in government. Most pimps,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

### **Interrogating the Pimp-Big *Dhara* Relationship**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Conclusion**

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

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

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



## Chapter 4

### A Pressured Manhood? The *Chi-UBA* ‘Antics’ of Male Students

The subject of concern of this chapter is masculinity as ‘performance’. I examine two senses in which the dominant form of masculinity at the UZ, which is referred to as *chi-UBA* by students, is a ‘performance’. First, it is a performance in the everyday sense of ‘putting on a show’. Second, *chi-UBA* is a performance in the Goffmanian sense of being ‘all activity [by] an individual which occurs during a period marked by continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers’ (Lemert 1997: 97). In the first sense, performances exist in the realm of play-acting (Edwards 2006) whereas in its second sense, performance is about how individuals ‘highlight the common, official values of the society in which [they] belong’. In drawing on Goffman, I deviate slightly from Butler’s notion of performativity, as discussed with regard to female students in chapter two. Instead of focusing on the largely unconscious performance of gender roles, as she might, I examine how the self-conscious performances of *chi-UBA* constitute a key aspect of male gender roles at UZ. Goffman’s reading of performance resonates closely with Butler’s concept of performativity, which was discussed in chapter two. In this chapter I deviate slightly from Butler’s concept, which focuses primarily on the (unconscious) performance of (gender) roles in order to focus instead on how self-conscious performances like *chi-UBA*, constitute a key role for male students at the UZ campus.

The performances that constitute *chi-UBA*, that is, the state of being a male student or *UBA*, mark two particular states of manhood that are available to male students at the institution. On one hand, *chi-UBA* performances are meant to distinguish male students at the UZ from other young men in the country, including male students from other universities. In this way, male students can be said to be defining themselves as liminal figures who exist somewhat ‘outside’ mainstream Zimbabwean society, and for whom certain societal rules do not apply. This is why most *chi-UBA* performances entail physical and verbal confrontations with authority figures and are normally enacted when male students are in interaction with these authorities. Herein lies the first key idea: that the *chi-UBA* performances enacted in the context of relations with outsiders represent an oppositional or militant masculinity, which is intended as a challenge to a gerontocratic social order that dominates the country’s politics and economics. This oppositional, or militant, masculinity enables male students to articulate and embody their frustrations with the ‘failed promises of modernity and democracy’ (Ferguson 1999) under a geriatric leadership as well as to express their discontent at the manner in which the ZANU-PF led government has ruined the country’s economy. There is no doubt that male students at the UZ consider themselves to be political actors who have an important role to play in public life (Zeilig 2007; Mlambo 1995; Gaidzanwa 1993). A large part of male student militancy can therefore be read as a response to what they see as attempts by authority figures on and off campus to exclude them from active participation in the political system. As will become apparent, student activism, or militancy, is a decidedly male territory at the UZ campus, and is central to notions of *chi-UBA*. It is for that reason that I have chosen to examine it through the lens of performing masculinity.



When, on the other hand, *chi-UBA* is performed in the context of male students' interactions with each other and in their interactions with their female counterparts, it serves to distinguish '*UBA chaiyo*' (i.e. real, authentic, unadulterated) from 'those who are *UBA*'s by virtue of being enrolled at the UZ', as one of my male informants put it. This is done in much the same way that many societies distinguish between 'real men' and 'lesser men' (see Niehaus 2005; Gutmann 1997; Heald 1994). Herein lies the second key idea: namely, that male students display a 'complicit' masculinity in their interactions with fellow students (Connell 1996), which in turn serves to reproduce male domination as well as reproduce class and ethnicity-based hierarchies at the institution. Indeed, more often than not, *chi-UBA* masculinity reflects an ethnic *chi-Shona* masculinity and is not, in this case, as unique to the UZ as male students paint it.

The last major idea that I explore is the fact that, regardless of where *chi-UBA* is enacted—on campus or off-campus; in a female residence room or in a public taxi—and regardless of the reasons for its enactment—to challenge a gerontocratic national politics or to reproduce gender, class and ethnic hierarchies—*chi-UBA* is not just about *doing* masculinity, but is also about *speaking* masculinity. By this I mean that *chi-UBA* is a speech-based masculinity, largely predicated on 'intellect', and mediated through the spoken word. What is spoken and how it is spoken is central to its performance; cleverly constructed sentences and the creative use of specific words separate '*UBA chaiyo*' from the generality of the male student population.

The first half of the chapter focuses on male students' confrontations with authority figures, such as security personnel on campus, the university administration and state officials, especially the riot police. I trace the specific things that male students do

and say during these confrontations and I draw extensively from two student publications, *Vision Magazine* and *Campus Magazine* in order to show the important role that speech plays in *chi-UBA* masculinity. In the last half of the chapter I focus on how gender, class and ethnicity-based tensions are played out, particularly during Student Executive Council (SEC) elections as well in students' everyday interactions with each other. This material provides the necessary background information for understanding *chi-UBA* sexuality, which is the subject matter of the next chapter. As I will show, the militancy that underpins *chi-UBA* masculinity, for instance, greatly influences male students' views and approaches regarding love, sex, intimacy and romance.

### **Student Activism and the Shaming of Authority Figures**

As alluded to in the previous chapters, all male students who are enrolled at the UZ are said to belong to an imaginary 'University Bachelors Association', hence the acronym *UBA*, pronounced as 'you-bah' by students. Manwa (1995:77) traces the origin of the term to the year 1993/4 and states that it originally referred to 'any male student who did not have a girlfriend on campus or was shy about proposing love to women'. Over time, she argues, it came to refer to 'all campus hooligans who abuse alcohol...and have no respect for women' (ibid). Manwa goes on to note that these 'hooligans' were active in student politics on campus and that 'because of student apathy, they [*UBA*'s] alone participate in [student council] elections' (ibid). Manwa's description, despite its disapproving tone, highlights two important *UBA* characteristics that will be explored in this chapter and the next. The first relates to male students' sexuality (e.g. their lack of

courtship skills) and will be discussed extensively in chapter five, while the second points to male students' militancy (or 'hooliganism' as Manwa calls it) and political activism, which is the main subject of discussion in this chapter.

University students in Africa have always been at the forefront of agitating for political change and for better governance in their countries (see Zeilig 2007; Byaruhanga 2006; Lovell 2006; Abdullah 2005; Ivaska 2005; Amoa 1979; Burawoy 1976). University students generally consider their role in society to be that of holding national leaders accountable to democratic principles; they also see themselves as the 'voice of the voiceless' and the 'conscience of the nation' (Byaruhanga 2006: 76). At the UZ, students were instrumental in resisting colonial rule and in building nationalist movements throughout the seventies (Mlambo 1995; Cefkin 1975). They also challenged the one-party state proposed by President Mugabe in the early nineties and exposed rampant corruption in the government. As a result of protests following the 'Willowgate scandal', a guilty minister committed suicide (Gaidzanwa 2007). In the mid-nineties, student activism was largely fanned by dissatisfaction with the government's mishandling of the economy. During this period, students aligned themselves with the workers movement and participated in protest action against the privatization of various social services (Zeilig 2007). From 2000 onwards, UZ students were no longer just questioning state policies, but were actively supporting the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

According to a number of male students I spoke to, *chi-UBA* masculinity is predicated on the following three principles: rebelliousness, radicalism and non-conformity to authority. It is these characteristics that most male students exhibit in their

interactions with particular authority figures on and off campus. Consider an incident that happened one evening during the 2006 orientation week. The UZ hosted a cultural event to celebrate a twinning project between itself and a South Korean university. The event was intended to be a big public affairs undertaking and was thus held in the New Lecture Theatre, which sits a maximum of five hundred people. The event was graced by a number of dignitaries, including the Vice Chancellor, University Council members and the South Korean Ambassador, among others. The press was also in attendance. The event was open to the public, hence hundreds of students also attended. This was somewhat surprising: university authorities are usually wary of inviting students to such official events because of the latter's unpredictable and volatile behaviour.

The students in attendance behaved relatively well during the main event (perhaps because most of the audience was made up of the new students). However, when the event ended and an announcement was made that food would be served outside, there was pandemonium. Students ignored the directive to remain seated until all the dignitaries had exited the venue; instead, they rushed outside and headed for the tables where the food for the dignitaries had been laid out. The organizers of the cultural event had set up two separate eating areas: one for the important guests, which included expensive wines and fancy cocktail food and another for students, which, as could be expected, had less glamorous food and drink. I stood off at a safe distance and watched as the private security firm that had been hired for the night tried, unsuccessfully, to control the crowd of students. I quickly made my exit as soon as the campus security arrived with their baton sticks in tow, ready to beat up the students.

Although order was eventually restored, the male students I spoke to the following day informed me that the ‘damage’ had already been done as a large part of the dignitaries’ food and drinks had been consumed before the security officials restored order. Amid much laughter, the male students talked about how they had stuffed food into their pockets and students who had grabbed bottles of wine. When I asked why students had behaved that way, Thula, a third year male student, explained that the looting of food had been a ‘typical *chi-UBA* moment’ [*chaive chi-UBA chaicho*]. Other students described the event as a *UBA* ‘performance’: *UBA raka pefoma nezuro*, literally translating to, ‘Yesterday *UBA*’s performed’. According to Thula, the looting was initiated by older male students as a way of drawing attention to the poverty on campus as well as to the mismanagement of limited resources by university authorities. Thula also explained that students were unhappy with the fact that the UZ was willing to host ‘expensive parties’ and yet was unwilling to fix the plumbing system on campus or assist cash-strapped students. In brief, they did not see any immediate or direct benefits of the twinning project with the Korean university.

It must be noted that there was also a misunderstanding about which Korea was sponsoring the event. Many students—and indeed, many Zimbabweans—do not readily distinguish between North and South. The problem is, three years after Zimbabwe’s independence in 1980, the government unleashed soldiers who had been specially trained in North Korea to ‘stifle’ political dissent in the southern parts of the country. These soldiers were notorious for their brutality and thousands of people were killed, maimed and beaten up (*Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Report 1997*; Lindgren 2003). More generally, North Korea has been very vocal in its support of ZANU-PF. ‘Korea’ is

therefore looked at rather suspiciously by many Zimbabweans as is the government's current 'Look East' policy, which seeks to strengthen trade relations with countries like China, Malaysia and Korea in an attempt to reduce Zimbabwe's reliance on the West.

At first glance, the looting incident might appear to have been mere clowning around by a group of young men (and indeed might have been so for the majority of first year students present), but on closer inspection, it is not. Looting of the dignitaries' food and behaving disgracefully was intended to shame the authorities in two ways: first, it would give the foreign dignitaries the impression that students at the institution were generally rowdy and badly behaved, thus reflecting on UZ authorities failure to instill the necessary discipline in their students. Secondly, and much closer to the reality at the institution, the looting of food was meant to inform the 'wider world' of the poverty existing in the country as a whole, and on campus specifically. Poverty in this sense can also be read as a form of shorthand referring to the national economic crisis that had been caused by poor policies and rampant corruption at the top echelons of government.

The excessiveness of the looting incident, such as stuffing of food into pockets, is just one way that the *chi-UBA* principle of radicalism is applied in practice. As many male students told me, radicalism is about being unpredictable and engaging in the most shocking ways when people least expect it. Shaming authority figures is a carefully thought out and deliberate *chi-UBA* strategy that male students use to hold university and national leaders accountable. It is certainly not a sign of immaturity, which is what some scholars have suggested is the case with the 'amusements' and 'pranks' that young men engage in, particularly in their dealings with adults and other authority figures (see Pace 2004; Moffat 1989). Shaming authority figures allows university students to cut national

leaders down to size, so to speak, and to demarcate the UZ as a supposedly democratic and egalitarian space that operates along a totally different set of rules than the rest of society. In fact, male students often argue that the UZ is a country in itself as it has its own constitution and electorate. *Chi-UBA* thus enables male students to perform what they consider to be their most important role as university students: that of being the ‘conscience of the nation’. *Chi-UBA* performances can also be viewed as representing everyday forms of resistance or what Scott (1985) termed the ‘weapons of the weak’. Scott argued that this form of resistance is often covert and does not lead to open revolt.

### ***Chi-UBA* ‘antics’ and the performance of an ‘oppositional’ masculinity**

‘Non-conformity to authority’ is another key *chi-UBA* attribute that male students enact via their *chi-UBA* performances. Non-conformity enables students to safeguard those values that they believe are important in a democratic society, in particular the freedom of speech and association. This non-conformity plays itself out in male students’ interactions with campus security and the police, who are seen as the main agents that that the state and university authorities use to stifle students’ right to freedom of expression and association.

The following incident is illustrative. The second day of the 2006 academic year began like any other day during orientation week. The new students were going about their usual registration business, which involved standing for hours in a variety of long queues: a queue to pay one’s tuition and residential fees; a queue to attend a health briefing at the Student Clinic; a queue to collect or submit student loan forms; a queue to

collect the keys to one's room; different queues to see the many authority figures who were necessary to make one's stay on campus a bit more bearable, such as the Dean of Students, the Accommodation Officer and the Campus Counselor. That lasted until after noon, when a booming voice on a loudspeaker abruptly changed the tenor of the day, and indeed the tenor of the remaining week, with the following statement: 'Watch out! GBs [Green Bombers] going by! Clap for them! [*Chenjerai! Ma-GB ari kupfuura. Omberai*]' The speaker was a member of the Students Executive Council (SEC) and he was informally addressing 'the Union', as the general student body is called. Within an hour of uttering the statement, the student council tent, which it had pitched as part of its orientation week display, had been violently torn down by the 'green bombers' and the Vice Chancellor had issued a directive prohibiting the student council from participating in the rest of orientation week activities. A cloak of tension enveloped the university for a couple of days following this incident and there were real fears that the student council would organize a violent demonstration in retaliation. However, nothing happened.

The term 'GB' refers to campus security personnel, who have been nicknamed 'green bombers' because of the green uniforms that they wear. The name also has derogatory overtones, as a 'green bomber' is the name used by most Zimbabweans (and not just students) to refer to a large fly, which, as one student magazine described '[has] green eyes [and] which love[s] rubbish dumps and dirty public toilets' (*Vision Magazine*, April 2001 Page 13)<sup>9</sup>. More significantly, the term has deep-rooted political connotations. Unemployed youths who undergo 'national youth service' training in

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<sup>9</sup> The magazine was the initiative of the Catholic Chaplaincy at the UZ. In 2001, the editor of the magazine was a female student, although the majority of articles were from male students, particularly members of the student council as well as politically active male students. Few female students ever contributed articles, although the magazine was popular among both female and male students.



camps that are managed by the ruling party—ZANU-PF—are also widely known in the country as ‘green bombers’, again because of the colour of their uniforms and because ‘like greenflies, they destroy everything living’ (Lindgren 2003:6). These national youth training camps were established in 2001. According to Zeilig (2007:144), they were an ‘attempt to politicize sections of unemployed and rural youths and should be seen as only one part of the regime’s effort to confront a social base to confront the emergent opposition movement’. For many students, therefore, the term ‘green bomber’ denotes a traitor as well as a government stooge. Green bombers have been implicated in many cases of politically motivated violence, particularly during the 2002 and 2007 elections.

The council member’s remark represents a typical *chi-UBA* instance and also points to the intergenerational tensions and anxieties that exist between male students and older male authority figures, both at the institution specifically, and in the country as a whole. In the incident above, the student council member was expressing disdain for the type of authority represented by the green bombers, which is seen as repressive and undemocratic in ways that mimic broader politics in the country. As the full story behind the incident unfolded, it emerged that the confrontation was indeed political: earlier that morning the student council member had apparently been playing music whose lyrics derided the ruling party while promoting the opposition party. At the time of the incident, national elections were only six months away and political tensions in the country could already be felt. By playing the song in question, the student council was publicly voicing its support for the opposition in a place that, over the years, has increasingly come under the direct influence of the ruling party.

In fact, the government had intensified its efforts to stifle student activism at the UZ by immediately serving suspension letters to presidents of the student council as soon as the election results were announced. A student council member that I interviewed explained that suspension meant that a student was not allowed into campus until a disciplinary hearing is held. The council member further noted that letters of suspension were sometimes served to all those students who were elected into the three most powerful student council positions, namely the president, vice-president and the secretary-general. Furthermore, according to the council member, in the past three years the Student Executive Council had not been allowed to hold general meetings with students even though the student constitution required the council to hold two general meetings every semester.

“The communication channel has been closed out for us. For instance, when you approach the Dean [i.e. the dean of Students] for help he will tell you that he is busy. The VC [i.e. the vice chancellor] will not entertain you at all, so there is no link between students and the administration. This is a deliberate and calculated move by the authorities.”

The council member observed that this situation had left student councils greatly weakened and unable to function effectively. He further noted that this situation had also affected the quality of students who campaign for positions in the student council. This was because many students had come to associate the student council with suspension and expulsion and were therefore reluctant to participate in student activism at that level.

Green bombers have played an active role in enforcing repression on campus. They often do this by spying on the activities of the student council, particularly sniffing out any talk of a student demonstration. It is not surprising therefore that the two green

bombers who happened to walk by the student council's tent that afternoon, with their baton sticks visibly displayed, were immediately suspected of spying on the student council on behalf of the university authorities. The statement was therefore uttered in order to provoke and to expose the duplicity of the green bombers.

Part of the students' disaffection with them stems from the view that they not only inform the UZ authorities of planned demonstrations, but also go on to inform the riot police and by so doing align themselves with what the majority of Zimbabweans consider to be an autocratic government. The brutality of the riot police is legendary and has, in the recent past claimed some students' lives and accounted for many serious injuries. Another dimension to the incident was the fact that students were unhappy with the fact that university authorities had dedicated a daily bus service to ferry green bombers (and other workers) to and from the city centre and yet the same authorities had refused to do the same for non-resident students. The student council was piqued by this preferential treatment in favour of green bombers.

It is this complicity as well as the role of the green bombers in brutally beating up students during demonstrations that led a student magazine to liken the green bombers to 'Green Iscariots'. This was a play on the biblical Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus with a kiss; the label was applied to the green bombers after a particularly brutal demonstration in November 2000, which saw them beat up female students *and* students with disabilities during a demonstration. According to the magazine, until then, 'they [green bombers] had never been as brutal, never wantonly destroyed property before and never looted students' property before' (*Vision Magazine* April 2001:13).

It is with this broader political background in mind that the confrontation between the student council member and university authorities should be interpreted. Why did a seemingly straightforward statement elicit such a violent response from the authorities? Among the Shona, juniors traditionally greet their seniors by shaking hands followed by the clapping of one's hands in a deferential manner, as one enquires after the health of the senior (Jacobson-Widding 2000; Schmidt 1996). By calling on students to engage in an action that one typically performs when greeting elders and other important people, the student council member was indexing the power-hungry nature of campus security and challenging a patriarchal masculinity which is based on the unquestioned authority of one's seniors (Cornwall 2003; also Bourdieu 2001 and van den Berghe 1977). The irony of the student council member's statement was not lost on the green bombers, hence the resulting confrontation.

A second major group that male students target via their *chi-UBA* performances is the police force. Male students interact voluntarily with members of the Zimbabwean police during weekend soccer matches and involuntarily during campus disturbances. According to Thula, who was an avid soccer player and one of my key informants, the *chi-UBA* performed for the police typically takes the form of songs. In one of these songs, which is sung specifically during soccer matches with the police, the lyrics go: 'Our claim to fame is our intelligence...we were not recruited on the basis of our height, running ability or ugliness'. It juxtaposes the ostensibly superior intellect-based masculinity of male students to the inferior physique-based masculinity of the police. UBA's make fun of what are widely held to be police recruitment criteria, emphasizing the correct height (the taller the better), athleticism (the faster the better) and

fearsomeness (the uglier the better) and downplaying the importance of education or academic intelligence. Both colonial and post-colonial governments used this criterion. Although students are aware that allegiance to the ruling party is perhaps a more important criterion for being recruited into the police force nowadays than one's physical attributes, they still refer to the latter because the police find it particularly upsetting (see Zeilig 2007). Given the ever-increasing levels of political repression in the country, the police-force has almost become synonymous with irrationality and an inability to think logically in many Zimbabweans' minds, but nowhere is this idea expressed more forcefully than at the UZ. Members of the police force are seen as blindly following orders given to them by their superiors and it is this unquestioning attitude that male students strongly despise and poke fun at via their *chi-UBA* performances.

In perhaps the worst incident of police brutality ever witnessed at the UZ, the riot police invaded the university on the evening of 8 April 2001 in order to stifle a demonstration. Ironically, the demonstration was not directed at national or university authorities, but rather at 'NABA's', the non-student suitors supposedly robbing UBA's of the female student population.<sup>10</sup> A first year male student was beaten to death as he tried to flee his tear-gas filled room. According to the student-run *Campus Magazine*<sup>11</sup>, 'the police knock[ed] down doors [and] teargas[ed] halls of residence [and] wait[ed] for those bold enough to jump from the first and second floors through the windows' (*Campus Magazine*, October 2001, p4). In a rare show of solidarity with students, the Acting Dean of Students at the time was moved to boldly comment, during a memorial service in

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<sup>10</sup> This conjunction of the sexual and political is not incidental, as will become clear in the next chapter.

<sup>11</sup> *Campus Magazine* was started by two male students in 1998, who were also its editors. Unlike *Vision Magazine* which was run by the church, *Campus Magazine* was an independent publication and relied extensively on its sales in order to be self sustaining. Most of the contributors to the magazine were male.

which the Vice Chancellor and the Minister of Higher Education attended, that ‘I can only be a Dean of Students when there are [actually] students [on campus] and not when [students] are killed in such cold blood’ (*Campus Magazine*, October 2001, p7). The secretary-general of the then student council was reported by the magazine to have ‘failed to contain his anger’ during the memorial service and to have jumped on stage and, grabbing the microphone away from the Dean of Students, informed the Minister of Higher Education who was at the memorial service that ‘he [the minister] was no longer regarded by students as their minister, but [as the minister] of the National Parks and Wildlife since the UZ had turned into a game park where police came to kill’ (*ibid*).

Police brutality intensified after 2001, and although there have not been any more student deaths to date, it is commonplace for the riot police to invade the campus at night and fire teargas directly into student residences. Indeed, during my fieldwork, I was surprised one morning when some of my female research participants informed me that fully armed riot police had visited campus the previous night—well after 10pm—after a fire had broken out in one of the female residences. University authorities suspected that the opposition party, via some male students, was behind this act of arson<sup>12</sup>. The residence in question was evacuated and, according to my female informants, all the students in it were herded off to an open field nearby where they were detained, under heavy police guard for at least an hour, while the cause of the fire was investigated. Guns were pointed at them the whole time and no one was allowed to get up or leave. A police helicopter was even called in and it hovered above the group of female student for a while.

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<sup>12</sup> The opposition party has regularly been accused, by the ruling party, of using university students to commit various acts of violence around the country.

It is these excessive displays of brute force, meant to stifle freedom of expression, which *chi-UBA* performances challenge. All three principles of a militant *chi-UBA* masculinity—rebelliousness, radicalism and non-conformity to authority—were coded into the actions of the student council member described above. His impatience (grabbing of the microphone) and the rude and mocking manner in which he addressed the latter symbolized his own frustration, and that of the students he represented, with state bureaucracy and societal duplicity which required him and other students, as juniors, to act deferentially towards political elites simply because of the symbolic and economic capital that the latter wield (see McKittrick 2003). The comic nature of some of the *chi-UBA* performances—such as the student council member’s analogy that the UZ has been reduced to a zoo and must therefore fall under the ministry of wildlife, not education—belie the larger political project that such flippant and seemingly childish comments mask<sup>13</sup>.

Thula, my male informant, described *chi-UBA* performances as ‘antics’. The term is quite apt because it does not simply reference wanton playfulness, but a planned playfulness that is intended for a specific audience. ‘Antics’ are not random acts but carefully thought out performances that put a lot at stake for the performers. It can be argued that male students deliberately enact *chi-UBA* in comic ways as it allows them to get away with comments and actions that they otherwise would be prevented from enacting or uttering, given state repression of all forms of dissent. Again, this type of protest action is not unique to the UZ, but is a common in the other universities in the continent, especially during periods of autocratic rule (see Sichone 1999 on Zambian

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<sup>13</sup> See Sichone (1999) and Mbembe (1992) for a detailed discussion on how vulgarity is used to shame pompous politicians.

students; Lovell 2006 on Togolese students). *Chi-UBA* performances that involve direct confrontation with political and university authorities also involve a logic of grabbing opportunities as they present themselves. UZ students, like most Zimbabweans, do not have easy access to these authorities, hence when they find themselves in the presence of these authorities they will make the most of their chances. The seriousness of *chi-UBA* antics is further evidenced by the fact that a large number of *UBA*'s who have gone on to hold key decision-making positions in the opposition as well as in influential civil society movements. Former student leaders like Tafadzwa Musekiwa and Job Sikhala were elected as parliamentarians a few years after graduating from the university, while many other former student leaders are heading key civil society organizations.

It must also be noted that contemporary student activism has a high commercial value for some students. Many student activists are assured of jobs in the burgeoning non-governmental sector in the country. A student council member that I interviewed observed that a sizeable number of council members who have been suspended or expelled have been offered scholarships to study abroad in European universities, by sympathetic countries. He was of the opinion that some students were only interested in using their positions in the student council to 'get exposed and make connections' with regards their professional development. Zeilig (2007:255) refers to this phenomenon as the 'commodification of resistance in Zimbabwe'. The economic crisis contributed to a situation where the government lost its hold on students since it could no longer guarantee them lucrative jobs upon graduation. In fact, if anything, most students I spoke to during fieldwork looked forward to finding employment with non-governmental organizations as these paid better salaries, usually in foreign currency, and offered better



working conditions. This is perhaps one of the many contradictions in contemporary Zimbabwe. From 2000 onwards, and despite repressive state policies, there has been an upsurge in the number of non-governmental organizations whose main agenda is the promotion of human rights, social justice and good governance in the country (see also Zeilig 2007). Many student leaders and student activists have secured jobs with organizations like Crisis Coalition in Zimbabwe, the Student Solidarity Trust, Bulawayo Dialogue and the Combined Harare Residents Association. The Kubatana Trust of Zimbabwe, an online-based organisation, contains a list of at least thirty Harare-based non-governmental organizations that are working on good governance issues in the country.<sup>14</sup>

### **Homosociality and Induction into *Chi-UBA* Masculinity**

This last half of the chapter focuses on students interactions with each other. I argue that the *chi-UBA* that is performed within the context of students' interactions with each other has vastly different meanings than the *chi-UBA* that is performed in male students' interactions with outsiders (i.e. non-UZ students). An investigation of intra-*UBA* relations reveals some interesting departures from commonly held views regarding the construction of masculinities among young men. While a number of scholars have observed that young men often display their masculinity through acts of physical violence against each other, and not just in their relations with women (see Edwards 2006; Abdullah 2005; Morrell 2001; Gilmore 1980), this is not the case at the UZ. In fact,

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<sup>14</sup> Visit ([http://kubatana.net/html/sectors/sector\\_cont.asp?sector=DEMGG](http://kubatana.net/html/sectors/sector_cont.asp?sector=DEMGG)).

physical confrontation among male students is quite rare, and when it does occur it is often almost always linked to excessive alcohol consumption. Occasionally, though, physical violence does break out during student demonstrations, as part of the student council's 'mobilization' strategy. Here, students who are seen going about their daily business, rather than joining a planned protest action, are 'geologised', that is, stones are thrown at them initially as a warning and eventually as a direct assault. While physical violence among male students is rare, verbal confrontations, on the other hand, are much more common in male students' everyday interactions. The low levels of physical violence among male students can be explained in a number of ways.

According to most of my male informants, in addition to being made aware of the three *chi-UBA* principles of radicalism, rebelliousness and non-conformity to violence, first year male students are also informed that they are now part of a 'brotherhood' and that, as such, they have an obligation to look after each other. The concept of a 'brotherhood' also draws students' attention to the fact that they are now part of a 'community', which must defend itself against a common enemy: that is, the government and other authorities. Male students are also taught that 'an injury to one is an injury to all', which is the slogan that has been adopted by workers movements around the world. Although female students are exposed to these ideas during orientation week, when they attend a 'compulsory' hour-long political education session offered by the student council, it must be noted that politics is largely considered to be a 'male' activity. Furthermore, the courage to confront violent repression is a valued masculine attribute. This is why political education for male students continues throughout the year and is typically offered either at night in a male residence or on weekends at the soccer fields.

Male students admitted that these sessions were not ‘female friendly’ because of the intensity of *chi-UBA* ‘antics’ displayed there. Many male students laughed when I enquired what would happen if a female student attended these meetings. They explained that she would probably never attend such meetings again because of the ‘raw and vulgar language’ that is used at the meetings.

The second possible explanation why physical violence among male students is rare is that *chi-UBA* masculinity is predicated less on physical strength and more on intellect. Therefore, even though sport, particularly soccer, occupies an important role in the social lives of male students, *chi-UBA* is not necessarily based on sportsmanship in the same way that sports are typically used as tests of ‘real’ manhood in other contexts (Majors 2001; Messner 2001). At the UZ, it is active participation in student politics and regularly displaying the three *chi-UBA* qualities of radicalism, rebelliousness and non-conformity to authority that make one a *UBA chaiyo*. Soccer matches, while entertaining, are important in so far as they provide male students with safe spaces in which to meet *as males* and learn about *chi-UBA*. As one male student explained:

“The sports fields are the breeding ground for *chi-UBA*...When you attend soccer matches, that is where you get all the current information...that is where all the planning takes place, such as whether there will be a demonstration or not. That is where everything is done, because the chances of the CIO [Central Intelligence Office] following you to the sports fields are very low”.

Another male student I knew had a slightly different take on the role of the soccer fields in nurturing *chi-UBA*. He explained that the process of becoming a ‘*UBA chaiyo*’ started long before one even enrolled as a student at the institution, and that this process

culminated in one's first attendance to a soccer match. He likened this culmination to a 'baptism':

“You get to hear from the people who have been at the college [i.e. UZ] that *UBA*'s are like this and like that. And the first day that you come to the college, during orientation, even the Senior Proctor and the Dean when they address you they tell you that *UBA*'s are like this and this. And then you think [to yourself] that, even someone as big [i.e. important] as the Senior Proctor knows what *UBA*'s are like? Then the SEC addresses you too: ‘Ahoy *UBA*! Etc’. and all they do is fill you up with all this information that we are against everyone, especially the *GB*'s because they did this and that. We as *UBA*'s do this and we do that. Then you begin to realize that this is what they [other people] meant when they said *UBA*'s are like so and so. So, somehow you bring the memories and all the things you were told...eventually, you are a *UBA*. And when you go to soccer matches, ah, you are now going to be baptized. That's like the baptism of fire. There will be lots of other *UBA*'s there singing vulgar songs, harassing people and yelling [at them] ‘you are not learned’ [hamuna kudzidza]”.

Despite their different takes on the subject, both male students are in agreement on the importance of the sports fields as a site for the production of a *chi-UBA* masculinity.

In the exclusively male spaces of the soccer fields, members of the student council address *UBA*'s, and it is here that the latter, especially first year males, pick up the appropriate ways of doing and saying *chi-UBA*. In this sense, the UZ sports fields approximate the Shona *dare*. In his highly influential paper on Shona masculinity, Shire (1994: 147) explains that the *dare*, defined as the traditional meeting point for men, is a place ‘in which men can show their prowess through the skilful use of language and embellish particular masculinities’. Likewise, it is indeed during these all-male meetings that male students show off their linguistic creativity, by either coining new words (or ways of speaking) or composing new songs to be sung at student demonstrations and during soccer matches. Just as in the *dare*, where adolescent boys learn how to be men from their elders, at the sports fields, *UBA*'s learn how to be ‘*UBA chaiyo*’ from the

student council and from older male students. *Kutaura zvinyadzi*, which translates to ‘being vulgar’, is one language skill that male students get to perfect in these all-male spaces, which they then make use of in their daily interactions with each other, and with female students and authority figures.

Consider the following comment by the vice president of the student council, made during a forum organized by SHAPE Zimbabwe Trust as part of its World AIDS Day commemorations on campus. The student council member contributed to a debate on condom negotiation:

“I like to drive a point with passion alone... I think that it is of *much paramount importance*, especially at this *highest pinnacle of modern* education...there are some ladies who are so *erudite* and eh, who think above board to make it a sure case that when the guy wants to *screw* them without a condom they always object. But there are those ladies who are so down to earth and they cannot reason around with guys, eh, you know, to deny *peremptorily and vehemently* [sex without condoms]...I think that men should be gentlemen enough to make it a sure case that they have condoms in their rooms provided that they have the *sexual propensity of screwing ladies*.”

The student council member, who was a final year law student, spoke with great aplomb and ceremony. His speech pattern was a typical *chi-UBA* performance: the use of ‘big’ words, such as *peremptorily* and *erudite*, which few ever use in everyday conversation as well as his verbosity were meant to show off his command of the English language. His use of the word ‘screw’ was intended to shock those present because of its vulgarity and unexpectedness. In fact, the first time that he used the word ‘screw’ there were a few gasps of surprise, and when he used it a second time, students (mostly male) erupted into laughter. The student leader’s comments were also tinged with a thinly veiled sexism—‘ladies who cannot reason’—that is a common feature during interactions between female and male students.

Contrast this to the less verbose, but no less shocking, comment made by a different male student in another typical instance of a speech-mediated *chi-UBA* performance. The setting was similarly a SHAPE discussion forum: here, students were debating why female students prefer dating older men and not *UBA*'s. A female student commented that the problem was that 'there are very few gentlemen on campus'. A male student immediately responded: 'Eh, I think that what this sister is saying is **disorder** [*Eh, zvirikutaurwa nasisi ava ndinofunga kuti madhisinyongoro*]'.

The male student responded in Shona and he spoke very slowly, enunciating each syllable and pausing for effect just before he used the unexpected word, *madhisinyongoro*. As expected, the comment elicited laughter and deafening applause from the other *UBA*'s present. The word *madhisinyongoro* is a combination of English and Shona: the prefix 'ma' denotes the plural; 'dhis' is derived from the English prefix 'dis', which denotes a negation, while 'nyongoro' is a Shona word which means 'not straight'. The word is difficult to translate, but is generally used by Zimbabweans to denote a chaotic, disorderly and even nonsensical state. An older male academic informed me that the word that was frequently used during the liberation struggle as part of nationalist protest songs aimed at denouncing the colonial government. UZ students sometimes sing these nationalist songs during their demonstrations, and one of the songs in which the word is used goes: *hatidi zve madhisinyongoro*, which means, 'we do not want disorder/chaos/nonsense here'.

This male student, just like the student council leader, was applying the *chi-UBA* principle of radicalism through his speech act. It is the ability to casually throw in such an extreme, and totally unexpected word, which defines most *chi-UBA* performances. A whole *chi-UBA* lexicon, comprising of big words and clever sentences has been

developed over the years at the institution. Aspiring members of the student council typically show off their command of the English language, and hence their *chi-UBA* masculinity, by employing hyperbole, verbosity and imagery in their campaign posters, manifestos and speeches. In 2000, a few male students worded their campaign messages in the following ways. One student promised to be ‘the force of logic not the logic of force’. He made it into the student council and was the president that year. Another poster read: ‘The hour has come to deliver the Union from **decadent** governance; **revitalize** students’ dignity and **grandeur**. No more compromise’. In 2007, a student who was campaigning to be the student council president used the following motto in his posters: ‘Propagation of the negation of the negation’.<sup>15</sup> Other words and phrases have been immortalized by successive student leaders, including the following: *adumburate* and *expagorate* (i.e. to clarify a point); ‘Comrades, we have two options available to us: to demonstrate or to demonstrate!’ ‘Comrades, the administration/government is masturbating on us!’ ‘Comrades, we have been reduced to political condoms: we have been used and carelessly discarded [by the administration]. It is important to also realize that, in addition to denoting *chi-UBA* performances, these forms of oratory also have political currency and enable students to exercise some form of power<sup>16</sup>.

As an undergraduate at the institution, a classmate of mine made it into the student council and he never addressed students without throwing in his signature phrase, ‘political harangue’. He always pronounced the word ‘harangue’ in three syllables, as ‘ha-raa-ngoo’. It is through these various performances that first year male students get induced into *chi-UBA* and learn what is expected of them. Let me point out that simply

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<sup>15</sup> This is a reference to the philosophy of Hegel, likely picked up from readings in Marxist literature.

<sup>16</sup> See Maurice Bloch’s (1975) edited volume on Political language and oratory in traditional society for a detailed discussion of the role that political language and oratory plays politically.

being a good orator without exhibiting the other key *chi-UBA* attributes is considered elitist, and does not win one too many admirers. In fact, those male students who usually made it into the student council were those who were not only creative in their use of language but who also displayed a willingness to directly confront various authorities as and when the need arose. This brings me to the next key idea that I explore in detail in the section that follows, which is that while in their interactions with campus security and the police, *chi-UBA* performances are tinged with some level of elitism in their interactions with each other—‘we are intelligent and you are not’—elitism among students is viewed as an undesirable trait.

### ***Chi-UBA, Ma-Nose and Class Anxieties***

The ‘disorder’ incident described earlier highlights another key point regarding those *chi-UBA* performances: they often also reflect thinly veiled gender, class and ethnic anxieties at the institution. For instance, the female student who made the comment about there being no ‘gentlemen’ on campus belongs to a category of students who are classified as *ma-Nose*, which was explained to me as ‘the lowest thing one can be on campus’ by a male student. *Ma-Nose*<sup>17</sup>, which literally translates as ‘the noses’ are despised for not being ‘black enough’. The label derives from the fact that these students are said to speak very nasally—through the nose—in an attempt to sound British or American (see Pattman 2005). The typical *mu-nose* has an upper middle-class background and attended high school at either a private school or a former ‘Group A’ school. The latter refer to

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<sup>17</sup> In Shona, the prefix *ma* denotes the plural while *mu* denotes the singular. *Mu-nose* therefore refers to one individual while *ma-nose* refers to more than one individual.



schools that catered for affluent middle-class whites during the colonial era and are thus believed to have higher educational standards than other schools. These were the schools that Zimbabwe's upper middle-class families sent their children to after independence.

Over the years, however, the term *mu-nose* has come to encompass not just an affected accent, but also comportment and any bourgeois tendencies, whether one actually has an affluent middle-class background or not. Therefore, being fashion conscious and preferring designer labels, subsisting on non-campus meals, especially fast foods like pizza and chicken and chips and a preference for American hip hop are just some of the more prominent markers of the *mu-nose* identity. However, UZ students do distinguish between 'real' *ma-nose* and 'fake' or 'wannabe' *ma-nose*: the latter merely pretend to be from well off backgrounds and they often fail to give an authentic *mu-nose* accent.

Turning back to the 'disorder' incident described earlier, the male student's response in Shona was deliberate and was intended to serve as a stark contrast to the '*mu-nose-ness*' of the offending female student. The male student's speech pattern enabled him to not only dismiss and belittle the female student in her capacity as a female, but also in her capacity as a member of a particular social class. Although all female students are stereotyped as materialistic, it is the female *mu-nose* student to whom the label is especially applied. A *mu-nose* female is said to have expensive tastes and very high standards to maintain; she is also said to only prefer a man who has the proverbial 'four C's: car, cash, cellphone and charm, which most *UBA*'s lack.

The silencing of this group of students is therefore a widespread phenomenon at the institution: their opinions are often rudely dismissed in the manner described above or

they are made the objects of scorn in everyday campus conversations and interactions. For instance, a student who is considered to be a *mu-nose* will not make it into the student council and labeling opponents *mu-nose* is one of the most common strategies that is used to de-campaign them. It is also not uncommon for campaigners' posters to be defaced with the words '*mu-nose*'. In fact, in the history of student politics, only once has a *mu-nose* made it into the top student council position of president and this was largely because, despite his nasal accent and good oratory skills, he exhibited the *chi-UBA* traits of radicalism, rebellion and non-conformity to authority. In short, his class airs were limited to his speech and did not affect how he related to other students.

The use of Shona by the male student in question, further reflected unresolved ethnic tensions at the institution. For all their claims of one-ness, the UZ remains deeply divided along ethnic lines. In many ways, *chi-UBA* mirrors the chauvinism of the country's largest ethnic group, the Shona. Others, like the minority Ndebele, exist on the fringes of the university in ways that mirror national politics. Relations between the Ndebele and the Shona can best be described as 'politely civil' following the brief, but bloody, civil war that erupted between 1983 and 1987 and in which Ndebele speakers were accused of being insurgents. The ruthlessness with which this revolt was suppressed has never been forgotten. In 1997 the Catholic Church produced a report, which was promptly banned, cataloguing the atrocities committed by the state between 1983 and 1987 (See the *Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace Report 1997*). For a while, too, some Ndebele politicians have been lobbying for a federal system of government in the country, as this would give them the autonomy to manage the Matabeleland region, where the Ndebele population is mostly located. However, even though ethnic tensions

gingerly resurface during national elections, they are never violent or lasting. They merely simmer away under the surface.

Male students have replicated this ethnic stratification at the institution. For instance, it is widely known—and accepted—that a Ndebele student can never be elected into the top post of student council president. When I first joined the university in the mid-nineties, there were stories going around that the then vice president of the student council, a very eloquent and charming character, had been cheated out of the post of president because he hailed from Bulawayo—the second largest city, which is also located in the Ndebele heartland of the country. Even though he was ethnically Shona, the fact that he grew up in Ndebele territory and spoke the language made him ‘more Ndebele than Shona’ as far as most students were concerned. As a result, another candidate allegedly sold his votes to the student who eventually became the council president, thereby giving him the majority needed even though he was an alcoholic who lacked any strong leadership skills. While many students, especially Ndebele speaking ones, were unhappy with this situation, outright physical confrontation was kept in check by two factors. First, was the fact that the leadership abilities of the vice president were undeniable and he in effect ran the student council. Secondly, he was an excellent strategist who could effectively negotiate with university authorities and government officials to resolve student grievances.

Towards the end of the nineties, there was another ethnic flare-up at the institution, but this time, it was very violently expressed and the institution was almost shut down by the authorities. A popular Ndebele student, Jethro Mpofu, ran for a position in the student council, and this time, after many foiled attempts at rigging the vote, he

was announced as the new secretary-general. This is considered the second most powerful post after the post of the president. Likewise, it was this student's ethnic identity that was under scrutiny and after he was announced as the winner, an angry mob stormed into his room with the intention of beating him up. He somehow managed to escape and for a whole week the campus was rocked by serious ethnic violence. Many students were injured in these disturbances and the new secretary-general had to lay low for a while. Eventually the riot police were called in and order was restored.

It is interesting to note that the male student who is Ndebele and the *mu-nose* who is male are both stereotyped as being too effeminate.<sup>18</sup> This is in many ways the crux of the matter: *chi-UBA* is inescapably about masculinity, no matter how or to whom it is directed. Most tests of manhood, as a number of scholars have shown (Bourdieu 2001; Halberstam 1998; Gutmann 1997; Heald 1994), involve the rejection of the feminine and this is often achieved by feminizing other men<sup>19</sup>. At the UZ, this feminisation takes place within the context of class and ethnic tensions. Both *ma-nose* and Ndebeles are considered to be fashion conscious and to pay more attention to how they dress than typical *UBA*'s, who seem to delight in wearing a mishmash of whatever clothes are available. This lack of care is taken as evidence of their 'hardness' (Jacobsen-Widding 2000).<sup>20</sup> *Ma-nose* in particular are not 'hard': *UBA*'s claim that they have never wanted for anything in life and have lived a sheltered and comfortable life. They are perceived as weaklings who spend their time playing middle-class sports like basketball, tennis and

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<sup>18</sup> This is one area where stereotypes inside UZ are markedly different from those outside. Amongst most Shona-speakers, Ndebele men are thought categorized as uncontrollably violent.

<sup>19</sup> Ritual homosexuality and male rape in the prisons are some of the more extreme forms that the feminisation of other men takes (see Gear 2005; Mosse 1996; Segal 1990) while accusations of homosexuality are a common strategy adopted by young men in order to feminize their peers (see Willis 1976).

<sup>20</sup> Zimbabweans often joke about the so-called 'hard Mashona type', i.e. an uber-masculine Shona man, who is compared (not necessarily unfavourably) to a popular breed of cattle.

cricket rather than so-called manly sports such as soccer (see also Pattman 2005). Finally, *ma-nose* are despised because they are seen to be less committed to the political struggles of the university. They can rely on well-off family members to secure jobs or graduate school opportunities locally or abroad. This lack of interest puts them in the same category as female students, and in many ways, *chi-UBA* is deliberately constructed in such a way as to discourage the participation of both.

## **Conclusion**

*Chi-UBA* masculinity represented the dominant model of manhood on the UZ campus. This is not to say, however, that it was the only model available to male students. It is important to bear in mind Connell's (1996:164) observation that hegemonic masculinities merely reflect the 'culturally authoritative pattern of masculinity' rather than numeric domination. Furthermore, hegemonic masculinities never exist in isolation but are always surrounded by other types, such as subordinated, marginalized and complicit (ibid). The *chi-UBA* masculinity that existed on the UZ campus was hegemonic in precisely this way: it represented the dominant model of student masculinity even though only a small proportion of the student population engaged in *chi-UBA* performances on a regular basis. For the majority of male students, *chi-UBA* was a strategic identity that they donned and discarded at particular moments, such as during interactions with authority figures and other undesirable individuals, such as *ma-nose* and female students. *Chi-UBA* in this sense is therefore literally a 'performance', in that 'it involves taking on a role, which lives only for as long as the play that one is acting in (Edwards, 2000: 99).

The chapter has also illustrated how *Chi-UBA* masculinity was fraught with contradictions. On one hand, it was about militancy and resisting exclusion from the political process. On the other hand, however, the ethnic, gender and class tensions that were often played out during students' interactions with each other usually mimicked the type of Shona chauvinism and nationalist politics that ZANU-PF was well known for, and despised, by students.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, despite their acts of violence towards *ma-nose* students, male students who engaged in *chi-UBA* actually aspired to be members of the middle-class and saw their time at university as the process through which they would realize these aspirations (Pattman 2005). I argue that it is therefore not middle-class-ness per se that male students rejected as much as it was particular aspects of being middle-class. *Chi-UBA* masculinity was about being modern without losing one's 'blackness', and indeed one's 'Shona-ness'.

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<sup>21</sup> This chauvinism often targets Malawian migrant workers and the Ndebele minority, among others.



## Chapter Five

### ***Chi-UBA* Sexuality, Undesirability and Violence**

In the previous chapter I examined the masculine ideal at the UZ, focusing on the daily interactions between male students and with authority figures. In this chapter, I continue to investigate the experiences of masculinity at the institution, but this time I focus on their interactions with the opposite sex, especially as it relates to their sexual and romantic liaisons. As many scholars have shown (Silberschmidt 2005; Hunter 2001), sexual experience and the ability to attract members of the opposite sex are key markers of adulthood. For instance, male circumcision rites and their focus on the penis are as much about becoming a male adult in general as they are about becoming a sexual male adult (Heald, 1994). This is why adults actively encourage pre-marital sexual experiences by newly circumcised young men.

In a similar vein, when viewed as a ‘rite of passage’, university entails much more than merely acquiring one’s degree; it is also where boys become men and perhaps more importantly, it is where they truly become *sexual* men. Scholars such as van den Berghe (1977) and Moffat (1989) have shown that sex is of great importance during the liminal period of university life, when students find themselves suspended between childhood and adulthood. One must not forget, however, that, for many young people, sexual debut often occurs long before they make it to university. In Zimbabwe, sexual debut for both men and women tends to occur at age fifteen and older (*Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey 2005-6*: 209).

Although university offers ample opportunities for sexual experimentation and sexual flirtation, and although young men are generally seen as being ‘sexually in control’ (Gutmann 1999), this chapter demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case for the typical male student at the UZ campus. I argue that many male students have difficulty living up to the image of the sexually successful male. In fact, the average *UBA* is considered to be sexually inept by both female and male students and has very little success attracting sexual or romance partners on campus. Many female students also consider the typical male student to be undesirable as a sexual or romance partner. Following Henrietta Moore (1994: 66), I will show that this situation leads to a ‘crisis of representation or thwarting of ideological investments in dominant male identities’. Moore defines ‘thwarting’ as ‘the inability to sustain or properly take up a gendered subject position, resulting in a crisis, real or imagined, of self-representation and/or social representation’ (*ibid*).

In the first half of the chapter I examine male students’ experiences of ‘thwarting’ as they pursue romantic and sexual liaisons with their female counterparts at the institution. In the second half, I show how different kinds of sexual and romantic liaisons, termed ‘gold rush’ and ‘one-day internationals’, are part of the strategies adopted by male students to overcome the ‘crisis of representation’ that they experience. Sexual and romantic relationships, I argue, offer male students opportunities to reconstruct themselves as sexually successful male adults as well as live out what Moore (1994) refers to as ‘fantasies of power’.



### ***UBA's, Undesirability and Powerlessness***

Many feminist scholars have expressed reservations about the notion of male powerlessness (Kandiyotti 1994; Canaan and Griffin 1990). They assert that all men, by virtue of their dominant status in society, and regardless of their social class position, automatically benefit from what Connell (1995) terms the 'patriarchal dividend'. While true, it is important to remember that men do not benefit equally from the patriarchal dividend. Hanmer (1990: 30) points out, 'many other factors mediate [men and women's] personal experiences'. With this understanding in mind I turn to examine UZ male students' subjective experiences of powerlessness—real and imagined—not so much to critique the notion, as to show how it significantly influences the sexual choices that male students make while at the institution.

In their interactions with female students, male students were constantly made aware that they fell short of the masculine ideal of 'man the provider'. The incident involving the burning down of a car belonging to a 'sugar-daddy' described in chapter three is illustrative. Male students were enraged at the blatant manner in which older and wealthy non-university men, *NABAs* or *Big Dharas*, 'stole' female students away from them. I suggest that the presence of *NABAs* and *Big Dharas* on the UZ campus 'thwarts' male students' ability to properly take up gendered subject positions and throws into question who they are as 'men'. Moore (1994:66) argues that 'every person has fantasies or ideas of the type of person s/he would like to be seen to be by others' and that 'a lot of investments go into maintaining these fantasies'. For many male students, intelligence and independence of thought and action were central to their masculine identities. In fact,

one could argue that the *chi-UBA* principles of radicalism, rebelliousness and non-conformity to authority essentially revolved around male students' fantasies of themselves as highly intelligent and independent thinkers and actors. It is these characteristics that male students typically showed off in their interactions with outsiders, that is, with non-UZ students. However, when they were confronted with alternative markers of masculinity, embodied by *NABAs* and Big *Dharas*, male students were made aware of the inadequacies of their particular brand of masculinity, especially as it related to successfully attracting females as sexual and romance partners. Furthermore, they soon learned that intelligence and independence of thought and action are not enough to attract the ladies, unless these attributes were accompanied by an equal dose of what students referred to as 'fiscal power', that is, economic wealth.

According to Leonard, a third year male student, there were only two things that *UBA*'s found stressful during their stay on campus. These were 'assignments' and 'girls'. Leonard proceeded to ask, rhetorically, 'Besides these two things, what else would a *UBA* stress about?' Leonard explained that male students, in true *chi-UBA* fashion, often had a solution for everything and that they could get themselves out of almost any situation, save in these two areas. For instance, there was no way that one could negotiate their way out of the obligation to write assignments, short of failing their classes or completely withdrawing from the university. In this one aspect, Leonard clarified, the lecturer, rather than the *UBA*, is totally in control. 'Girls, on the other hand', he sighed, 'are way more complicated. You can never understand them'. This was the response he volunteered when I enquired why he seemed to be in low spirits. I had expected him to mention school as one of the reasons for his glum exterior given that the first semester

examinations were almost due. I had not, however, expected him to mention ‘girls’ in his answer as he always portrayed himself as uninterested in romantic relationships.

Leonard’s close friend, Nhlanhla, had even composed a rap song entitled ‘Types of Girls’. Its lyrics went as follows:

“There are many types of girls  
There are those who are known as capitalists  
This is because they only date men with money  
Then there are those who are known as communists  
Because they share their love with everyone  
Then there are the motorists  
These girls are addicted to the smell of petrol  
There are many types of girls  
There are those who are known as pharmacists  
These girls will readily use love potions to get their way...”

The song captures his, and many male students’ anxieties about their sexual undesirability. The song also traces the major source of this undesirability: male students’ limited financial resources. In the song, Nhlanhla classified female students (and girls in general) into various groups: ‘capitalists’ (i.e. women who date only men with lots of money), ‘communists’ (i.e. women who are sexually promiscuous and have multiple sexual partners), ‘motorists’ (i.e. women who only date men who drive) and ‘pharmacists’ (i.e. women who use love potions in order to lure men). What the categories had in common is that they did not just portray female students in wholly negative ways, as sexually promiscuous and materialistic, but also simultaneously portrayed male students as hapless and powerless in the face of such active female sexual agency. For the average male student who was not as musically talented, the various discussion forums convened on campus provided them with ample opportunities to confront female students on these issues.

During fieldwork I recorded in my journal a conversation I had with a group of first year female and male students on their views of campus life. Almost all the students in this group had more negative things to say than positive, and their responses focused almost exclusively on the issue of relationships and dating. The first entry in my journal was a comment made by a male student that, ‘Girls are a problem. They are too materialistic’. This is followed by a comment from a female student who advised the previous speaker to ‘Go after your class...if she [i.e. a female student] is wearing her expensive jeans and her \$15,000 shoes, don’t try to reduce her to your class’. The first student protested this view and pointed out that he only went after ‘high-class’ women in order to ‘score points’ within his peer group. This particular conversation continued for a while with most of the students strongly advising against dating fellow students. The reasons they gave for this included the ‘wild’ nature of both female and male students and the ‘absence of virgins’ on campus.

I highlight this conversation in part because it shows the extent to which concerns about dating and romance dominate the lives of students at the institution. Without fail, every conversation or discussion that I participated in or observed, and which focused on relationships and dating on campus, ended up with male students angrily accusing female students of being prostitutes. Having observed and recorded many such incidents during fieldwork, I was always struck by two things: first, that males seemed to view female students’ so-called financially-motivated sexual licentiousness as a personal affront; and second, that their feelings bespoke resentment rather than mere displeasure.

In one discussion forum, a male student characterised female students as ‘myopic’ because, in his opinion, ‘They don’t even think about the future and they will do anything

for money, including having unprotected sex’. Another male student in the same forum agreed and lamented that ‘*USA*’s have a love for money and will not open their hearts for the sake of love. And with a *UBA* [sic], they know that he is not working, he is poor and so forth’. The poverty issue dominated the discussion for the next ten minutes, during which male students objected to ‘being used as ATM [automated teller machine] cards’, by which they meant that female students used men as a source of ready cash. However, a male student at the forum acknowledged that while it was unfair for female students to expect *UBA*’s to splurge on them all the time, he was personally in a position to provide the ‘cellphones and cerevita [an expensive cereal brand]’ that female students desired. He had a number of income-generating projects that provided him with money. This suggests that male students were not actually averse to fulfilling the ‘provider’ role in romantic relationships. Rather, what they resented was the fact that they often did not have the means to effectively meet this expectation when they were on campus. This resulted in them having very little power to control what happened in the sexual marketplaces of the university and compelled them to stand by and watch as *NABAs* and *Big Dharas* ‘stole’ their women. Male students’ sense of powerlessness must therefore be understood within the context of their marginal position as junior males in a broader masculine hierarchy.

The relatively disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds of the majority of male students explain their position of powerlessness and undesirability in the sexual and romance marketplace of the UZ campus. This fact is widely acknowledged by both female and male students at the institution. However, when this is added to the fact that most male students strongly believed in male superiority and female subordination, they become even less appealing as far as many female students are concerned. On campus,

many male students realized that they did not have as much control over female students as they imagined themselves to have. Some female students actively challenged existing gender ideals of the demure, subordinate female by being ‘active lust seekers’ and by engaging in transactional sex relationships. Furthermore, some female students also asserted their independence through their dress styles and challenged male control over their bodies and sexuality. The personal freedom that female students enjoyed on campus seemed to impinge directly on male students’ ability to dominate them. It is therefore not surprising that they experienced their greatest sense of powerlessness and thwarting when confronted with extremely independent female students.<sup>22</sup>

Take for instance, Tawanda, who was two months into his first year when I interviewed him. Tawanda admitted to ‘experiencing shock’ when he first set foot at the UZ during orientation week:

“I was very traumatised to see one of my home-girls wearing some trousers [sic] the other day. Down there, where I come from, we have been groomed [sic] to look down upon such dressing [such as] mini-skirts, trousers and jeans. But I have had to adapt and be accommodating of such. Now I am no longer as affected.”

Tawanda was from Chiredzi District, which is located 418km away from the UZ campus, in the south-eastern part of the country. Communities in this rural area still practiced circumcision for young men and held elaborate sexual initiation ceremonies for young

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<sup>22</sup> Liz Walker’s (2005) gives an interesting account of a similar sort of thwarting that occurred among South African men immediately following the country’s independence in 1994. She shows how the granting of women equal status to that of men, and the independence that the latter consequently enjoyed, especially as it related to their sexuality, destabilized ‘old notions of masculinity and male privilege’ (p 225) and many South African men discovered that they would have to ‘negotiate their manhood’ (ibid) differently. Most men were particularly piqued by what Walker refers to as constitutional sexuality, that is ‘the liberal versions of sexuality that marked the country’s new democracy’ (ibid) and many responded to its challenge with acts of sexual violence. According to Walker, rape against women actually increased by seven percent, following South Africa’s independence.

girls. In contrast, Joseph, another first year male student I was interviewing jointly with Tawanda, explained that he was ‘very liberal when it comes to women’s dressing’. Tawanda attributed this to the fact that he had grown up in the capital city and so was accustomed to how women here dressed. However, even Tawanda admitted to finding some of the clothes worn by female students to be extremely sexually arousing:

“I can’t stand those hipsters! [laughs uncomfortably]. Hipsters appeal...they have a loud voice and they show everything that can be desired. You see, even the name shows that they are somehow connected with the hips, and you know what they say about hips? Hips don’t lie! [laughs]”<sup>23</sup>

It must be remembered that the ability to control women—be they girlfriends, wives, sisters and, sometimes, even mothers— as well as women’s bodies, is seen as an important masculine trait in many societies, including Zimbabwe.<sup>24</sup>

The third factor that explains male students powerlessness and undesirability in the eyes of their female counterparts can be traced back to their *chi-UBA* performances. The majority of female students with whom I interacted did not appreciate *chi-UBA* performances and considered these to be evidence of male students’ immaturity and irresponsibility. As a result, most pointed out that male students were ‘no different from our little brothers’. This statement also referenced the fact that most male students were of the same age—nineteen to twenty-four years—as female students. Here one sees how male students were not only under pressure to prove that they are ‘real’ men in their relations with other men, but in their relations with women as well (Edwards 2006). The

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<sup>23</sup> This was a reference to a hip-hop song (Shakira and Wyclef Jean) that was popular at the time.

<sup>24</sup> In her study of students at an Indian university, Lukose (2001) discusses how male students harassed female students who wore modern skirts as well as jeans, rather than the traditional attire of the *pawada*, (a traditional long, full-length skirt). Skirts and jeans, she explains, were seen as immodestly modern.

various social scripts that are available to men, and which define how ‘men can be men’, or rather, how men can be ‘good at being men’ (Herdt 1981), often conflict with each other. For instance, while the kinds of bravado and macho-ism that male students displayed during their *chi-UBA* performances marked them as ‘*UBA chaiyo*’ (and hence ‘real men’) in the eyes of their peers, the very same performances marked them as ‘mere boys’ (and hence ‘not men’), in the eyes of their female counterparts. Shire’s (1994) discussion of the different, often contradictory spaces in which young Zimbabwean boys learn about masculinity perfectly captures this conflict. According to Shire, as young boys moved between the kitchen (a ‘women’s space’) and the *dare* (a men’s space), they were exposed to different, and conflicting, sets of masculine values in each space. However, both spaces played a significant role in ultimately shaping young boys into men. There is therefore, ‘no one way of being a man’, as many scholars have argued (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994; Connell 1995; Guttman 1997; Morrell 1998).

Related to this is the fact that the one *chi-UBA* trait that male students drew on when trying to attract women into sexual and romantic relationships—their intelligence—was usually ineffective with female students, who considered themselves to be equally intelligent, if not more so, and were thus not in awe of the ‘university student’ identity. Many male students shared stories with me of how the ‘UZ student card’, a photo identity card that is issued to each student upon enrollment, worked wonders in luring non-university women, particularly high-school girls, into romantic and sexual relationships with *UBA*’s. A male student narrated an incident, which occurred when he was in a bus and on his way home. He explained that there was a young woman that he thought was attractive, and so to gain her attention and interest, he had deliberately dropped his



student card at her feet. Luckily for him, the object of his interest picked it up and remarked, as she handed it over, ‘Oh, you are from the UZ?’ According to the male student, a friendship was established at that moment and he eventually had a sexual relationship with the young woman. The male student attributed his ‘luck’ to the power of the UZ student card. Another male student shared a similar story. He explained that in his neighbourhood back home, he was considered to be ‘good husband material’ because of his ‘UZ student’ status. He explained, ‘Many mothers throw their daughters at me. They ask me to help their daughters who are in A’ level with their school work. That [UZ] ID [identity card] is powerful out there!’ Unfortunately, for many male students, the UZ student card did not offer them any added advantages in the sexual and romantic marketplace on campus. Amongst their female peers, their disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, their sexism and their perceived immaturity and irresponsibility continued to militate strongly against them.

Finally, *UBA*’s were deemed ‘unschooled’ in the art of courtship. ‘*UBA*’s do not know how to woo women’ [*UBA haigone kunyenga*] is a statement that I heard mentioned time and again by both female and male students. Even though the statement was usually accompanied by much laughter, I always observed an element of discomfort among most of the male students present each time the statement was made. This discomfort, I soon realised, was due to the fact that the statement was true. Recall Manwa’s (1995:77) observation that the term *UBA* ‘originally referred to any male student who did not have a girlfriend on campus or who was shy about proposing love to women’. Thula, whom I introduced in the previous chapter, explained, ‘The *chi-UBA*

spirit says you should never go out of your way to overly impress a woman [*musikana haanyengererwi*].

Female students considered this nonchalant approach to dating as one of the many flaws of *UBA*'s. A female student declared in a discussion forum '*UBA*'s are not romantic! I don't want you to rush. Woo me! Make me yours! Don't rush! This is not the land reform programme [*haisi hondo yeminda*]!' The last point referred to the country's infamous land invasions, which began in 2001, and are seen by many to have been carried out in a hurried and haphazard way. Put simply *chi-UBA* conflicted with female students' notions of what constituted romantic behaviour. While female student considered a protracted courtship as evidence of 'manliness', male students, in turn, did not. This refusal to be romantic can be interpreted as a form of protest against female students' perceived materialism and as an attempt to exercise some control over 'wayward' females. However, the following comment by a male student betrayed an even deeper meaning. *UBA*'s 'unromantic nature' is a strategy that they use to mask, and downplay their feelings of masculine inadequacy and failure:

"Why should I bend over backwards for them [i.e. *USA*'s]? They know very well that we [i.e. *UBA*'s] are struggling as it is. Even if I want to take you out for a movie tonight, you know I can't afford it. And anyway, we [also] know that *USA* is a no-go area; they are the territory of those who already have title deeds over them, i.e. *NABA*'s. So, when we date *USA*'s, most of us [*UBA*'s] are just doing it to keep ourselves entertained while we are here on campus".

### **Male students and the 'gold rush'**

The pressure for male students to be sexually active, or at the very least to be known to be romantically linked to a woman, is quite high. At the UZ, a scoring system has been



developed to identify ‘sexually unsuccessful’ males. In this scoring system, no points are awarded for every year that a male student spent on campus without a girlfriend. Male students admitted that they tried to avoid ‘being beaten three-nil by the university’, that is, completing their studies without having ‘scored’. A male student observed: ‘The pressure to score at least one point is higher when you are in your final year’. The soccer metaphor that male students used to describe this scoring system aptly captured the competitive and often downright violent manner in which male students approached intimate relationships with female students at the UZ campus.

Despite their general undesirability as sexual and romance partners, male students did occasionally manage to attract and date female students. However, many accomplished this feat by using strategies that exceeded conventional boundaries of ‘wooing’ [*kunyenga*] and by employing *chi-UBA* tactics. I limit my discussion here to the three types of intimate relationships—‘gold rush’, ‘one day internationals’, (ODIs, in short) and importing—that many male students participated in. Following Moore (1994), I argue that aside from providing what was evidently a necessary sexual outlet for frustrated male students, these particular relationships also enabled male students to live out their ‘fantasies of power’ and to thus measure up to the masculine ideals of a sexual adulthood.

The ‘gold rush’ referred to a practice in which older male students competed for the attentions of first year female students. The ‘gold’ in ‘gold rush’ denoted a grading system that was used to rank the perceived ‘sexual purity’ of female students. When they first joined the university, female students were believed to be sexually inexperienced (that is, virgins), a highly valued condition in Zimbabwe, hence the ‘gold’ status accorded

to them. First year female students were also said to be ‘fresh’, a further reference to their perceived sexual purity. In their second year, female students were considered to have lost most of their sexual purity, hence their value diminished to ‘silver’. By their third year, female students’ sexual purity was considered to have been reduced even further, hence they were downgraded to ‘bronze’ status.

Even though the ‘gold rush’ occurred throughout the first semester of each new academic year, it was much more pronounced during the first couple of weeks when new students arrived on the UZ campus. This was particularly when first year female students were ‘in great demand’. For example, although Tawanda was totally opposed to dating a fellow female student, he was nonetheless willing to ask out a first year student during the first couple of weeks of a new academic year. Tawanda explained his preference this way, ‘I have to socialize her into my culture before she is socialized into the UZ culture’. This was despite being a first year student himself.

Many of the male students with whom I interacted during fieldwork voiced concerns that female students were difficult to have as girlfriends because ‘they are intelligent and can challenge you [as the man]’. One openly stated that he preferred a wife who was many years younger than him *and* who was not a university graduate. ‘I need someone I can control, not someone who will challenge me’, he explained. The ‘gold rush’ was thus one of the ways powerless male students used to enact their fantasies of power. Tawanda’s explanation betrayed his, and many other male students’ anxieties of powerlessness: they would only date those women over whom they could exercise some measure of control, such as naïve first year female students. But even then, this control was only possible under extremely limited conditions or for very limited periods.

I interviewed Joseph just two months into the 2006 academic year, and he had already been through one unsuccessful relationship with a fellow first year female student. Joseph claimed that when he first met her, she had presented herself as a ‘decent church-going girl’, but once she had spent some time at the institution she had changed and become sexually demanding. ‘It turned out that I was a better Christian than my ex because she had a sexual orientation [sic], whilst I was against sex’, he explained. He claimed that his girlfriend had left him for a *NABA*, that is, a non-university wealthy man. Ostensibly, the ‘UZ culture’ had corrupted her.

An analysis of how the ‘gold rush’ occurred suggests that its main objective was sex and control, not romantic love. It was also clear from students’ descriptions that male students who participated in the ‘gold rush’ took advantage of first year female students’ general lack of familiarity with university life and with university regulations. One of the key regulations that female students were often not aware of when they first arrived on campus was that they had full rights to their rooms and could therefore decide whom they admitted into these rooms. As a result, older male students visited Swinton Hall, a residence hall that was reserved for first year female students, and went about knocking randomly on doors and then forcing their way in when a door was opened. The majority of first year female students who had been ‘gold rushed’ described the experiences in very similar ways. Samantha explained:

“You can hear them [i.e. male students] knocking on doors. When you open they will say ‘We are looking for So and So’. They just give a fictitious name. And when you tell them that such a person does not stay here, they will then ask you for your name. And before you can stop them, they push their way into your room and refuse to leave”.

Reports of male students refusing to leave female students' rooms were extremely common and what made this practice particularly upsetting for many female students was that the 'gold rush' typically occurred in the evenings, after 7pm. Again, male students capitalized on the fact that, in the first week of their arrival on campus, most first year female students still felt uncomfortable with venturing out of their residence halls after dark. A first year female student I knew had unwittingly opened her door to a drunken male student. The incident had occurred at 8pm and the male student in question had refused to leave her room until it was well after midnight. When I asked the female student why she had not left the male student while she sought help, she explained that she had considered it but thought it unsafe to leave a total stranger alone in her room. She worried that he could have stolen some of her property, or worse still, taken something that belonged to her roommate. She also explained that she was worried that she would be blamed for having opened the door for him to begin with. During this period, the male student had professed his love for her and had made numerous attempts at physical intimacy, such as touching her hands and hugging her.

Besides being hounded by complete strangers, female students were also often at risk of being 'gold rushed' by male students they knew from their former high schools.

Tino, a first year female student explained her terrifying experience as follows:

"I was coming from a lecture when I met this guy that I knew from my high school. We started chatting, just catching up on high school stuff, you know. He walked me to my rez [residence] and we continued chatting until we got to my room. I was surprised when, as we were talking, he got up and he locked the door. I had left the keys in the lock when we entered my room. I tried not to look scared. He started telling me that he loved me, and [that he] had always loved me since high school and he threatened not to leave my room until I told him I loved him too. He was in my room for nearly three hours. The whole time I was

thinking to myself how easy it is for someone to be raped on campus and no one would ever know...”

Tino also explained that during the three hours that she had been trapped in her room, the male student had made numerous attempts at physical intimacy, such as touching various body parts as well as hugging. I often asked first year female students to estimate the number of male students who had made sexual or romantic advances towards them during orientation week. Many were unable to do so as there were simply too many to count. A female student, Regina, felt that she needed to first divide those male students who had asked her out into two groups—‘those who are persistent and even come to your room and refuse to leave’ and ‘those you just meet while going for your lectures and who only bother you there and then and leave you alone afterwards’—before she could hazard a guess of any kind. Another female student felt it necessary to exclude male students who ‘looked drunk or were drunk’ from her count as there would just be too many to consider. The first year female students suggested an average figure of about eight propositions from male students each day, although one informant confidently estimated that at least one hundred male students *a week* had made sexual and romantic advances towards her. This figure, she clarified, included *any* male student who had initiated a conversation with her and expressed the desire to be ‘more than just friends’.

The majority of male students who participated in the gold rush employed the same set of ‘wooing’ techniques. In the cases given above, male students used the fact that they had attended the same schools with particular first year female students in order to earn their trust and gain access to their room numbers as well as rooms. Some male students targeted females students in their departments. They would invite these female

students over to their rooms and offer to assist them with class assignments and texts. Yet still other male students simply resorted to outright physical violence and forced their way into female students' rooms. Although very few male students succeeded in establishing actual sexual contact using these particular 'wooing' strategies, many did manage some form of physical contact.

However, the real value of the 'wooing' strategies that male students employed during the 'gold rush' was that they gave them access to the room numbers of first year female students. Once male students had these room numbers they could then disguise their 'gold rush' 'wooing' strategies to resemble more 'conventional' 'wooing' techniques. Let me explain. In addition to having the right to determine whom they admitted into their rooms, university authorities warned female students against giving out their room numbers indiscriminately. When male students thus knocked randomly on female students' doors during the 'gold rush' it was a strategy that enabled them to gain direct access to the room numbers of attractive female students. This information would, in turn, facilitate repeated visits. It was during these repeat visits that male students would try to convince female students that they were not participating in the 'gold rush' but were genuinely interested in a serious relationship. They were said to visit particular female students' rooms numerous times a day, leaving notes of professed love each time. The female students with whom I interacted acknowledged that such attention could be flattering and that many first year female students eventually succumbed to male students' advances, only to realize much later that they had in fact been 'gold rushed'. My female informants also claimed that they knew of many female students who had



given in to male students' sexual and romantic advances as a desperate way of getting the harassment (i.e. the unwelcome visits and attempts at physical contact) to stop.

What is particularly striking about female students' accounts of their 'gold rush' experiences is the absence of actual rape cases, even though many admitted that they had found themselves in situations of 'near rape'. Brenda, a bubbly first year female student summarized her perceptions of male students' actions during the 'gold rush' in the following way, 'It's like they want to rape you or something'. She was one of my closest female informants and I had got to know her quite well when she told me about her 'near rape' encounter. Like most students, Brenda was not allocated a room on campus. This was despite the fact that her home was three hundred kilometres away and she had no relatives she could stay with in Harare. Again, like so many other students in her situation, Brenda had tried everything she could to secure a room on campus. This included submitting numerous application letters to the accommodation office.

After spending the first couple of days of the new academic year 'squatting' (i.e. illegally sharing a room with a student), she decided to approach the student council for assistance. A few days later, a council member, Tonde, had successfully secured a room for her. However, it was then that her problems began. Tonde made romantic advances towards her and, despite rejecting his advances, he began treating her like she was his girlfriend. Tonde visited her room daily and that he brought two or three of his friends with him each time. These friends always referred to her as 'Mrs. So and So', using Tonde's surname, implying that she was Tonde's girlfriend. Brenda also explained that Tonde's friends would even comment approvingly on her physical features and congratulate Tonde for his 'good find'.

In addition to these unwelcome daily visits, Brenda discovered that Tonde's friends also monitored her behaviour on campus. On one occasion, Tonde and his friends threatened to make 'life miserable' for a male student with whom Brenda was particularly close. When she went to the dining hall for her meals, Tonde's friends would be there and they would greet her out loud as 'Mrs. so and so', again using Tonde's surname. Brenda considered these actions a form of harassment and she knew that they were a consequence of her continued refusal to date Tonde. After almost a week of such harassment, Brenda decided to resolve the issue once and for all:

Brenda: I told him [Tonde] one day that I wanted to speak to him. He said I should come to his room at 8pm on a particular day. I was worried about going to his room alone at that time of the day, but I just needed to put an end to everything. I knew that I was taking a risk.

Me: What did you have in mind?

Brenda: I wanted to tell him to stop harassing me. And I was prepared to give up my room if it meant that he would leave me alone. I knew that I had to take action or else it would never stop. I mean, I couldn't even go to the dining hall anymore without bumping into his friends and being called by someone else's name. And you know people start to talk...

On the appointed day, Brenda made her way to the all-male residence where Tonde lived. When she confronted him about his own, and his friends' behaviour, Tonde apologized and tried to distance himself from his friends' actions. He also began professing his love for Brenda. Below, Brenda describes what transpired during the visit:

"It happened to me here on campus, in a place that I thought I would be safe. But it happened to me. Someone hugging me. Someone throws me on his bed. Imagine! He threw me on his bed and I thought to myself 'Should I scream?' But I couldn't scream. I always thought to myself that if a guy touches me this way I will scream, but you don't scream... So, the only thing that I could do, I touched [covered] his mouth, like this, because he wanted to kiss me. And then he said 'You are now an adult, so start acting like a grown up [*watokura so, saka chi-*

*ekita semunhu atokura*]. I told him that with regards to what you want to introduce me to, I am still a kid. And then he said ‘Go ahead and scream if you want to’.

Brenda claimed that as they were struggling on the bed, someone knocked on the door and called out that it was time to attend a specific meeting. It appeared that Tonde had forgotten about an urgent meeting that he had to attend. Brenda explained that she took advantage of Tonde’s diverted attention to free herself from his grip in order to sit up. Tonde acknowledged (without opening his door) to the person knocking that he would be there shortly. He had then turned back to Brenda, who was at this time on her feet and heading for the door, and had asked ‘How would you feel if I kiss you?’ She had replied, ‘I don’t think I will be okay with that’. However, she had granted him his wish for a kiss: ‘I let him kiss me. Yes, he actually kissed me. I remember that. I didn’t like it’.

When I asked Brenda why she had allowed him to kiss her, Brenda had explained that she felt that it was a small price to pay for her freedom. Like many female students, Brenda had not reported the incident to any of the university authorities because she feared that she would be held responsible for what transpired. After all, it was *she* who had gone alone and at night to the room of a male student who had been harassing her. Furthermore, it would just be her word against his. There was no evidence that the incident had occurred at all. This was the same dilemma that Regina had faced when a male student had held her hostage in her room for three hours. A number of scholars have pointed out that one of the many reasons that men perpetrate acts of sexual violence, including rape, is precisely because these acts go largely unreported. As a result, ‘men perceive rape as rewarding and low-risk’ (Bart and Moran 1993: 2).

The ‘gold rush’ was by no means an unusual occurrence at the UZ campus during the 2006 academic year. It was already in existence when I joined the institution as an undergraduate student during the mid-nineties and was a major part of the ‘campus culture’. Its meanings, however, seem to have changed over time. When male students participated in the ‘gold rush’ in the nineties, it was not primarily because they were considered sexually and romantically undesirable. Then, all students were generally assured of fairly well paying government jobs upon graduation and all students received a generous government stipend. Even though they still had to contend with *NABAs* and Big *Dharas* ‘taking their women away’, male students then did not seem to experience their junior male status in as disempowering a manner as male students appeared to during my fieldwork.

### **Deception, ‘one-day internationals’ and male students’ ‘fantasies of power’**

Once the excitement of the gold rush had died down, male students became much less selective in their choice of sexual and romance partners, and started to target any female student. ‘One Day Internationals’, popularly referred to as ‘ODIs’ on campus, were the primary means by which male students ensured that they had sex on regular basis and thus lived up to the ideal of a sexual male adulthood. ‘One-day internationals’ were the equivalent of ‘one-night stands’ and casual sexual relationships. Although the latter are neither novel nor unique to the UZ, the term ‘one day international’ is. From what I gathered from male students, the term had been in use for about a year at the time I began fieldwork. It derived from the sport of cricket, which has gained much prominence in the

country during the last ten years because of the national team's international achievements. Since 2000, Zimbabwe hosted numerous international cricket games. During these periods, normal TV programming was usually interrupted and replaced with cricket matches, which could last up to six hours or more. This had given the sport so much visibility that many public schools had started to offer cricket as an extra-mural activity. Schools therefore transformed cricket from being an exclusively elite sport to a more popular one.

In the game of cricket, one-day internationals refer to those games that are concluded in a single day as opposed to test matches, which are played over five days. When applied to campus relationships, one-day internationals were considered to be less demanding and to require fewer commitments from male students. In contrast, test matches were the equivalent of standard 'boyfriend/girlfriend' relationships and were said to place many demands on men, such as regularly taking girlfriends out for meals and movies, all of which was expensive given the financial status of the average male student. I interviewed a second year male student, Solo, at length about his experiences of 'one-day internationals'. Solo was widely considered to be a sexually and romantically undesirable male student. He was from a small town and his family was very poor. He spent his vacations assisting his mother, who was a vegetable street vendor, sell her wares. At the time of the interview, Solo was squatting in a friend's room on campus and was too poor to secure his own accommodation. He always wore the same T-shirt and baggy jeans and appeared to be perpetually intoxicated. Solo described himself as a drunkard and admitted to smoking marijuana all the time. However, he insisted that he only drank and smoked in order to alleviate hunger, since he was too poor to afford

campus meals. Lastly, Solo actively participated in *chi-UBA* performances and this made him that much less appealing as a sexual and romantic partner. Solo was aware of his undesirability and he described some of the strategies that he employed in order to overcome his disadvantaged position the sexual and romance marketplace on campus.

He explained that it was important to ‘make a big impression’ when wooing a female student. ‘You have to show that you have a nice wardrobe and that you also wear labels. [You need] something expensive that shows that you’ve got financial muscle’. To satisfy this requirement, Solo explained that many male students, including him, borrowed outfits from their friends if there was a particular female student that they were pursuing. He claimed that male students pretended to be well off by dressing in ‘labels’, that is expensive brands, and yet, in reality they were not, ‘They do it just for the ladies’. Even though Solo had a girlfriend ‘back home’, whom he had started dating when he was in his first year and she was in her third year of high school, he admitted to engaging in casual sex. He narrated a recent ‘one-day international’ encounter. In short, he met a female student whom he ‘liked’ and invited her over to his room—or rather, his friend’s room since he was a squatter—‘for a cup of tea or coffee’. The encounter culminated in the two engaging in unprotected sex. When I enquired about the current status of his relationship with the girl, particularly if he had seen her since the encounter, he replied matter-of-factly: ‘If I have, I wouldn’t know because I don’t remember what she looks like. And anyway, the point is not to have a relationship with her. If you ever meet your ODI’s, you should not show that you recognise them. Pretend that you don’t know them’.

I would like to highlight a few key points pertaining to ‘one-day internationals’, especially as they relate to how these relationships enable otherwise undesirable *UBA*’s to

overcome—temporarily—their positions of powerlessness. Flattery was a central strategy that male students like Solo used to overcome female students’ general mistrust of *UBA*’s. As Solo narrated his ‘one-day international’ encounter, he spent considerable time detailing exactly what he had done to earn the trust of a female student whom he had just met. This involved distancing himself from *chi-UBA* masculinity as far as possible. He achieved this by reassuring her that he was ‘not like other *UBA*’s’ and even by bad-mouthing *chi-UBA* culture and by commending the female student for her wariness. Solo also detailed extensively how he had used flattery to ‘soften up’ [*kusofta chibhebhi* in Shona] the female student. The idea of ‘softening up’ girls implies making or coaxing something into a state of pliability which makes control possible. The ability to ‘soften up’ a woman, while a standard wooing technique in Zimbabwe, assumes great significance in the lives of powerless young men like Solo. Such men absolutely have to excel at the technique in order to attract members of the opposite sex.

“You gotta make them believe its love at first sight, you know. I can see you now [for the very first ever] and tell you that I love you and when you are gone and I see another girl, I tell her the same and not even feel any guilt.”

Solo captured the full extent of the desperation of his situation when described himself as ‘a one minute man’. By this he was drawing attention to the fact that he had to make the absolute most of his encounters with female students given his general undesirability:

“Once I got her talking, I knew that I was in! I was in! So I invited her to a room that wasn’t even mine! And once the door is closed [anything is possible]. You sit next to her...look for anything that gives you an opportunity to touch her. [Comment] on her nails or her hands. Touch her where you won’t let go! If you touch her and she is not pulling away, then you know that we are going there! Everything changes and you make your move! I was moving for real! I was moving! [i.e. making progress]”.



Solo's 'softening' strategies in the above incident were carefully thought out. First, he had focused on establishing rapport with the female student; then, he had focused on convincing her that he just wanted to be friends and nothing more. After having achieved this, Solo's next step was to get the female student into his room—hence the offer to make her a cup of coffee. Finally, once he had her in his room, Solo had gingerly initiated some physical contact. Eventually he had sex with her. Solo stressed that he always paid attention to a female student's body language as this provided him with important clues as to whether he would be successful with her or not. Simple things like a female student not pulling away when he touched her hand and a female student who was willing to engage in conversation offered important clues. When I asked Solo what the point of his 'one-day internationals' were, he responded that he did not want to be viewed as a 'Girl Guide', a name that was apparently given to those male students who were not known to have any romantic or sexual partners on campus.

Men's use of flattery and outright deception are traditionally considered to be central to the courtship process in Zimbabwe. This is denoted in the following Shona idioms: 'a man who does not lie, does not marry [*risinganyepi hariroore*]' and 'a man deceives [lit. 'bows down in deference'] when he is courting and only reveals his true colours after he has got the girl [*rinonyenga rinohwarara, rozotambarara rawana*}'. On one level therefore, the actions of these male students simply reflected, and conformed to, this particular cultural script for courtship. On another level, though, when the use of flattery and deception is assessed within the broader context of male students' powerlessness, it assumes far greater significance and ceases to be just a courtship



strategy. For these young men, flattery and deception were the only tools upon which they could rely, given their lack of fiscal power. In their desperation to achieve a sexual male adulthood, however, most male students exceeded the limits of what is considered culturally acceptable, as the ‘gold rush’ and ‘one-day internationals’ examples illustrate.

One last type of relationship that was common on the UZ campus was known as ‘importing’. The term was used when males brought sex workers to their rooms on the UZ campus. They were outsiders and distinctly out of place there, hence the term, ‘importing’. Like the ‘gold rush’, ‘importing’ had been practiced at the institution since the nineties, and probably even earlier (see Cheater 1993). In contrast to the ‘gold rush’ and ‘one-day internationals’, ‘importing’ was very lowly regarded by many male students as they considered it to be the epitome of desperation, and hence of masculine failure. While male students talked openly about having participated in the ‘gold rush’ and in ‘one-day internationals’ and even bragged about it in conversations, few readily admitted to having personally ‘imported’. ‘Importing’ carried the same sort of stigma that masturbation, and indeed homosexuality, had on the UZ campus. According to one of my male informants, Ranga, a lot of teasing occurred in the common rooms when male students were watching ‘tutorials’, a term that was used to refer to soft porn movies. Male students who walked out of the common immediately after a ‘tutorial’ or immediately after a sex scene were teased and were said to be going off to masturbate:

“Don’t make a mistake of walking out of the common room soon after a sex scene has been just been playing, because the other guys will start shouting and laughing at you saying [that] you are going to engage in the solo act of devotion! [a reference to masturbation].”



It is therefore not surprising that whenever the issue of ‘importing’ came up during my fieldwork, it was always narrated in the third person, as something that had happened to others. There were at least three incidents of ‘importing’ that were brought to my attention. The circumstances were always the same: a male student would bring an ‘import’ to his room and after having sex with her, the male student would find a way to abandon the import in the bathroom. Inevitably, other male students who resided in the same residence would discover the unfortunate sex worker and they would sound the alarm and she would then be harassed. Below is a male student’s description of an ‘importing’ incident that occurred during the second semester of the 2006 academic year and which he claimed to have been privy to:

“Last semester, a *UBA* from Baghdad [i.e. the colloquial name for one of the student residences that houses first year male students] brought a prostitute over and after spending the night with her, he did not want to pay. So, when morning came, he showed her the bathroom so that she could take a bath. That is how he managed to lose her. When she was discovered by some *UBA*’s lost in the corridor, they started calling out ‘Whore! Whore!’ [*Hure! Hure!*] You could tell that she was one [i.e. a prostitute]. She was rescued by one male student who offered to give her money for bus fare. From what I hear, the male student took her to his room and had sex with her before giving her some cash.”

Some of these incidents have even been reported in the national press (Cheater 1993). The male student quoted above attributed this type of behaviour to a variety of factors, such as the lack of entertainment on campus, which he said forced male students to patronise bars in the city centre, where they would drink and, once drunk, secure the services of sex workers. He was also of the view that male students resorted to sex workers ‘when life gets difficult’ [i.e. ‘*kana zvapressa*’], which in this case meant when they got really desperate for sex. Getting sex from sex workers worked out cheaper, in a

financial sense, in much the same way that ‘one-day internationals’ did. Furthermore, as the incident above showed, male students usually succeeded in completely evading the costs associated with ‘importing’.

## **Conclusion**

Male students at the UZ face tremendous pressure to prove their masculinity through sexual encounters. This explains why most of the relationships that they establish have sex as its end goal, rather than romance and other non-sexual forms of intimacy. This chapter has illustrated the extreme lengths—such as the gold rush, importing and one-day internationals—that many male students are thus willing to go to just to meet the sexual male ideal. Additionally, I have tried to show that male students’ sense of powerlessness in the face of wealthy and successful outside men, who are also competing for the affections of female students, greatly influences their choices regarding the types of romantic and sexual partnerships that they eventually establish. As in the previous chapter, I have primarily focused on those relationship types that are dominant on the UZ campus as these inform the campus culture regarding love, romance and intimacy. This should not be taken to mean that other forms of partnerships do not exist at the institution. As the next chapter will show, many male students did not participate in the gold rush and were in committed, monogamous relationships.



## **Chapter Six**

### **Christian Students, Sex and Disciplined Bodies**

Christian activity at the UZ plays itself out daily in the campus chapel, which caters to a variety of Christian groups, ranging from Seventh Day Adventists to Anglicans to various Pentecostal groups. Every Sunday between 7am and 6pm, different denominations meet in the chapel for hour-long services, while on Saturday, the chapel is solely reserved for use by the Seventh Day Adventist church. During the week, countless church groups hold prayer meetings at the chapel and in the various residence-hall common rooms. During fieldwork, I observed that church groups dominated the use of these common rooms and that the latter often had to be booked well in advance due to high demand.

On one occasion while attending a slam poetry group meeting on campus, I noted that a church group had just vacated the common room that we were now using and that a church choir was meeting in a separate section of the common room that had been partitioned off. Our poetry meeting was disrupted each time the choir broke out into loud prayer or began singing. When the poetry meeting concluded, an hour later, I noted two more church groups preparing to use the room that we had been in. Furthermore, three of the six members of the poetry group were en route to church meetings being held elsewhere on campus. It was also not uncommon to see church meetings being held outdoors—in the chapel gardens, on the sports fields or in other secluded open spaces. Indeed, a visitor to the institution would be forgiven for thinking that the UZ was a decidedly Christian campus.

In this chapter I turn my attention to the specific experiences of Christian students on the UZ campus in order to examine how Christianity operates as a ‘technology of the self’ (Foucault 1990:58) in the management and regulation of Christian sexualities. More specifically, this chapter will focus on the following: students’ struggles against sexual temptation; the strategies that different church groups use to encourage and enforce ‘Christian’ sexual subjectivities among students; and how these strategies inform the Christian groups’ approach to HIV prevention on campus. I centre most of my discussions on one Christian group, the interdenominational Celebration Church, which attracted hundreds of students to its weekly services. In fact, a large part of the Celebration church’s appeal on campus, besides its ‘prosperity’ and ‘modernity’ messages, was its interdenominational character.

### **Christianity and HIV in Zimbabwe**

The majority of Zimbabweans consider themselves to be Christians. According to the most recent statistics released by the Central Statistics Office in 2006, sixty-six percent of men and eighty-nine percent of women reported that they were Christians (*Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey 2005-6*; see also Chitando 2002). The distribution according to specific denominations was as follows: Apostolic Sect (30% women and 22% men); Protestants (26% and 17% respectively); Pentecostals (18% and 13% respectively); Roman Catholics (10% for both women and men) and ‘Other Christian’ (6% and 4% respectively) (*Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey 2005-6*). Only two percent of women and eight percent of men indicated that they were ‘Traditionalists’ and less than

one percent of all respondents indicated that they were ‘Muslim’. While these statistics obscure a lot, such as the fact that in reality many individuals who claim to be Christian also occasionally practice certain aspects of ‘traditionalist’ religion, they do clearly show that most Zimbabweans think of themselves as Christian. Given the recent rise in Pentecostalism in the country, many Christians now also belong to more than one denomination at a time. Similar patterns can be assumed to exist on the UZ campus, with perhaps much smaller proportions of students who belong to the Apostolic Sect and practice traditional religious rituals.

There are major differences in the origins and theologies of the Christian denominations listed above. Here I would like to highlight a few differences between so-called mission-oriented churches, Apostolic Sects and Pentecostal churches. Mission-oriented churches include Protestant groups such as the Dutch Reformed, Methodist and Lutheran churches and also the Roman Catholics. They date back to the late 1800s (Zvobgo 1996; Bhebhe 1979) and represent the earliest presence of Christianity in the country, except for a brief encounter with Jesuit missionaries in the 1600s. Despite being seen as the precursors to Africa’s colonialism, mission-oriented churches were historically associated with ‘progress’ and ‘modernity’ and the schools they established ‘provided access to high salaries in white collar work, and also access to politics and power’ (Bourdillon 1990: 285; see also Dachs 1973 and Comaroff and Comaroff 1997). Apostolic sects started to grow in the early twentieth century, and were often led by former members of mission-churches, who integrated local rituals and processes with Christian ideas. They tend to fashion themselves like Old Testament communities, and focus more on faith healing than complex doctrine (Engelke 2007; Sundkler 1961). They

also often resist certain trappings of ‘modernity’, and sometime explicitly oppose involvement with government and employment by Europeans. Members of one particularly prominent sect, Johan Marange, are not allowed to seek ‘Western’ medical care (Jules-Rosette 1975). All Apostolics wear some kind of uniform to church—the most typical being a completely white tunic, and most prefer to meet in open places rather than in special buildings.

In contrast to both mission and Apostolic churches, Pentecostal churches in the country are predominantly a feature of independent Zimbabwe. In fact, Meyer (2004: 453) traces the rise of Pentecostal churches in Africa to ‘the crisis of the post-colonial nation-state...and mass-mediated popular culture’. The first key difference is therefore that mission-oriented churches have a longer history in the country than do Pentecostal churches. The second major difference that is relevant for my purposes in this chapter pertains to theology. Most mission-oriented churches are guided by what Weber termed ‘the Protestant ethic’, which is based on the principle of prosperity, but without the corresponding excessive shows of wealth. Mission churches promote frugality and discourage compulsive enjoyment. By contrast, Meyer (2004:459) that Pentecostals ‘present themselves as the ultimate embodiments of modernity’ as illustrated by the ‘huge churches’ that they build for their congregations as well as by the very glitzy lifestyles of the pastors from these churches. The Pentecostal theology also posits that prosperity is a blessing from God and that outward displays of prosperity are perfectly fine as long as one continues to be led by the Holy Spirit (*ibid*). I will show in the latter parts of the chapter how these ideas feed into Pentecostal churches’ messages to students regarding morality and sexuality.

Mission-oriented churches and Pentecostal churches also approach the issues of sexuality and HIV in contrasting ways. Garner (2000:51) argues that the former ‘ask few questions’ about the private lives of their members, while in the latter, ‘the romantic and financial aspects of members lives are monitored—if not controlled—by church leaders’. In their study of mission-type churches and what they called ‘spirit-type’ churches (i.e. Pentecostals and African Independent churches) in Zimbabwe, Gregson et al (1999) noted that the former believe that the avoidance of sin is best left to individual conscience and prayer, while in the latter, ‘church leaders teach that sin can lead to sickness and often operate systems of checks and punishments for offenders’. Some studies suggest that HIV prevalence is lower among Pentecostals precisely because of these regulatory systems (see Sadgrove 2007; Gregson et al 1999). Other studies merely point to the protective effect of religion. In Zimbabwe, for instance, individuals who reported that they were not religious had higher rates of HIV compared to their more religious counterparts (Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey 2005-6). In the same study, Muslims had the lowest infection rates among religious individuals, reflecting trends elsewhere on the continent (Epstein 2007). It must be noted, however, that the relationship between religious affiliation and sexual behaviour is much more complex. Furthermore, there are numerous differences in the extent to which Pentecostal churches actually monitor and regulate the romantic and sexual lives of their members.

There is general consensus in the literature that the church has in Africa greatly contributed to HIV and AIDS-related stigma and discrimination (Delius and Glaser 2005; Robins 2004). The tendency to associate infection with promiscuity is often cited as the main reason. It is important, however, to realize that the church’s response has not been



homogenous. In her study of the role of Christianity in promoting democracy in Zimbabwe, Mukonyora (2008:135), for instance, distinguishes between two groups of Christians: those who are ‘other worldly’ and ‘are reluctant to reflect on the way their beliefs shape their politics and who reinforce the status quo’. In contrast, she argues that ‘this worldly’ Christians believe that they have a key role to play in challenging inequities in society and they try to draw on Christian principles to accomplish this. Mukonyora’s analysis is useful for examining how Pentecostal and mission churches in Zimbabwe have responded to the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

According to Chiweza (1997:117), some church groups in the country treat the problem of HIV and AIDS as an ‘earthly one’ and ‘believe that God shall resolve the problem at his own time’. Such groups can be said to conform to Mukonyora’s ‘other worldly’ classification because they place emphasis on prayer and belief in God as the only viable approaches to HIV prevention. These churches seldom discuss the issues of HIV and AIDS and when they do, they associate the epidemic with sin. Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe have placed adverts in the media claiming that they have the ability to ‘cure’ AIDS through prayer. A Zimbabwean columnist received the following response from a Christian after she had written an article criticizing some church groups for their over-emphasis on prayer as an HIV prevention strategy. The response read, ‘Christians should be preaching salvation...it’s up to God to cure them of Aids when they ask Him. Believe me God is still in the business of healing people even today’. The national press ran a story in January 2004 on the upsurge of so-called ‘miracle cures’ that were being offered by some church groups and traditional healers. In the article, some Pentecostal churches were said to be providing ‘holy water’ which they claimed cured all

ailments, including HIV infection (*The Herald*, 14 January 2004). These particular responses encourage passivity in the face of the epidemic. The director of a women's organisation in Zimbabwe captured this idea perfectly at a conference held on gender violence and HIV last year. She explained that many married women had told her that they did not see the need for them to use condoms with their husbands because 'God was their condom' (*The Standard*, 1 May 2010). For these women, Christianity offered immunity against the virus.

Other churches, however, view HIV and AIDS as problems that must be addressed in the here and now. Most mission churches fall into this group and regularly talk about the epidemic in their sermons, although they tend to promote abstinence and fidelity as the only acceptable prevention methods. Ministers associate condoms with sin and discourage their use as a way to stamp out pre-marital and extra-marital sex. Kelly, a Catholic priest based in Zambia, acknowledges that 'the explicit teaching of the Church [i.e. Catholic] is that it is unlawful for a married couple to use condoms when they engage in sex...' (Kelly 2001:10). A major limitation with abstinence-only programmes as an HIV prevention strategy is that they foreclose any opportunity for comprehensive sex education with young people (Marindo et al 2003). In fact, church groups only talk about sex and sexuality with those young people who are about to get married; until then, youth are virtually treated as if they are asexual beings. Fidelity, on the other hand, is said to be ineffective against HIV infection because it ignores—and often reinforces—gender inequities that make it impossible for many married women, especially, to enforce. For instance, church groups reinforce cultural beliefs that all decision-making, including sexual decision-making, is the prerogative of the husband. Many church groups in

Zimbabwe stress that obedience, subservience and respect to husbands are important attributes of a Christian wife (*The Standard*, 1 May 2010). Feldman and Maposhere (2003) and Njovana and Watts (1996) have argued that this makes it very difficult for Zimbabwean women to confront their husbands about the latter's infidelity. It also makes it hard for them to enforce condom use in their marriages.

The church's response to HIV and AIDS continues to be disjointed and inadequate even though heads of denominations from close to two hundred church groups developed an HIV and AIDS policy in 2005. A number of church groups are also now encouraging pre-marital HIV testing for young couples (*The Herald*, 9 June 2005). Some Apostolic and Zionist churches have decided to end the practice of polygamy as a way of stemming the spread of HIV among their members (*The Herald* 21 September 2005). The Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe, which incorporates one hundred church groups, has introduced mandatory testing for all its pastors, marriage officers and would-be couples. In addition, many churches have vibrant home-based care programmes in which church members provide care and support to the sick, many of whom are often suffering from HIV and AIDS-related illnesses. Church groups generally find it easier to provide care and support to the infected than to talk openly about the epidemic, because they have always traditionally cared for the sick (Rodlach 2009). Churches have also been instrumental in providing care and support, in the form of food packages and school fees, to children orphaned by the epidemic.

### **Christian Students' Struggles against Sexual Temptation**

In the preceding chapter I briefly introduced two friends, Leonard and Nhlanhla, who were both in their final year. I did not mention, however, that both were devout Pentecostal Christians. The two rarely went through a whole conversation without making reference to the Bible or declaring their Christian commitment. Both claimed that they had never had sex nor dated because this was against the teachings of their church groups. Whenever I was in their company, they talked incessantly about girls and dating and about female students they were romantically interested in but had never asked out. Leonard and Nhlanhla were particularly interesting research participants because they readily discussed the challenges they faced as ‘male virgins’. Both attributed their success at retaining their virginity to the fact that they were not resident on campus. Leonard had grown up in a low-income neighbourhood in the capital city and hence commuted daily between the university and home, where he stayed with both parents and four siblings. Nhlanhla, on the other hand, was from a small town located hundreds of kilometers away in the southern part of the country. When the university was in session he stayed in a middle-income neighbourhood with his paternal uncle, the latter’s wife and their two children.

One Friday morning, and at my prompting, Leonard and Nhlanhla described some of the most challenging sexual temptations that they had faced on and off campus and which they had almost given in to. We also discussed the role that Christianity had played in helping them ‘triumph’ over these various temptations. Leonard claimed that a tenant’s daughter had made several sexual overtures towards him and that, at one point, he had come ‘dangerously close’ to succumbing to them:



“If there was anyone I was ever going to have sex with, it was that lady. I think she was sent by the Devil! There [must be] a demon for sex [because] I was not thinking straight. You are like in a mood, you know, like at a waterfall and the current is strong, you can’t resist and God, you are about to do it [have sex] then, Hallelujah, an angel stops you. Or someone knocks on the door! Then you are back to your senses!”

Leonard described how he had felt completely out of control—like a waterfall—when he kissed the tenant. He claimed that this was the first time that he had ever kissed a woman in his life. Although Leonard admitted that he had found the kiss extremely pleasurable, he immediately attempted to diminish his feelings of guilt and to reconcile his actions with his Christian ethics by blaming his temporary loss of control on the woman—she was the devil incarnate—and to an even greater force—demonic spirits. He also tried to distance himself further from his actions by drawing on the waterfall analogy in order to draw attention to the fact that it was humanly impossible to resist the kind of temptation that he had faced. Attributing certain types of ‘un-Christian’ behaviour to extra-terrestrial forces, particularly demons, is a common strategy that many Christians use to assuage their guilt (Robbins 2004). By framing his experiences in the context of the supernatural Leonard managed to downplay his culpability while simultaneously highlighting the important role that divine intervention had played in ‘saving’ him from committing a sinful act.

Nhlanhla reinforced his friend’s views and pointed out that even the greatest men in the Bible had ‘fallen’ because of sexual temptation:

“The more you start getting closer to God, the more women start appearing from nowhere...and if you are not careful, you will fall. Abstaining is difficult. It is very, very difficult and it is only through God’s grace that we are able to overcome [sexual temptation].”

Nhlanhla's most recent encounter with sexual temptation involved a neighbour's wife. He alleged that on several occasions the neighbour's wife had come over to his house asking for assistance for a malfunctioning television set. His parents had sent him over to look at it and each time the 'problem' would turn out to be something minor that she and her husband could easily have fixed themselves. Nhlanhla claimed that on one occasion he had found the neighbour's wife clad in a revealing 'zambia', ostensibly about to take a bath. A 'zambia' is a special type of boldly printed cloth, approximately 2m x 1.5 m in length, which women in the country wrap over their regular clothes in order to cover as much of their lower body as possible. The 'zambia' is considered a sign of feminine modesty and respectability, especially among older and married women (Jacobson-Widding 2000). Sometimes, when women prepare to take a bath, they wrap a zambia much higher up so that it covers the breasts. However, wearing it this way leaves the shoulders completely exposed as well as shortens the length of the cloth to just below or above the knees, which many men find seductive. In fact, Jacob Zuma, the President of South Africa, cited the 'kanga' (as the 'zambia' is called in South Africa), as his reason for having sex with a woman who had brought rape charges against him in 2008 (Motsei 2008; Robins 2008). He claimed that 'kanga' constituted sexually 'provocative' dressing. Just like Jacob Zuma, Nhlanhla had found the neighbour's wife's zambia-clad body sexually enticing. Unlike Zuma, however, Nhlanhla had successfully resisted the temptation.

Both Leonard and Nhlanhla took little personal credit for their success at sexual abstinence and instead attributed it to their relationship with God and to God's direct intervention. For Leonard 'an angel' had appeared in the nick of time, while Nhlanhla

attributed his success to ‘God’s grace’. Christianity thus acts as a protective force against the more serious types of sexual temptation. In this particular instance, Christianity prevented the two friends from having actual sexual intercourse. It had not, however, prevented them from committing other sexual sins, admittedly of a much lesser magnitude, such as kissing. Again, Nhlanhla’s experiences are illustrative.

“I have kissed many people in my life. I have this problem that when I meet a girl, I will end up kissing her. I can’t help it. One time I kissed a girl within an hour of meeting her! For three days we met at a park and kissed. She disappeared after three days and I have not seen her since. To this day, I don’t even know if she was a demon or what...”

Nhlanhla characterised his love for kissing in terms of an addiction. It is also quite clear that he felt terribly conflicted about this particular personal weakness.

In contrast to their male counterparts, only a small number of the female Christian students I interviewed described the sexual advances they received from men in terms of temptation. However, they did acknowledge being pressured for sex by boyfriends. ‘Even if you have agreed with your boyfriend to abstain, guys have a way of luring you and you end up doing it [i.e. having sex]’, a female Christian student observed. Most, however, considered the desire for material consumption goods to be a much greater temptation than pre-marital sex. It was this desire, they pointed out, that made many female students ‘compromise’ their standards by engaging in transactional sex relationships. ‘Being Christian is hard’, a female student admitted in an interview, ‘When I first came here [to the UZ] I was tempted...you know...Some people seemed to be always having fun. But after some time I realized that they have to pay...’ She proceeded to give the example of

a friend who had been infected with HIV by an older man that she had been dating, not because she loved him, but because he provided for her financially.

Another Christian student, who was part of a Christian women's fellowship group on campus, explained that all women faced the challenge of 'looking good' and 'having better clothes' throughout their stay on campus although the pressure was greatest for first year students. 'In [your] first year you want to fit in and to be accepted. You are concerned about your looks and this can lead to low self esteem if you cannot afford to buy what is in fashion'. The women's fellowship group that she belonged to used examples of powerful women in the Bible to help members develop high self-esteem. 'We try to show female students that they have so much potential in them and that they too can be powerful. We also encourage each other to study hard as there will be plenty of time to look good after graduation'.

There were other ways that female Christian students' dating experiences differed from those of their male counterparts. Women seemed to be confronted with much greater, and contradictory, challenges. For instance, many indicated that Christian peers pressured them to become engaged and be in serious relationships. They also observed that female students who were not in relationships were often suspected of engaging in clandestine promiscuous behaviour. Charity, a Catholic student explained:

"People respect you when you are in a relationship. People refer to you as '*madam wa ningi*' [i.e. so and so's woman] and they do not mess around with you. It was only after I broke up with my boyfriend that I realized that single women are not respected here [on campus]."



Rather than avoiding intimate relationships, therefore, many female Christian students were actively pursuing them. The idea that married women or women in long-term relationships are more respectable than single women is fairly common in Christianity (Brusco 1995). In her study of femininity and Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, for instance, Mate (2002:557) observed that single women and widowed women were ‘routinely prayed for so that they would get married and have long lasting relationships’. Once in relationships, female Christian students faced an even greater dilemma, which was how to maintain non-sexual relationships while allowing limited forms of physical intimacy, which did not conflict fundamentally with their Christian faith. The experiences of the three female students I discuss next are illustrative of this dilemma.

The three students, who were friends, belonged to the Seventh Day Adventist church. Like the two male students discussed earlier, they too claimed to be sexually abstinent. However, each held a different view regarding non-sexual forms of physical intimacy in relationships. Miriam, for instance, was dating a fellow Seventh Day Adventist and there was no physical intimacy whatsoever in the relationship. ‘I have never had sex and I have never kissed a guy’. She attributed this to the fact that her boyfriend belonged to the same church and was exposed to the same messages regarding sexual abstinence. He had thus never made any sexual advances towards her. The second student, Langa, was also dating within the same church but her relationship involved limited forms of physical intimacy: ‘I am still a virgin, but my boyfriend and I hug and kiss’. The last student, Chipso, was dating someone from a different church and she stated, ‘We do everything but sex’. She proceeded to explain,

“I think people use the word virgin wrongly. Most of us have kissed and done almost everything. We have even experienced what an orgasm feels like even though there was no penetration. Can such a person still be called a virgin?”

Because they had not had actual penetrative intercourse, Chipo and Langa were convinced that their actions fell within the ambit of an acceptable Christian response. They were also of the view that physical intimacy was a necessary aspect of relationships, ‘otherwise you are just brother and sister’. Furthermore, they felt that a total ban on all forms of physical intimacy was unrealistic in contemporary Zimbabwe. The three students mentioned that some of the female Christian students they knew were responding to sexual temptation in the following ways: engaging in mutual masturbation with their male partners, setting clear ground rules regarding premarital sex at the start of a new relationship, avoiding isolated places when they were with their boyfriends and always keeping their clothes on when making out. ‘Once the clothes start coming off, you know that you are in trouble. It’s harder to stop at that point’, Chipo explained. When I asked Miriam, whose relationship involved no physical intimacy whatsoever, to give me some actual examples of how she managed to overcome sexual temptation, she responded: ‘Just think of your mother when you find yourself in such a situation [i.e. sexually tempted]’.

In her study of ‘born-again’ (i.e. Pentecostal) Christian students at Makerere University in Uganda, Sadgrove (2007) showed that there were often more similarities, than differences, between the sexual behaviours of ‘born-again’ students and their non-born again (i.e. mission churches) counterparts. The only difference was that the former seemed more conflicted and experienced a lot of guilt with regards their sexual behaviour than the latter.

## **Dating, Courtship and other Christian Responses to Sexuality on Campus**

If Christian groups at the UZ shared one thing in common, it was their condemnation of premarital sex. However, they were less unanimous in their views on the propriety of intimate relations among students. Some groups supported these relations but only under very strict conditions. For instance, they required that dating couples belong to the same church, that romantic liaisons be made public to the rest of the church and that marriage should be the intended outcome of any such relations. In contrast, other churches did not discourage dating at all. I noted during fieldwork that most Christian groups, especially Pentecostals, maintained a strict differentiation between ‘dating’ and ‘courtship’. One such group was the Celebration Ministries International, which I discuss in much greater detail later in the chapter. A brief description of the church group is necessary at this point.

Celebration Church, as it was popularly known in the country, marketed itself as an interdenominational church and was located within walking distance of the UZ campus. The church’s headquarters constituted of a flamboyant building complex and was described in a website as a ‘glamorous, multi-billion dollar building’. It housed, among other things, a theatre that could accommodate as many as three thousand people, a coffee bar, a bookstore, and ‘high tech’ children’s play centre. Although membership was open to all, Celebration Church typically attracted the upper middle-class and the

truly wealthy<sup>25</sup>. However, students who participated in the weekly meetings organized by Celebration on campus were not necessarily from wealthy backgrounds, although many tried to project an aura of success, mostly through their dress code. I was often amazed at how spectacularly dressed and made up some of the female ushers who served at the weekly Tuesday meetings were. The male leaders, in turn, dressed formally in trendy suits and ties as though going for a job interview.

At one of its weekly meetings on campus, the young and newly wed pastor who had been invited to speak on ‘Marriage and Courtship’ described dating as ‘trying out something before you buy it’ and as ‘a preparation for breakup’. To drive his point home, the pastor held up a sheet of paper and, tearing it up piece by piece, declared:

“Ladies, each time you let a guy into your panties [he paused to tear off a couple of pieces], you lose a part of yourself! Marriage is about *wholes* coming together. By the time you are done with your studies in three or four year’s time, what will be left of you? [He paused again and tore off a huge chunk of paper]. Stop enjoying the benefits of marriage when you are not married! Ladies, keep those legs crossed! Guys, check yourselves before you wreck yourselves!”

The pastor associated dating with premarital sex and sexual promiscuity, which were not only considered sinful, but were also seen as indicative of a much greater spiritual malaise: the improper pursuit of pleasure and an inability to delay gratification until the proper time and place. The pastor explained that dating allowed students to ‘enjoy the benefits of marriage’ without being married. It was, in a sense therefore, a ‘trial run’ of marriage without any real intention of eventually marrying the person that one was dating. Consequently, dating was seen as an undisciplined giving in to bodily desires,

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<sup>25</sup> E.g. Nigel Chanakira who owns an Investment Banking enterprise and who was named ‘one of the world’s 100 future leaders under the global body, World Economic Forum in 2005’ or Gary Thompson, ‘an advertising mogul’.

which represented a worldly and un-Christian response to sexual temptation. In contrast, courtship was perceived as an approach that was based on the idea of deferring pleasure to the ‘proper place and time’. Courtship required individuals to exercise great self-control and discipline regarding their bodily desires, all of which were regarded as being essential to spiritual development. In fact, as Marshall (2009:173) points out in her study of ‘born again’ evangelism in Nigeria, ‘...control and channeling of desire [is] central to the problem of salvation’. This is one main reason why most church groups on campus stressed the importance of delayed gratification when they addressed the issue of sex.

Consider the sermon below, which was held during the 2006 orientation week and was directed at first year students. The sermon was held in an overflowing chapel and to an interdenominational audience:

“Does anyone want to share this sandwich with me?” the pastor offered, as he unwrapped a modest looking sandwich. The audience of mostly first year students exchanged glances, unsure of how to respond. ‘Anyone?’ the pastor prompted. Again, an uncomfortable silence followed. The pastor held up his sandwich invitingly and after what felt like an eternity of silence, a hand shot up. ‘Ah!’ the pastor exclaimed happily, ‘Come to the front young man!’ Everyone watched with heightening interest as a male student made his way to the front. Unexpectedly, the pastor then proceeded to take a bite out of the sandwich before handing it over to the male student. The latter hesitated and withdrew his extended hand. The audience laughed. Next, the pastor dropped the partly eaten sandwich to the ground, trampled on it, picked it up and once again offered it to the student. This time, the student declined verbally. The pastor then turned to the rest of the audience and again asked, ‘Does anyone want this piece of bread?’. Satisfied that there were no takers, he delivered his punchline: ‘Ladies, this is what happens to you when you engage in premarital sex! You become like a dirty piece of bread that no one wants. You cheapen yourself!’”

The message of the sermon was very similar to the one given by the pastor from Celebration Church. Both spoke strongly against pre-marital sex and they emphasised its destructive effects—‘cheapening oneself’; ‘losing a part of oneself’; ‘dirtying oneself’—

for those who did not have the discipline to do things the ‘proper’ way. In his sermon, the Celebration Church pastor offered himself as a case study in the art of discipline and delayed gratification. He pointed out that he had not given in to sexual temptation during his stay on campus and that after graduating ten years earlier, he had focused on his relationship with God. It was only after doing this that he had decided to pursue a romantic relationship, which culminated in his marriage in 2006.

Courtship was considered to be a more appropriate Christian approach to relationships because it represented a clear and firm assertion of a couple’s preparation for and commitment to marriage. Courtship was therefore more than just a search for a suitable marriage partner. The Celebration Church pastor offered the following advice to male students, ‘The first words out of your mouth when you court a girl should be ‘will you marry me?’ If she says yes then you immediately start to prepare for married life together’. It is this clarity of intention that appears to give courtship an edge over dating in Christian circles. The second reason why Pentecostal churches on campus preferred courtship to dating was that the former forced relations between members of the opposite sex out into the open and made them easier to regulate. As Foucault (1977:193) noted, ‘visibility assures the hold of power [and] it is the fact of constantly being seen that maintains the disciplined individual within his subjection’. For instance, courtships in many churches are publicly announced, often during main services, and the couple involved is displayed before the whole congregation. In many churches, too, courting couples are immediately enrolled in some form of ‘marriage preparation’ programme. In other denominations, individuals who are courting are required to interact only in the presence of a third person who acts as a chaperone. Again, this appears to be a strategy

for keeping relationships under public scrutiny and for ensuring that the courting couple does not give in to sexual temptation should it arise. Dating relationships, in contrast, are associated with the furtive and hidden.

Some churches' regulatory mechanisms bordered on the absurd. In 2003, when I worked at SHAPE, a female student named Martha, who had trained as a peer counselor, approached the organisation for assistance regarding a problem that she was experiencing within her church group. Martha belonged to a Pentecostal group known as the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA), which had elaborate systems for 'disciplining' Christian bodies. As in most churches, external discipline for females included strict dress codes and Martha adhered to this requirement by always wearing ankle-length skirts and loose fitting, long-sleeved blouses. In addition, her hair was always tied or pulled back in a simple style and she never wore pants or high-heeled shoes. Besides dressing, ZAOGA also believed in keeping contact between female and male students at an absolute minimum. Where such contact could not be avoided, the parties involved were expected to have a third person present. This applied to all members of the church and not just to courting couples.

On the day in question, Martha had come to SHAPE for assistance because the church leadership was unhappy with the fact that she was not observing this particular rule. However, as one of only two girls in her Engineering class, Martha could not always ensure that she was never in the company of a male student alone. Neither could she stop male classmates from visiting her room. Furthermore, Martha felt that it was unrealistic for her to always have a chaperone on stand by, so to speak, in case a male classmate paid her a visit. Martha had been summoned to numerous 'hearings' and had even been

‘temporarily suspended’ from participating in some church events as a result and also because of her association with SHAPE. The latter’s pro-condoms stance was seen as a tacit approval of pre-marital sex.

Although many churches supported courtship rather than dating, few actively enforced it in the manner that ZAOGA did. This therefore left Christian students with plenty of room to oscillate between the two approaches, as illustrated in my discussion in the previous section. In the next section, I examine the specific messages and strategies that were used by Celebration church to promote an acceptable Christian sexuality among its members on campus. In particular I seek to highlight how Celebration pastors appropriated business metaphors to make their messages attractive and relevant to students.

### **Sexual ‘Investments’ and Creating ‘Disciplined’ Bodies in an ‘Undisciplined’ Space**

Much of my fieldwork involved attending meetings and discussion forums that I saw advertised on various notice boards around campus. This is how I came to know about the ‘Get Wisdom’ lecture series organized by a group of Christian students who referred to themselves as ‘Campus Ignite’. Campus Ignite was the campus branch of Celebration Church and its services were held every Tuesday evening from 7pm to 8pm in a lecture theatre that sat four hundred students. The services always started off with announcements from the Campus Ignite leadership and some singing, after which the pastor of the day would be introduced and invited to speak. More often than not, the pastors arrived ten to fifteen minutes late and were welcomed with standing ovations and



screams of delight initiated by the Campus Ignite leadership. The cheering and applause would continue as the pastors made their way from the back of the lecture theatre, where the main entrance was, to the front, where the podium was located. The relative importance of each pastor could often be judged by the duration and intensity of the ovations. The second key ritual performed at these services was the reciting of Campus Ignite Vision, which was referred to as ‘the affirmation statement’. The statement went as follows: ‘We seek to reach tomorrow’s leaders today and to build them up into a Godly generation that will impact and influence diverse spheres of life thereby ushering in God’s Kingdom, reforming communities and reviving nations’. A close reading illustrates how it underscored many of the ideals, such as personal success and leadership, which characterised the Celebration Church theology.

Pastors from the church used a subtle brand of persuasion, which was based on the clever appropriation of the business concepts of ‘investment’, ‘efficiency’ and ‘dividends’ and which was meant to be both inspirational and intellectually stimulating for a university audience. Between April and May 2007, for instance, four out of the six Celebration Church services I attended on campus were on the following business related topics: Success, Entrepreneurship, Mentorship and Wisdom. The remaining two were on ‘God’s Universe’ and ‘Marriage and Courtship’. Regardless of the topic under discussion, however, all the pastors who were invited to speak on these topics had two characteristics in common that made them especially appealing. First, they were relatively young by Zimbabwean church standards (i.e. in their thirties and early forties) and secondly, they were all very successful entrepreneurs and appeared to be living the kinds of successful lifestyles that many students aspired towards. I observed that in all six

sermons mentioned above, every one of the pastors referred to their personal wealth and attributed it to God. For example, the pastor who preached on Success mentioned, as a key part of his sermon, that he had eventually succeeded in taking his family of four on a ‘dream trip’ to Disneyland in the USA. He pointed out that he and his family had traveled business class, not economy. The pastor who preached on Entrepreneurship explained his recent absence on campus by pointing out that he had been holidaying in the United Kingdom with his wife. In response to the applause and cheering that greeted his reference to the UK—which represents all things modern and successful for many students at the UZ—the pastor declared that ‘money and wealth are a by-product of faith’ thus implying that students could enjoy similar success by developing their faith. This is what many (e.g. Mate 2002; x) refer to as the ‘gospel of prosperity’ among Pentecostal groups in Zimbabwe.

Students seemed equally inspired by the persons of the pastors, all of whom were young and successful. The pastors were also close enough in age to most students to serve as realistic examples that self-discipline was indeed practical and rewarding. Furthermore, the fact that these were lay pastors meant that they were not considered religious authorities in the same way that a fully ordained pastor would have been. These various factors made it possible for Celebration church pastors to assume the roles of empathetic older brothers or benevolent uncles, as opposed to that of strict parents, as many other churches seemed to rely on. Consider the tone adopted by the pastor in the excerpt below, which was empathetic, acknowledging the sexual pressures that students encountered on campus, and also mildly chastising:



“It is very easy to feel quite isolated when you are here on campus and you may feel pressured to be in a relationship. You may feel that you need to secure yourself a man while you are still marketable. I say do it the proper way! Find out who you are first... Focus on your career and on your relationship with God first... What’s the rush, guys? Ladies, why are you restricting yourself to the five thousand guys here on campus when you could choose from a million? Make right your relationship with God and He will pull through for you!”

This model was extremely popular on campus, judging from the large number of students who attended the services and the fact that the majority of them belonged to entirely different denominations. Because it marketed itself as an interdenominational organisation, Celebration church attracted a wide variety of students who ranged from those who were merely looking for inspiration to those who were between churches and were thus looking for a ‘new’ home.

The pastor who gave the sermon on Wisdom employed the metaphor of a *franchise* to describe the ideal relationship that students were supposed to have with God: ‘You are operating a franchise of God on earth. You are God’s advertising space. You are His billboard’. He then offered the following guidelines on how students were to ‘manage this franchise’:

“The Holy Spirit should be your tutor, your instructor and your trainer here on campus... You need to do three things to increase the activity of the Holy Spirit in your life: *pray* in secret—you need personal time with God because God speaks to us at a personal level; *fast* in secret—learn to discipline your flesh and desires and don’t let your body tell you what to do; and *give* in secret. As young people you need to understand the following: one, God works on the inside; two, channel your attention to God not to yourself; three, God resists the proud.”

The pastor stressed three things—prayer, fasting and giving—as necessary *investments* that each Christian had to make in order to achieve spiritual growth. He also provided a



road map on how students should go about making ‘investments’ in the self. The main thing was to be well versed in the Bible and he referred to this as constituting an ‘input’, in much the same way that an individual going into business would make certain inputs in order to get a business off the ground. The pastor was adamant about the importance of knowing Bible verses, as the Bible formed the bedrock of one’s faith: ‘Guys, you have to memorise the Bible! How come you know all the words to Shakira’s song about ‘shaking your booty’. Surely you can remember a few verses. The flesh wants you to think that it is too difficult to read your Bible’. Fasting was the second major investment, or input, that students had to make. He explained that fasting was how Christians nurtured the inner person—the self. Fasting was also an important way of disciplining the flesh and resisting temptation. Giving money to the church was the last investment that students had to make in order to realize material and spiritual success. What is significant about the three things that the pastor highlighted, and this was a common theme in all the sermons that I attended, was that while investments take time to mature they were well worth the wait.

The pastor who gave the sermon on ‘Success’ followed more or less the same script. He emphasized the business principles of goal setting, strategic thinking and planning. To illustrate his point, he shared the story of a shrewd entrepreneur who had decided to go into wine making. ‘Do you know that it takes seven years before a vineyard starts bearing fruit? But vineyards will continue bearing fruit for the next two hundred years. This man had a bigger vision for his future and he was not afraid to wait a while before he could enjoy the fruits of his labour’. The pastor explained that this entrepreneur had a long-term vision and placed emphasis on the future rather than on immediate

gratification. The same pastor proceeded to give a real life the example of John Goddard, an American motivational speaker who, when he was just fifteen, came up with a list of 127 things that he wanted to do in his lifetime. The pastor explained that, to date, Walsh had already achieved 122 of these, and had since added more items to his original list.<sup>26</sup> The take home message was that material and spiritual success was the outcome of self-discipline as well as an ability to orient oneself to the future.

From the above, it is easy to see why students found the Celebration church theology both intellectually stimulating and inspirational. The emphasis on personal success corresponded with the personal ambitions and perceived life trajectories of most students. It is indeed no exaggeration to state that a significant proportion of male students who attended these services hoped to get guidelines on how to become successful entrepreneurs or professionals and also on how to achieve economic success. Furthermore, Celebration church's focus on the inner person and the lack of group-based forms of surveillance appealed to many students. It meant that they could participate without the added pressure of committing themselves fully to the mundane aspects of the church. Netsai, a first year female student who served as an usher at the Campus Ignite Tuesday meetings explained in an interview that Celebration Church offered students guidelines on how to survive on campus. 'If I need someone to confide in, or if I need help with anything, I go to Celebration church. I trust them and I know that they have my interest at heart. Celebration church is the only organization that is interested in students' welfare. They will not stand by and watch you make mistakes. And anyway, we have a

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<sup>26</sup>For more details on John Goddard's achievements, visit <http://www.johngoddard.info/index.htm>

lot of fun there as well’. It is significant that in all six sermons that I attended, Celebration Church never addressed the issue of HIV and AIDS directly. Instead, the church group was more interested in the effects of premarital sex on the spiritual self rather than its effects on the physical person. One possible reason for this can be traced back to Celebration Church’s notion of ‘investment’, which primarily emphasizes first preventing sin and only later attending to the effects of sinful behaviour. HIV and AIDS are considered to be the effects of sinful behaviour while pre-marital sex is seen as the cause of sinful behaviour and which must be immediately rectified. Furthermore, as earlier discussions in the chapter have shown, sexual immorality is viewed as leading to more than just HIV infection. It detracts from the attainment of broader life goals, which can ultimately lead to personal success. Another key reason that HIV and AIDS is not addressed directly by organisations like Celebration Church is the simple fact that the epidemic is simply not openly discussed in Zimbabwe’s public spaces. Many people still refer to HIV and AIDS using euphemisms such as ‘the illness of today’ [*chirwere chamuzuva ano*] or ‘the plague’ [*mukondombera*] despite over two decades of intense awareness and educational campaigns aimed at breaking the social stigma attached to the epidemic in the country. Individuals who die of AIDS-related infections are often said to have died of ‘a long illness’. Sometimes the immediate cause of death (e.g. cerebral malaria, severe headache, pneumonia) is given. Hardly is HIV infection publicly acknowledged even though privately most people will speculate that the death of a loved one or neighbour may have been caused by ‘the illness of today’.

## **Conclusion**

Many of the church events that I attended on campus were concerned, in one way or another, with the central question of self-discipline and they offered it as a key tool for navigating the world and, more specifically, for navigating the undisciplined world of the UZ campus. Christianity on the UZ campus thus offered a specific way for students to orient themselves to the world. ‘Christian theodicy’, as Giddens (in Weber 1992:xvii) pointed out, ‘enjoins the believer to achieve his own salvation by refashioning the world in accordance with Divine Purpose’. Christianity offered students an alternative model for experiencing university, a model based on discipline and disciplined bodies, as opposed to the standard liminality model, which thrived on the lack of discipline and unbridled freedom. In the Christian model, an undisciplined body was seen as both vulnerable and prone to sin. It also caused others to sin. A disciplined body, on the other hand, was considered to be self-aware and able to resist temptation because it possessed the maturity and ‘necessary qualities’—e.g. patience and a sense of purpose—to successfully do so. In this chapter I have tried to show that Christian groups on campus approached the issue of discipline from two perspectives. For groups like the Celebration Church, discipline referred to an internal quality, hence the emphasis they placed on developing the ‘inner person’. In contrast, for group like ZAOGA, discipline was not just internal, it was also an external trait that could be imprinted on the body and which was open to public scrutiny. In the latter case, individuals were not only accountable to God, but they were also accountable to the group, hence it required both individual and group effort to produce a disciplined body. In contrast, groups like Celebration Church believed that disciplining the body was a private affair involving one’s conscience and God.

Another key point that is highlighted in this chapter pertains to the place of Christian students on the UZ campus. Christianity required that students remain fundamentally *unaffected* by the university encounter, which most considered to be corrupting and detrimental to their spiritual and academic growth. Devout Christian students did not believe that university should *only* be experienced liminally and were thus seen as bringing the ‘outside in’, thereby disrupting the boundaries that needed to be maintained if university was to offer a truly liminal experience. It is therefore not surprising that Christian students were unpopular on campus and they were caricatured conservative, backward and indoctrinated.

Lastly, Christianity served to regulate and structure Christian students use of space and time on campus. For instance, a considerable segment of Christian students spent most of their leisure time in those spaces that were considered to be less corrupting to the Christian soul, such as the campus chapel, residence hall common rooms, student rooms, the library and the lecture rooms. Church activities were time consuming and most Christian students I knew did not have enough time to participate in campus activities offered by other organisations. As a result, many Christian students participated minimally in the broader social life of the university and they often did not belong to non-religious student associations, such as student politics, sports clubs, entrepreneurial groups or even HIV prevention groups. This helps explain why Martha’s association with SHAPE and her un-chaperoned interactions with members of the opposite sex were frowned upon by her church group; they were seen as reflecting a lack of discipline regarding the proper use of time and space. They also reflected a different aspect of



indiscipline, in this case foolhardiness, because she was seen as unnecessarily exposing herself to temptation.

## Chapter Seven

### The University's Responses to the HIV Epidemic

This chapter examines official and unofficial responses to the HIV epidemic at the UZ. Here, I have in mind the interventions by the Student Health Services (SHS), which is that arm of the university that attends to the health care needs of registered students, and SHAPE Zimbabwe Trust,<sup>27</sup> a non-governmental organisation that focuses specifically on prevention work in Zimbabwe's universities. Because it is a university department, I regard the intervention by the Student Health Services as representing the university's 'official' response. On the other hand, given its 'non-governmental' status, I regard the intervention by SHAPE as representing the university's 'unofficial' response to HIV on campus.

My broad objective in this chapter is to examine the frustrating and complicated processes involved in implementing HIV interventions at a university campus. I will also draw attention to the unintended consequences of some of the strategies that organizations like SHAPE have employed in their work with students. By unintended consequences, I mean the effects of prevention work—often unexpected, unforeseen and counter-intuitive—that might well undermine the stated aims of the projects. My discussion focuses extensively on the experiences of SHAPE because it was the main organisation doing HIV prevention on the UZ campus when I conducted fieldwork. The last part of my discussion will briefly examine SHAPE's positioning on the UZ campus

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<sup>27</sup> SHAPE is an acronym for Sustainability, Hope, Action, Prevention, Education.

and its relations with various regimes of power at the institution, which control and determine the organisation's access to university students. Before delving into these specific issues, I start off the chapter with an historical overview of HIV interventions in Zimbabwe.

### **Denial, Stigma and AIDS Fatigue in Zimbabwe 1980's to 2006**

According to Ray and Madzimbamuto (2006), the Zimbabwean government initially denied that HIV and AIDS were serious problems in the country. Consequently, by the end of the 1980s, ten percent of the adult population had contracted the disease (Illife 2006). However, the government relegated responsibility for the management of the disease to medical professionals whose major response was simply informing the infected that they had a terminal and incurable disease. A number of AIDS activists recalled how , in the 1980s, doctors simply informed them that they were HIV positive and had only months or weeks to live. Many infected individuals therefore simply went home and waited to die. Gundani (2004) attributed this initial response to the government's fear that openly admitting the extent of the epidemic would scare away potential investors and thus affect the country's economy. By the mid-nineties, however, denial gave way to a haphazard flurry of HIV education and awareness-raising activities by the government. This was in large part because the disease had spread significantly and approximately twenty-five percent of the adult population was infected (Illife 2006).

Again, as in many other countries in the continent, Zimbabwe's awareness-raising programmes portrayed HIV and AIDS as a deadly and shameful disease. It was during

these early educational programmes therefore that the process of ‘othering’ firmly took root in the country and particular types of people came to be strongly associated with the virus and with ‘promiscuity’. These groups included female sex workers, the poor and uneducated, rich old men (the so-called sugar daddies) and migrant workers, especially truck drivers and casual farm workers (Epstein 2007). As a result, many Zimbabweans displayed ‘low personal risk perception’ as well as ‘feelings of invulnerability’ (Pisani 2009) as they associated the epidemic with particular categories of people that did not include them. The nineties have been described as ‘the panic stage’ (*Zimbabwe Human Development Report 2003*: 21) because, despite the flurry of awareness activities, the government’s response ‘lacked clarity and specificity on who did what, how and when’ (ibid, 20).

At the start of the new millennium, the tendency to associate the epidemic with particular ‘risk-groups’ gave way to a sense of fatalism and so-called ‘AIDS fatigue’ (Epstein 2007). Many Zimbabweans felt that was just too much information on the epidemic. This can be attributed to the following factors: the high rates of AIDS-related deaths that were reported in the national press (i.e. approximately three thousands deaths a week); the government and AIDS service organisations’ endless referencing of the annual statistics that were released by the UNAIDS on the global state of the epidemic and which showed that young people between the ages of 15-24 accounted for half of all new infections in 2000; and the fact that just about every Zimbabwean had lost someone they knew to the epidemic. This barrage of information caused many people to feel that they were not immune to the virus and that there was very little that they could do to protect themselves. It was not uncommon to hear people express the view that ‘we are all

infected’ in everyday conversations. Ironically, even though the government had introduced a National AIDS Policy in 1999 and established a National AIDS Council in 2000 to coordinate prevention efforts, ‘fatalistic attitudes and AIDS fatigue prevented many people from engaging in the kinds of protective behaviour that were being encouraged. By the year 2004, HIV prevalence had grown to thirty-three percent (Ray and Madzimbamuto 2006).

The last five years (2005 to present) have been characterized by a shift away from merely educating people on HIV transmission patterns to promoting what is referred to as ‘behaviour change communication’. In fact, the 1999 national AIDS policy was replaced in 2006 with the Zimbabwe National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan (ZNASP) and the National Behaviour Change Strategy, which are both meant to inform prevention programmes for the next five years. The new strategies place emphasis on partner reduction, increased utilization of HIV testing and counseling services as well as increased access to anti-retroviral treatment drugs. In the policies, the government also acknowledged the importance of a multi-sectoral approach, decentralized and coordinated response to HIV prevention in the country. A key feature of the government’s response to HIV since 2005 has been its focus on HIV treatment. This was spurred by the ‘3 by 5’ access to treatment that was initiated by UNAIDS, with generous funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The aim of the initiative was to ensure that three million people living with HIV would be on anti-retroviral drugs by the year 2005. In 2006 only twenty-three out of an estimated three hundred and fifty thousand HIV positive people were accessing treatment (*The Herald*, 26 May 2010<sup>28</sup>). But by 2009 the number of

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<sup>28</sup> Prevention better than cure-Paidamoyo Chipunza, *The Herald*, 26 May 2010.  
<http://www1.herald.co.zw/inside.aspx?sectid=19267&cat=1>

Zimbabweans using anti-retroviral drugs had increased to two hundred thousand. Despite the focus on increasing access to treatment, prevention remains a top priority in the country. The recent decline in Zimbabwe's HIV prevalence to just under sixteen percent has largely been attributed to the country's focus on behaviour change. Youth remain at the core of the HIV prevention response while adults are the main beneficiaries of treatment programmes.

Although the government has laid down the broad framework for addressing HIV in the country, on a practical level, it is the four hundred plus AIDS service organizations that are ultimately doing most of the HIV prevention, care and support work in the country. This is because most donor organizations (with the exception of a few like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) have begun channeling their funds directly to non-governmental organizations and not through the government as was the case during the eighties and nineties. However, AIDS service organisations have to contend with the following two key questions: *how* to do HIV prevention work and *who* to involve in this work. The first question is concerned with ensuring that HIV messages and educational methods are 'appropriate' for intended audiences while the second question is concerned with ensuring that the most 'appropriate' individuals are identified to lead and assist in the implementation of programmes. Determining what is an 'appropriate' intervention is a highly contested process (UNAIDS/WHO *AIDS Epidemic Update* 2005; Rivkin-Fish 2005; Nguyen and Peschard 2003; Farmer 2002; Pigg 2001). In Zimbabwe, the process has often pitted AIDS service organisations in direct opposition to the state as well as against community members, particularly parents, religious leaders and other adults (Marindo et al 2003). As far as the Zimbabwean government is concerned—and this

continues to be reflected in its various policies— ‘appropriate’ responses are those which promote sexual abstinence for young people (Muparamoto and Chigwenya 2009), mutual monogamy for married couples and then condoms, but only as a last resort (Francis-Chizororo and Matshalaga 2003). For some AIDS service organizations that are involved in HIV prevention with young people, the anti-condoms stance is especially problematic as it conflicts with their own versions of what constituted an ‘appropriate’ intervention.

In chapter two, I alluded to the ‘parental’ and ‘adult’ outrage that accompanied the Population Services International’s social marketing campaign of condoms. The organisation was forced to withdraw a condom advert that some Zimbabweans found especially offensive. Negative attitudes towards condoms have been widely documented in many African countries and are said to result from people’s tendency to associate them with sexual immorality and promiscuity (Schoepf 2003), interference with sexual pleasure (Kaler 2004) and infidelity by those in more committed long-term relationships (Schatz 2005; Francis-Chizororo and Matshalaga 2003; Feldman and Maposhere 2003). It also seems that much of the angst regarding condoms revolves around the concerns about the ‘appropriateness’ of publicly talking about and promoting them. In a Foucauldian sense, therefore, concerns over condom education in Zimbabwe and many other African countries are essentially concerns over ‘rendering [sex] too visibly present’ (Foucault 1978:2). Of all the prevention approaches, condom education campaigns thrust sex into the public domain and make it impossible to conceal. In contrast, ‘abstinence only’ programmes tend to foreclose any opportunity for frank and detailed talk around sex and sexuality (Kirby et al 1994; Baldo et al 1993).

Condom education in Zimbabwe is often extremely graphic. During fieldwork I attended numerous off-campus training workshops organized jointly by the Zimbabwe AIDS Network (a consortium of over 400 AIDS service organisations) and the German Development Society. The aim of these workshops was to assist AIDS service organisations develop more ‘innovative’, ‘non-threatening’ and yet ‘effective’ ways of promoting behaviour change among young people. One of the main topics covered in these workshops pertained to the correct use of female and male condoms. The facilitators used a wooden replica of the penis and a plastic replica of the vagina to demonstrate correct condom use. What I found particularly interesting about these sessions was the awkwardness that the wooden penis produced among both facilitators and the workshop participants. Part of this awkwardness arose from the very obvious fact of having genital organs—even if they were replicas—displayed in a public forum such as a workshop and to mixed-sex and mixed-age audiences.

Workshop facilitators often tried to ameliorate this awkwardness by prefacing the introduction of the wooden penis with the statement ‘*pamusoroi*’ [Shona], which translates loosely to ‘excuse me’ or ‘pardon me’. Among the Shona, the word is used in a variety of contexts, such as when one is addressing or interacting with the elderly or with one’s seniors or when seeking permission to eat from the women of a household before meals. What is especially significant about the term, however, is that it is a discursive precursor that allows individuals to engage in particular actions. It is also performative in that it produces the space that makes particular actions possible (see Goffman 1997). By prefacing the introduction of the wooden penis with the term ‘*pamusoroi*’, workshop facilitators were therefore able to produce a space that made it ‘proper’ for them, and



workshop participants, to talk about sex in such public and detailed ways. Secondly, this action served to position the speakers as individuals who were respectful of societal norms regarding ‘who speaks in what manner about what topic with whom’ (see Rodlach 2006). Finally, the term served as a request for workshop participants to understand the words and actions that followed within a particular frame, thereby excusing the speaker for any offence that their words might cause.

As previously stated, condom education in Zimbabwe involves very detailed and explicit talk about sex and the naming of specific sexual organs as well as demonstrating ‘correct’ condom use (Pigg 2001). For instance, AIDS educators often stressed the following points in these educational sessions: that a condom should only be worn on an ‘erect penis’; that the correct way of wearing a condom was ‘rolling it down the shaft of the penis’; finally, that a condom had to be removed ‘soon after ejaculation and while the penis was still erect’. In contrast to some countries that have no specific words for the ‘penis’ and the ‘vagina’ (see Pigg 2004), in Zimbabwe the Shona words for these body parts are *mboro* (i.e. penis), *machende* (i.e. testicles) and *beche* (i.e. vagina). From my personal experiences, these words are never used in HIV and AIDS education as this would be considered offensive. Rather, more ‘neutral’ references to ‘male organs’ (*nhengo yababa/yechirume*, Shona) and ‘female organs’ (*nhengo yamai/yechikadzi*, Shona) were typically used to refer to the penis and vagina respectively in workshops. Sometimes Shona totems, such as *murehwa* or *sinyoro*, were used as euphemisms for the penis in order to make it that much easier for those involved in HIV education to talk about sex in public spaces and for those being addressed to participate in otherwise awkward and difficult conversations.

Condom demonstration sessions were often accompanied by giggles from the women and outbursts of laughter from the men. This behaviour intensified when workshop facilitators invited participants to demonstrate condom use for the group. Younger participants usually volunteered while older participants declined. Many of the organizations that attended the training workshops confessed that they had never done condom demonstrations with their respective target groups and that they might consider it on a one-on-one basis rather than in a group setting. Participants also pointed out that their organisations merely served as condom distribution points; others did not distribute condoms but referred community members to government-run centres where they could access free condoms. They felt that they therefore had no reason to delve into the nitty-gritty's of condom use. By contrast, organizations such as SHAPE that worked with young people were usually of the view that such frank and graphic talk was necessary to overcome the silence and shame associated with sex and sexuality. Unfortunately, by adopting this stance, such organizations often risked becoming unpopular within their communities.

### **HIV prevention at the UZ in the nineties**

The official response to HIV on the UZ campus was evident in the interventions offered by the student health services. Prior to the establishment of SHAPE in 2000, the Student Health Services was the main organisation responsible for HIV prevention at the institution. Its activities were largely confined to the training of students to be peer educators. When I trained as peer educator in the mid-nineties, the training was held over

two consecutive weekends. In accordance with the national AIDS policy, the training was intended to equip the peer educators with basic facts regarding the transmission of the virus as well as making them aware of the three key prevention methods, namely abstinence, faithfulness and condom use.

After training, the peer educators were required to ‘raise awareness’ about the epidemic by randomly approaching groups of students that they saw around campus and talking to them about HIV and AIDS and about how they could avoid getting infected. There was very little coordination of the on-campus activities of the approximately fifty peer educators trained annually and only a small proportion of them were ever truly active on campus. This was in part due to the stigma attached to the epidemic and to the AIDS fatigue that many people experienced. In fact, peer educators were branded ‘the AIDS people’ and they encountered hostility when they tried to talk to students about the epidemic. For many students, HIV and AIDS simply had no place on campus. This is not to say that students did not believe that some of their peers could already be infected, but rather that students were responding to the epidemic the same way that everyone else in the country was responding to it: with denial, shame and secrecy.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the peer education programme was less visible on the UZ campus than it was in the high schools, where peer educators regularly conducted awareness-raising activities. There was one exception: in 1996, the student health services ran a competition on campus in which each hall of residence was invited to develop an artistic expression of the impact of HIV in the country. Funds were allocated to the hall committees and interested students were invited to participate. This event was the only time, prior to the formation of SHAPE, that I saw issues of HIV and

AIDS being addressed so publicly on the UZ campus. Over a two month period, many students participated in planning and creating their artistic displays. These displays were to be mounted on open trucks that the student health services had hired, and students were then to march to the town hall where they would be addressed by government representatives and health officials. The best display would also be awarded a prize. I remember that this initiative generated great excitement on campus—admittedly among only those students who were not worried about being associated with the disease—and on the day before the march, students worked late into the night putting the final touches on their displays. There were hundreds of students who turned out for the march, again not so much because they were genuinely concerned with HIV and AIDS issues, but mainly because of the excitement involved in marching to the city centre which many students associated with *chi-UBA* performances. Although the Student Health Services worried that male students would use the march to confront government officials, the event went on as planned and no such incidents occurred.

In addition to the peer education training and awareness raising activities on and off-campus, student health services also supplied free condoms as well as treated sexually transmitted infections. As in the rest of the country, HIV prevention on campus was addressed from a bio-medical perspective, hence the emphasis on providing students with basic facts on the epidemic. Furthermore, the HIV prevention programme was housed in the student clinic and was coordinated by a nurse. Towards the end of the nineties, the major donor, the Southern African AIDS Training, stopped funding the university's HIV prevention programme. What was already a relatively weak intervention became even more so. From 2001 onwards, SHAPE replaced the student health services as the main

HIV prevention agency on the UZ campus. It is for these reasons that the rest of this chapter focuses exclusively on the activities of SHAPE.

### **Making HIV ‘Fun’: SHAPE and HIV prevention at the UZ (2001-2007)**

SHAPE desired to get university students more actively involved in HIV prevention in the country. The pioneers of SHAPE, who included myself, were of the view that UZ students were uniquely positioned to be agents of social change and wanted to tap into this potential. Perhaps naively, we strongly believed that society would listen to university students much more than they would to government officials. With support and guidance from a visiting Fulbright scholar who was teaching at the institution, we set about to establishing a fully functional AIDS service organisation. After the organisation’s first fundraising meeting with a representative from USAID, SHAPE decided to direct its attention to promoting behaviour change among university students as opposed to simply using university students to influence the behaviours of other people, as had been its initial focus. Dr. Osewe, the USAID representative had pointed out there were numerous interventions that were targeted at in-school and out-of-school youth, and yet hardly any that were specifically targeting tertiary institutions and university students. Since then, SHAPE has branded itself as an organisation that works with university students and universities in the fight against HIV and AIDS.

Having clearly defined its target audience, SHAPE’s next priority was to develop an intervention that university students would find exciting enough to participate in. I vividly recall the many months in 2000 that I spent brainstorming with the twelve other

founder members on how to make the SHAPE intervention different from what was currently being offered by most AIDS service organizations in the country. We all agreed that young people were sick of being lectured to about the dangers of HIV and that more creative approaches would have better success at overcoming the fatalism, AIDS fatigue and denial that still existed on campus. Six years later, when I began fieldwork, I was struck by just how much SHAPE had succeeded in this regard. When I asked students, particularly those who were members of the various SHAPE Associations, why they had joined the organisation, the answers given shared one common thread: the SHAPE approach to HIV prevention was fun and innovative. The following quote from a male student is illustrative:

“SHAPE was introducing AIDS from a different perspective. I thought the issue of AIDS had been exhausted, but when these people came and used discos and debates during orientation week, I was thrilled”.

At the start of 2001, SHAPE organized a couple of public discussion sessions termed ‘talk-shows’. These were modeled around popular American television shows, such as the Oprah Winfrey Show. The talk-shows explored what SHAPE considered to be controversial topics such as pre-marital sex and the benefits of undertaking an HIV test. Students who held strong views about these issues were invited to be panelists and to debate the issues in front of their peers. Talk-shows were very popular because they gave students a platform for dialogue and debate on matters that were of concern to them. This was in contrast to the lecture method that most AIDS service organizations used. A brief description of talk-shows is essential as it was one of the key features of the SHAPE intervention.



In the formative years of the organisation, SHAPE staff facilitated most of the talk-shows. With time, however, this responsibility was handed over to trained peer counselors. When I conducted fieldwork, the SHAPE Interact Club was solely responsible for organising and facilitating talk-shows on a weekly basis. The main aim of the talk-shows, according to SHAPE staff was to ‘encourage open and frank discussions around sex and sexuality issues’ (*The Shaping Times Magazine*<sup>29</sup>, 2003). Talk-shows were also meant to provide a ‘safe’ space where students could talk freely, amongst their peers, about all sorts of ‘youth issues’. Following Foucault (1978), it was through the talk-shows that SHAPE ‘induced’ university students to speak about sex *and* it was through the talk-shows that the ‘truth about sex was laid bare’. Indeed, there was a ‘discursive explosion around and apropos sex’ (Foucault 1978:61) at these talk-shows: nothing was censored, euphemisms of the sort that I described earlier were actively discouraged and students were challenged to ‘say it like it is’. I attended a SHAPE talkshow in October 2006 on ‘Sex on Campus’ in which a male participant was pressured, against his will, to specifically use the word ‘sex’. In contributing to the topic under discussion, the male student had made the following statement: ‘When I am in a relationship I expect, you know...’ Although he did not complete the sentence, it was clear to all thirty students in attendance that he was referring to sex. The two facilitators insisted that he tell it like it is. ‘You want *what?*’ questioned the male facilitator. ‘You know what I mean’, responded the culprit. ‘No, we don’t’, and the facilitators turned to the audience and rhetorically asked ‘Do we know what he *wants?*’ The audience played

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<sup>29</sup> Only one edition of the magazine was ever produced. This was made possible through a generous grant that the organisation had successfully applied for from the US-based Pfizer Pharmaceuticals. Unfortunately, none of SHAPE’s subsequent donors have been willing to finance the production of a magazine because of the exorbitant costs involved.

along and responded with a resounding ‘No!’ The culprit—for that is what he had become—grinned uncomfortably at the audience, no doubt seeking their compassion, but the shouting continued. ‘We don’t know what you mean! Tell us!’ The facilitator flatly refused to continue the discussion until the ‘culprit’ mentioned the dreaded word. After what was almost a whole minute, the male student blurted out: ‘I want sex, guys! I want sex!’ His capitulation was received with thunderous applause and laughter.

Five minutes later, another opportunity for ‘frankness’ presented itself. The male facilitator posed the question: ‘Are we having sex on campus?’ Participants responded with ‘They are!’ The facilitator repeated loudly: ‘Are we having sex on campus, guys?’ ‘They are!’ the audience shouted back at him. ‘We are busy doing it in our rooms, and yet we won’t talk about it! Does anyone want to share their own experiences?’ The facilitator proceeded to pick on a female student whose hand was raised. ‘Well’, she began haltingly, and in a strong *mu-nose* accent, ‘I don’t want to personalize this because this is not about me, *per se*’ she continued, rolling over her ‘r’s’ as she said the word ‘per se’ and eliciting murmurs of disapproval among some of the male students, as a result. It was these features—the awkwardness, the frankness, the accents, the jesting, the loudness, the facilitation—that made SHAPE talk-shows ‘fun’.

Furthermore, SHAPE talk-shows functioned as ‘speech communities’ in which students were encouraged to talk openly and frankly about all matters sexual, in the belief that this would be liberating and hence facilitate behaviour change. SHAPE considered the lack of opportunity, the inability and refusal to talk openly about sex as one of the key drivers of the HIV epidemic among young people. ‘Most of us don’t want to talk openly about sex and yet, when we leave this place, many of us will go to our *UBA*’s and *USAs*’



rooms and do it!’ a SHAPE staff member declared in a talkshow once. In addition to being spaces where interested students (attendance was voluntary) could converse freely on all matters sexual, without having to worry about what others would think of them, SHAPE talk-shows were also spaces in which difficult social issues, such as masturbation, sexual violence, HIV-related stigma etc, could be tackled.

Scholars like Butt (2008) and Pigg (2005), have criticized such approaches for their ‘relentless attention...to the act, the behaviour, the practice, the precise naming of body parts and desires’ (Pigg 2005:50). They argue that this turns the epidemic into a biomedical problem rather than a socio-cultural one. However, this particular approach appeared to work rather well at the UZ, if the numbers of students who attended SHAPE talk-shows and the jovial mood at these talk-shows were anything to go by. Furthermore, students considered SHAPE talk-shows ‘fun’ precisely because of the ‘relentless and precise naming of body parts’, which, for many signaled that the organisation was ‘in touch’ and understood the ‘real needs’ of students in particular, and young people in general. ‘SHAPE talks of real issues, such as sex and the youth...things that are practical and interesting for campus’, was the response I often received when I asked students why they had joined SHAPE.

In addition to the talk-shows, SHAPE also offered a number of training workshops, namely peer counseling, lifeskills, gender equity and masculinities training. With the exception of the peer counseling, these workshops were held over two-and-a-half days long, usually on weekends. Finally, SHAPE also ran an ‘edutainment’ programme, which I will discuss in greater detail later in the chapter. At the time of my fieldwork, SHAPE no longer offered the peer counseling and life-skills programmes

because of funding limitations. It had also suspended certain aspects of its edutainment programme, again because of funding limitations. In 2006 and 2007, SHAPE had three major funders: Oxfam Australia, HIVOS and the Norwegian People's Aid. This was a drastic drop<sup>30</sup> from its earlier years when it enjoyed funding from a variety of organizations, such as the Canadian International Development Agency, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, Park Nicollet Institute, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund and the US Public Affairs Section. SHAPE's peer counseling programme equipped students with basic counseling skills. This was a marked departure from the traditional peer education model that had been offered by the student health services which trained students only to provide basic facts on HIV and AIDS. In its first training in 2001, SHAPE received close to five hundred application letters from interested students and it selected only one hundred and fifty students to be trained. Never had UZ students expressed such great interest in an HIV related event before and the selected students were greatly envied by their peers. Students' interest in the peer counseling can be attributed to many factors, although the counseling component and the fact that UNICEF, which was funding the programme, had also endorsed the curriculum were the major ones.

The SHAPE edutainment programme was known as the 'Promoting Responsible Fun' Project and was implemented via the various SHAPE Associations. Vaughn et al (2000:148) define 'edutainment' as 'a communication strategy consisting of the insertion of educational messages into an entertainment media'. This usually takes the form of

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<sup>30</sup> Fundraising is usually an ongoing activity for most non-governmental organizations in the country because of most donors' reluctance to commit funds over more than a one-year or two-year period. The unstable political situation in the country since the 2002 elections has contributed immensely to this situation. In fact, during the most recent elections in 2007, many donors (and non-governmental organizations) were forced to shut down their offices as they were accused of funding the opposition party.

music, song, dance and sport, among other things. In 2006, there were six functioning SHAPE Associations, namely Music, Interact, Soccer, Ballroom Dancing, Poetry and Drama. There were on average between ten and twenty members in each association. SHAPE associations played two key roles. Firstly, they were the means by which the organisation ensured that students actively participated in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating its intervention. Participation of this nature is strongly recommended by UNAIDS, the Population Council and other global institutions involved in HIV prevention. (Marindo et al 2003). Second, through the associations, SHAPE could respond to the ‘problem’ of lack of adequate recreational activities at the UZ,<sup>31</sup> another factor that the above institutions have also blamed for sexual risk-taking by young people. The common belief is that, when young people have nothing better to do then they will use sex for recreational purposes (Campbell et al 2002). University authorities and students subscribed to this view and often complained that the only recreational activities available to students on campus were sports and church events. ‘High-school was even better’, many students declared before proceeding to reminisce about the many discos, talent shows, beauty pageants and related ‘fun’ activities that their high schools had regularly organized. Students who registered to be members of SHAPE were expected to join at least one of these associations, as it was through these that they could be more actively involved in HIV prevention on campus. In 2006, five hundred students

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<sup>31</sup> Although a number of hall committees organized annual parties for hall members, SHAPE was essentially the only organisation on campus to organize campus-wide discos and parties, even though it too managed to do this no more than once a year, on average. This was in large part because male students had a reputation for destroying property at such functions, which made it virtually impossible to secure venues on campus for any ‘fun’ event—unless an organisation was willing to take responsibility for, and replace any property that would be destroyed. In its early years, SHAPE resorted to using outdoor venues, such as the basketball courts, where very little property could be destroyed; in later years, SHAPE used venues halls in the surrounding Mt Pleasant neighbourhood; occasionally, some residences availed their common rooms, on condition that adequate security arrangements would be arranged.

completed membership forms although only a fraction of these actually participated in the associations. Despite this, most SHAPE activities attracted large numbers of students. I counted almost two hundred students at a disco that SHAPE organized during the 2006 orientation week and SHAPE talk-shows usually attracted as many as forty or fifty students at a time.

SHAPE's most popular edutainment activity, however, was its use of music to promote behaviour change on and off campus. Between 2002 and 2004, SHAPE produced three music albums, two of which received extensive airplay on national radio and television stations. In 2003, three songs from the second SHAPE album made it into the national Top 100 Music Videos of the Year (see Terry 2006). The three songs were also regularly featured as musical interludes on national television. The third SHAPE album was produced in 2004 and it too received great publicity in the media. This album was different in that it involved students from several other universities in the country. In many ways, therefore, the SHAPE programme was similar to South Africa's LoveLife Campaign (see *SafAIDS News* September 2000) and Soul City (Hutchinson et al 2007) in that it not only promoted active youth participation in the design of HIV interventions, but also sought to integrate HIV and AIDS issues into those activities that youth were said to find enjoyable such as sports and music, among others.

The music project was unique in many ways. First, it was the first project of its kind in the history of the university. Second, SHAPE identified talented students to write songs that promoted behaviour change and then paid the recording costs involved in the venture. Overnight, therefore, ordinary students were transformed into recorded artistes and their music was being played on national radio and television. Third, through its

launch activities, SHAPE managed to market itself to the rest of the country and to establish strategic partnerships with key figures such as the Minister of Health, Dr. S. Parirenyatwa, who attended two such launch events as the guest of honor. The then Minister of Higher Education, Dr. H. Murerwa, the UZ Vice Chancellor, representatives from the donor community and the media all attended the various launch events<sup>32</sup>.

As with the peer counselors, students who were involved in the music project were envied by their peers. SHAPE was seen as the place where dreams came true and where one could become a celebrity. For instance, students belonging to the music club were often invited by different institutions to perform at youth functions. They were also invited to speak and perform on television programmes targeting the youth. Some of the students had shared the stage with Zimbabwean musical giant, Oliver Mtukudzi, at the 2003 and 2004 album launches and a student had done a duet with Andy Brown—another local big name. Many other students had shared the stage with Roy and Royce and Plaxedes Wenyika, three artistes whose songs were doing very well in the local charts and at local clubs then. The list was endless. In 2007, a female student who was a member of the music club explained what the organisation meant to her by observing:

“I am famous here on campus. Everyone knows me, all because of SHAPE! I was still only in first year when I performed at the SHAPE party last year...that’s where most people saw me and now everyone knows me! I also got an opportunity to go to a recording studio last year, imagine. There are many people who are talented out there who do not have the money to record, and yet here I am, recorded and all”.

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<sup>32</sup> Students were generally well behaved at these events and did not heckle the government officials and university authorities who attended. This was largely because of the high regard that students had for SHAPE. It was also partly because students considered the presence of government and university officials to be an attestation of student power and hence a form of student victory over government arrogance.

A male student claimed that being an ‘artiste’ as he referred to himself, had made female students that much more interested in him. ‘They recognize me from performing at SHAPE functions’, he explained. Even though at the time in conducted fieldwork, SHAPE was having problems raising funds for the production of its fourth album, members of the music club remained hopeful that the money would be found and that their music would soon be playing on national radio and television stations, as had happened to their predecessors. With this conviction, members of the music club met weekly like everyone else for the purposes of helping each other with lyrics as well as practicing their performances. For many SHAPE students, not just music club members, the tasks involved in organising and implementing SHAPE activities made them feel truly important and special. SHAPE students were also often invited to give the ‘student voice’ when SHAPE executives met with current and potential donors. A first year female student asked rhetorically:

“Here I am, a mere first year and yet I have already facilitated talk-shows on campus and I am one of the leaders in my club. I have also represented SHAPE at many meetings here on campus. Which other organisation allows students so much room to do as they please as SHAPE does?”

The final point I want to raise in this part of the discussion is the fact that, in addition to its innovative intervention, students were also attracted to the organisation because its staff members were young. As a matter of policy, SHAPE deliberately employed recent graduates, preferably former SHAPE students, as its strategy of ‘keeping the office young’ and hence ‘approachable’. This was in the belief that students would find it easier to participate in SHAPE activities if SHAPE staff were closer in age to students. This strategy seemed to work well as SHAPE staff were seen as role models and many

students aspired to be like them: employed by an NGO and living a life of travelling, staying in hotels, meeting important people and earning a good income, among other things. The extravagant lifestyles that NGOs seemingly promote, as indicated by the large amounts spent purchasing expensive four-wheel drive cars, convening endless meetings and conferences in expensive hotels and resort towns as well as paying exorbitant per diems, have been the subject of intense debate in academic circles (see Epstein 2007; Rodlach 2007) and in the local media. However, many students equate these same features with success and hence feel inspired when they see their peers working for SHAPE and living such a life. Indeed, one SHAPE staff member had attended a couple of meetings in neighbouring South Africa while still a SHAPE student, and one meeting in the United States since becoming a full-time SHAPE employee six months earlier. SHAPE thus reinforced students' middle-class aspirations and was viewed by some students as an elitist organisation.

'Working for an NGO'—be it an AIDS service organisation or not—was something that most SHAPE students aspired towards, particularly those in the social sciences. Through their participation in SHAPE activities, and especially through the SHAPE Associations, many students got to be inducted into the world and workings of the non-governmental community. Many students thus equated involvement in SHAPE activities with high marketability in the job sector. 'It's good for your CV. And you know gender and HIV is where the money is these days', many SHAPE students I spoke to acknowledged. SHAPE was thus fed into many students' ideas of success and prosperity.

### **SHAPE and the frustrations of HIV programming on campus**

If the HIV epidemic has taught us anything at all, it is that individuals do not uncritically absorb ideas and messages that they are exposed to. Instead, they will often try to make sense of given messages and adapt them for their own needs, uses and purposes. In the discussion that follows I show how students' ideas of what a 'fun' intervention entailed were often at odds with SHAPE's ideas. I also explore the frustrations that this caused on both sides. Every Tuesday over lunch-time, the SHAPE official responsible for the SHAPE associations met with all association leaders for weekly updates. During these meetings, club leaders reported on the following: (a) activities that they had conducted in the previous week; (b) challenges and successes they had faced in implementing the said activities and (c) planned activities for the coming week(s). These meetings were key sites in which not only the concept of 'youth participation' was given life, but where also the concept of 'responsible fun' was constantly negotiated.

Each week, club leaders expressed their frustration at the bureaucracy involved in getting planned activities accepted by SHAPE staff. Clubs were expected to submit brief proposals, with accompanying budgets. A SHAPE official would then examine the proposal to ensure that proposed activities had sufficiently integrated gender and HIV and AIDS messages. All proposals falling short of these requirements were rejected. Also, many of the budgets submitted by students tended to be way above what SHAPE could afford or was willing to spend. Therefore students always had to revise their budgets downwards. Every week I observed, and assisted club members, adapt their proposals to be 'more relevant to SHAPE's core agenda of gender equity and HIV prevention' as well as to be within acceptable budgetary limits. Many times weeks went by before proposals





and budgets were approved. In one incident, the Ballroom Dancing Association submitted a proposal whose budget included the purchasing of a radio, ballroom dancing music CDs and ballroom dancing outfits. The proposal was rejected on the basis that SHAPE would have a difficult time justifying such expenses to its donors. Members of the association challenged—unsuccessfully—this decision on the basis that SHAPE had purchased jerseys and balls for the soccer association. In fact, there was a full set of soccer jerseys that had been purchased for female students, but which was not being used. How, members of the ballroom dancing association enquired, had this expense been justified to the said donors?

The soccer association, in turn, submitted a proposal in which they requested that lunch be provided to players after its weekly games. Until then, SHAPE supplied only juice and biscuits to players. A compromise was reached in which SHAPE would provide lunch only for those games in which space was created to discuss gender, HIV and AIDS issues. This would allow SHAPE to draw the needed resources from its ‘talk-shows’ budget. At another time, the Music Association submitted a proposal to host a ‘promoting information and morality party’, which they referred to as the ‘Pimp’ party. The proposal was approved, by the SHAPE Director, who was known to have a rather soft spot for all things related to music, even though the budget was double that of the Ballroom Dancing Association. Many students, and some SHAPE staff, also doubted the value of the Music Association as an HIV prevention strategy. This created enormous tensions between different clubs and I was often called upon by both SHAPE staff and students to help diffuse such tensions.

Tensions between associations sometimes threatened to derail SHAPE's activities. Because students who were members of the music association considered themselves to be celebrities, members of the music club often refused to perform at functions organized by other associations unless they were paid. Towards the end of 2006, I observed an altercation in that vein between members of the Music, Interact and Soccer Associations. The Interact Association was planning to convene a 'fun day' for children from a number of orphanages. To this end, the association had arranged for members of the soccer association to coordinate soccer matches between the children. It had also planned to have the music association perform at the event. Unfortunately, the latter wanted to be paid for their participation. One of the music members explained that it was the 'policy' of the association to only perform for a 'fee'. When the Interact Association submitted a budget to SHAPE that had a line item for the payment of the Music Association, it was rejected. After fruitless negotiations between the different associations and some SHAPE staff, the SHAPE Director was called upon to address the issue. In a rare show of displeasure the director reminded members of the Music Association that their association only existed because of SHAPE. 'Without SHAPE there is no music club!' he lashed out, 'You are the property of SHAPE! If you don't like our rules you can go off and start your own music club!' The SHAPE Director was generally very charismatic and affable and many students found him easy to relate to despite the fact that he was in his early forties. Ninety-percent of the time he could be found listening intently to students' ideas and laughing with them; the remaining ten percent was for difficult moments like these when he had to firmly remind students who

the boss was. The planned event went ahead, but with minimal participation from the Music Association.

In addition to the bureaucracy involved in budgeting, associations were also required to submit weekly activity reports. This meant that students had to make time during the week to use the word processor in the SHAPE office to type up these reports. One word processor was allocated for this purpose but high demand (caused, among other things, by poor typing skills among students and computer viruses that students carried on their flash-drives) meant that there was often a backlog of reports. SHAPE responded to this demand by allowing students to work late in its offices, under the supervision of the Finance Manager who often worked till 8pm. However, the office of the Dean of Student Affairs expressed security concerns about this arrangement and forced SHAPE to withdraw this facility. It did not, however, withdraw its requirement for club reports, although it allowed clubs to submit handwritten reports. SHAPE used these reports to keep track of the various Associations' activities and it also used these to compile reports for its various donors.

Another frustration experienced by club leaders and members was the requirement placed on all clubs to attract 'reasonable' numbers of female students to their activities or risk not receiving financial support from SHAPE. A long history of sexual harassment, sexism and various forms of gender violence on campus had contributed to low levels of participation in campus activities by female students (Someraï 2003). As illustrated in the various chapters, interactions between female and male students tended to be very frosty, hence many female students avoided those spaces that were prone to *chi-UBA* performances such as discussion forums, including SHAPE talk-shows. In

addition to preventing HIV infection among students, SHAPE was also interested in promoting gender equality at the UZ. This is because the organisation firmly believed that power imbalances between men and women in the country were responsible for fuelling the epidemic (see Terry 2006). Consequently, SHAPE associations were required to promote gender equality into their daily activities by employing the following tactics: ensuring that female students also held key leadership positions in the clubs; encouraging female students to participate in deciding club activities; ensuring that female students played an active role in the implementation of club activities and that club membership consisted of equal numbers of female and male students.

As a proponent of SHAPE's gender equality focus, I spent considerable time assisting students with ideas on how they could better integrate gender issues into their activities. I did not succeed in convincing SHAPE students that they might get better results if they advertised their activities through door-to-door visits in the female residences or sticking posters in female residence toilets, or by tasking each male SHAPE member to bring a female colleague to club meetings. 'You must try and figure out where female students spend most of their time and what types of activities they find interesting' I advised. 'Do you think many female students will be comfortable attending a 'pimp' party?' I probed members of the Music Association when I first saw their proposal. 'Will any female students be performing at this party', I continued to probe. It was always to no avail and I always got the same responses. Female students are afraid to perform. They lack confidence. They are not interested. Furthermore, male SHAPE members resented the idea of going to these extra lengths just to convince female students to participate in their events. A male student expressed the following view,

which was shared by many, ‘What’s so special about them [i.e. female students]? If they won’t come to our functions we will not beg them to!’ Towards the end of 2006, a club leader resigned in frustration at the bureaucracy involved in getting proposals approved and funded. He was also upset at what he described as the ‘lack of appreciation for the sacrifice involved in organizing SHAPE events’. Three committee members from two different clubs also threatened to resign citing similar reasons.

What these various examples illustrate is that the bureaucracy involved in managing and implementing an HIV intervention often ran counter to, and conflicted with students’ ideas of ‘fun’. Students associated ‘fun’ with spontaneity and simplicity. Another component to the conflicts narrated above is that, in the absence of alternative sources of income, some students saw SHAPE as a resource for financing social activities that had little to do with HIV prevention.

So, how did the SHAPE intervention fare with regards to reducing sexual risk-taking behaviour among students? From a public health perspective, effective HIV interventions are those that result in ‘behaviour change’. This is usually defined in terms of an increase in the number of individuals who adopt any one of the ABC’s, that is abstinence, faithfulness and condom use (Heald 2002). Many SHAPE students were implicated in the practices discussed in this thesis. For instance, many of the males participated in the ‘gold rush’ and had multiple partners. Similarly, Nakai, one of the ‘active lust seekers’ described in chapter two was a key SHAPE student and she was regularly called upon to facilitate the organisation’s talk-shows. Nakai considered herself an expert on the use of contraceptives and during fieldwork I attended a talkshow on contraception where she was the main facilitator. Nakai demonstrated—correctly—the

use of female and male condoms as well as responded—correctly again—to numerous questions regarding the efficacy of other contraceptives, such as the pill and the loop. Ironically, in April 2007 I found myself driving her to a reproductive health clinic to get a pregnancy test, as her period was ‘late’. She insisted that she was on the pill, but admitted that she never used condoms in her relationships. The pregnancy scare turned out to be false. However, Nakai had fallen pregnant before in her second year but had aborted.

In 2003, SHAPE carried out a cross sectional survey to assess UZ students’ knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices regarding various aspects of HIV. Nine hundred and thirty-three students participated in the survey and comparisons were made between the responses given by SHAPE students and those who did not participate in SHAPE activities (Terry et al 2006). While SHAPE students scored highly in terms of their knowledge on various aspects of the epidemic, their actual risk-taking behaviour was not very different from the rest of the student population. For instance, close to thirty percent of both SHAPE and non-SHAPE students who indicated that they were ‘currently sexually active’ reported that they had not used condoms during their last sexual encounter. These figures are comparable with national statistics, which show that thirty percent of young men and nearly fifty percent of young women between the ages of 15-24 reported that they had not used condoms during their most recent ‘higher risk’ sexual encounter (*Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey 2005-6:197*). ‘Higher risk sex’, in this case, was defined as ‘sexual intercourse with a partner who neither was a spouse nor who lived with the respondent’ (*ibid*).

### **The Politics of implementing an HIV intervention on campus**

At the time I conducted fieldwork, SHAPE had already been implementing its HIV intervention at the UZ for six years, yet it still faced the challenge of having to regularly negotiate its continued presence on the UZ campus. These negotiations were typically done with the following key university authorities, to whom its existence on campus was dependent: (a) the Vice Chancellors, of whom there had been two since SHAPE appeared on campus in May 2000; (b) the Deans of Students, who are responsible for the non-academic, welfare needs of students, and of whom there had already been six ‘acting’ in as many years; (c) the nursing ‘sisters’ from the SHS, who are directly responsible for the health needs of students, and of whom there had been at least three since 2000; (d) the senior security officers, who are responsible for maintaining ‘order’ on campus; and (e) other key officials in the Student Affairs Department (e.g. deputy deans, accommodation officers etc).

The fact that SHAPE needed to negotiate its presence at the UZ at all and on such a regular basis was evidence of its rather precarious positioning in the broader structures of the institution. This constant negotiation was despite the fact that SHAPE had been granted permission to operate on campus by the Office of the Vice Chancellor itself, which represents the highest decision-making authority for the day-to-day operations of the institution. Indeed, it was also because of the directive by the same office that SHAPE had been allocated office space in the strategically located Student Services Building, which housed the other key departments concerned with student’s welfare and well-being. With the direct backing of the Office of the Vice Chancellor, SHAPE had expanded from one office in 2000 to occupying almost one-third (i.e. seven) of the

available office space in the building, three years later. Even though the university claimed back three offices, SHAPE continued to be the only ‘outside’ organisation to take up that much office space in the building. Indeed, it was also the only ‘outside’ organisation permitted to set up base and operate from within the university.

Most ‘outside’ organizations, the majority of whom were religious in nature, had a ‘campus branch’ through which they operated. Even political parties had satellite branches at the institution, through which they accessed students. A good number of organizations had resorted to establishing student-run campus-based satellite branches, after having failed to secure the necessary permission to set up fully functioning offices on campus. While inadequate office space was obviously an issue, anxieties over what the government referred to as ‘regime-change organizations disguised as NGOs’ (Batsell 2005; Kagoro 2005; Rutherford 2004), appear to have been the main reason behind this particular response to the presence of non-governmental organizations on the UZ campus by UZ authorities. The latter worried that if civil society organizations were allowed to operate on campus, they would use the opportunity to fan anti-government sentiments and hence make the university ungovernable.

A brief background discussion of the government’s relations with civil society organizations is useful. Since 1999, civil society organizations in the country have grown in number and influence and become very vocal and critical of the government. In fact, in February 2000 civil society organizations, with funding from various donor agencies, had successfully mobilized the Zimbabwean population to reject the new constitution that the government had drawn up (Masunungure 2004). The perceived partnership between civil society organizations, the opposition and some donor agencies contributed to the



government's distrust of all three groups. In 2002 the government changed the law regarding the registration of non-governmental organizations in order to make them harder to establish. Furthermore, these organizations were placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Welfare, thereby making them directly accountable to the government. By 2008, government intolerance had grown to incredible levels and during the June run-off elections, it issued a directive for all non-governmental organizations and some donor agencies to close their offices with immediate effect (Matyszak 2009). This directive affected all organizations, including those involved in HIV prevention work such as SHAPE.

From its early days onwards, therefore, SHAPE came to measure its popularity within the corridors of power at the UZ—and by implication, its security of tenure at the institution—in terms of the number of offices it had at any given moment. In the absence of a formal (i.e. written) memorandum of understanding with the UZ, which would have clarified and sealed the organisation's role and positioning on campus, SHAPE had to rely on this rather indirect, but key, form of acknowledgment.

Three reasons explain why SHAPE was allowed to operate on the UZ campus. In the first instance, the fact that it was an initiative by former students was a major advantage. In 1998, a number of the founding members of SHAPE had organized a highly successful fundraising initiative for a fellow student who had suffered complete renal failure. This initiative had been covered extensively by the media and resulted in Grace Mugabe, the First Lady of the country, becoming involved. University authorities were therefore familiar with some of the individuals at SHAPE and this could have made them less suspicious of the students' intentions. In fact, one of the key individuals that

SHAPE consulted as it was still trying to set up the organisation was the Pro-vice chancellor's wife, Dr Nyagura. She was an academic at the institution and a few of the SHAPE founders had taken classes with her. The Vice Chancellor's wife was very supportive and it can be concluded that she played a key role in securing permission for SHAPE to operate at the institution. Over the years, SHAPE continued to establish strategic partnerships with key individuals both on and off-campus. Some of these, as previously discussed, involved inviting key government ministers and key university authorities to officiate at its functions, such as during the launch of the music albums. The organisation also regularly held joint activities with the student health services and the student council. In addition, academic staff, health personnel and other strategic individuals were invited to facilitate at training workshops. During the 2006 orientation week, for instance, SHAPE organized a series of seminars on sexual harassment on campus. The organisation invited a number of 'experts' to speak on various aspects of sexual harassment, such as an academic from the law faculty, a member of the Zimbabwe police and a representative from the non-governmental organisation, the Women's Action Group. The director of campus security and a few security officers were also invited to the seminars. These partnerships strengthened SHAPE's positioning on campus.

The second reason why SHAPE was allowed to continue operating on the UZ campus was that its activities, many of which were covered extensively in the national media, helped to clean up the badly battered image of the institution. At the time of SHAPE's formation, and indeed even well before then (see Gaidzanwa 1993), the media coverage that the UZ had been receiving was overwhelmingly negative. Through



SHAPE, however, students at the institution could be shown in a new light as engaged, concerned and responsible citizens.

The third factor had to do with the fact that the organisation enjoyed tremendous support and respect from students. Besides its 'fun' intervention, students also seemed quite taken in by the fact that SHAPE was an initiative of former UZ students as well as by the fact that SHAPE seemed to genuinely care for students' welfare. Unlike the university administration, whose approach to managing students was impersonal and seemingly aimed at 'containing' students and their destructive passions, SHAPE's mode of governance was the exact opposite: it was liberal, democratic and very personal. Indeed, the organisation maintained an 'open door' policy and students could just walk into the SHAPE reception, request to see the Director and see him as soon as he was available. This is because SHAPE appreciated the basic fact that its intervention would fail if it did not have strong student support. Also, as former students themselves, the SHAPE staff empathized with students' frustration at being infantilized and not listened to by university authorities. SHAPE was therefore seen as contributing, however indirectly, to campus stability and university authorities seemed to appreciate that.

Finally, in addition to establishing the strategic partnerships discussed above, SHAPE sometimes had to literally 'buy' its way into the hearts of the authorities. This typically took the form of financially supporting various university events. In 2004, for instance, SHAPE sponsored the top three prizes for the annual inter-universities athletics competition held at the UZ by the sports department. Between 2003 and 2007, it consistently sponsored the main prize for the annual inter-faculty soccer games. These games were one of the major highlights in the social calendar of the UZ and they

attracted participation from both students and staff. Occasionally though, SHAPE was quite blatant in its use of money. In 2003, SHAPE paid for the installation of security bars on the windows of all the offices that were located in the Student Affairs Building. The windows had been destroyed in a student demonstration. SHAPE had its offices in the building and, for the first time since its inception, the organisation's windows had also been destroyed. This was unusual because, until then, the organisation's windows had always been spared as students considered the organisation to be sympathetic to students' issues. In fact, members of the student council apologized to the SHAPE director and assured it that only students who were unfamiliar with the organisation would have committed such a reprehensible deed.

However, the deed having thus been done, SHAPE realised that it was politically expedient for it to replace all the shattered windows in the building as well as have security bars fitted on all windows for future protection. Although the costs involved in this undertaking were enormous, SHAPE came up with the money and all windows were replaced and secured. Unfortunately, while 'buying' its way served its intended purposes, it had a major downside. SHAPE came to be viewed as an extremely well-funded organisation and requests for financial assistance started pouring in from other sectors of the university community. One of these requests came from the student council which needed at least USD30,000 (then about Z\$7.5 million at the official exchange rate of Z\$250:1USD and easily twice that at the parallel market rate) for the refurbishment of the students union building—which included revamping the derelict plumbing system and plastering and repainting the whole building (a huge complex that included a dining hall that sits at least a hundred students, two gyms and close to twenty offices).

## Conclusion

Student expectations from HIV interventions often conflict with those of implementing agencies. This is the case even when implementing agencies try to employ creative and fun approaches to HIV prevention, as the SHAPE experience shows. The greatest challenge perhaps of implementing an HIV intervention with university students is that those who volunteer as peer educators do so primarily to gain skills that will make them employable in the non-governmental sector. Furthermore, many students who volunteer as peer educators are often much more interested in changing the behaviours of other students rather their own. Finally, students may participate in HIV interventions largely because they find them entertaining and not because of any real desire to engage in protective behaviours. In the next chapter I explore the implications of all this for HIV prevention in the country, and on the UZ campus.



## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

Thus far, this thesis has been silent on the issue of HIV positive students and access to treatment and care at the UZ campus. This is because few Zimbabweans know their HIV status and even fewer are willing to publicly disclose an HIV positive status. According to the *Zimbabwe Demographic Health Survey* (2005-6), young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four account for the lowest uptake of HIV testing services. Only seven percent of young women and five percent of young men in this age group have been tested for HIV and are aware of their test results (*ibid*). Across all age-groups, only twenty-one percent of women and twelve percent of men in Zimbabwe who took an HIV test actually collected their test results. The social stigma that is attached to HIV and the general lack of treatment options are the main reasons behind the low uptake of HIV testing services. Stigma in Africa generally emanates from two sources: the disease's association with 'sexual immorality' (Whiteside 2008; Illife 2006) and its association with social death (Niehaus 2009). As pointed out in the previous chapter, anti-retroviral drugs were only made available in government-run hospitals and health centres as recently as 2006. Until then, anti-retroviral drugs were only accessible from private hospitals and were beyond the reach of most. Consequently, many people associated HIV infection with death and they preferred not to find out their HIV status. However, even in countries like South Africa where treatment for HIV is widely available, few people chose to learn their HIV status (Hutchinson et al 2007; Simbiya et al 2007; Medley et al 2004).

Students at the UZ have displayed similar reluctance with regards to learning their HIV status. Organisations like SHAPE have regularly invited HIV positive individuals from ‘The Centre’ (a non-governmental organisation that works with, and provides care and support to HIV positive individuals) to its various activities to share their experiences of living with the virus. During the 2006 orientation week, SHAPE invited HIV positive individuals from ‘Clear Vision’, another organisation that works with and cares for the infected, to speak to first year students about the benefits of HIV testing and the possibility of living positively with the virus. Although many students indicated that they found such events beneficial, they still expressed great fear at learning their HIV status. This was because they equated an HIV positive status with the collapse of their dreams and future plans. Some students also worried about the potentially toxic effect of anti-retroviral drugs and did not therefore see the latter as a sustainable option. Despite the numerous advertisements that aired on the national television on how to ‘live positively’ with HIV and AIDS, the disease continues to be associated with imminent death in the minds of many. Cairns et al (2006) note that one of the major challenges facing universities is that students are only on campus for a limited period. Consequently, HIV positive students begin to show signs of infection only after they have left the institution, which makes the provision of anti-retroviral drugs to students a very costly exercise. It is clear from the above that a major gap exists in the literature regarding the experiences of HIV positive youth, in general, and university students, in particular.

I set out in this thesis to investigate how ‘campus cultures’ shape university students’ perceptions, and experiences, of love and romance, as well as their sexual practices. The thesis, however, should not be viewed as a mere cataloguing of the sexual

practices of university students, but rather should be read as an exploration of the various meanings that the latter attach to sex, love and romance. More importantly, perhaps, the thesis should be read as offering an account of the role that *institutions* play in structuring youth sexuality. A key point that I make in the thesis is that where individuals are located—spatially and temporally—is just as important to understand as are the other ‘risk’ factors, such as socio-cultural beliefs and poverty, for instance. Many HIV interventions in Zimbabwe have traditionally focused on ‘at risk’ populations rather than on ‘risky contexts’. The problem with focusing on the former, as Campbell (2003) pointed out, is that it places emphasis on individual behaviour change and not enough on the social and environmental contexts in which sexual and romantic partnerships are formed. Some HIV and AIDS activists have begun to call for ‘social change’ programmes in addition to ‘behaviour change’

The university students that I investigate offer particularly striking examples of how youth sexuality, and indeed sexual risk-taking behaviour, is the effect of a complex interplay of factors. While age, cultural beliefs and economic factors continue to be important factors, they take on vastly different meanings on a university campus. This is because these factors are mediated by students’ own perceptions of themselves as youth who are in the process of transitioning to adulthood. I have tried to show throughout the thesis that this idea of university as a transitional (and hence liminal) phase presents students with many opportunities to temporarily suspend and even subvert some societal norms. It is because of this, for instance, that the female students I discussed in chapter two and three constructed their sexuality in the ways that they did: by prioritizing sexual pleasure and using their sexuality to re-construct themselves as modern and successful in



their peer groups. Male sexuality, on the other hand, was heavily influenced by their perceptions of themselves as ‘male university students’ and not just by their perceptions of themselves as young Zimbabwean men. In particular, even though many male students lacked the necessary economic resources to attract romantic and sexual partners (just like most young Zimbabwean men), their specific responses to this position of powerlessness were guided by the *chi-UBA* principles of militancy, radicalism and rebelliousness. It is therefore impossible to fully understand male student sexuality, or even design an effective HIV intervention, without examining how masculine identities are created on the UZ campus.

Beyond its specific focus on young people in institutions of higher learning, the thesis generally seeks to expand contemporary knowledge regarding youth sexual agency within the context of HIV and AIDS. More often than not, young people—particularly young women—are portrayed as lacking any agency whatsoever in their relationships and with regards their sexual lives. This is especially common in studies of transactional sex and intergenerational relationships. I have, however, tried to challenge the idea that power always works uni-directionally and that men are always fully in control in these relationships. As the experiences of the female students in this study show, young women often exercise considerable agency, and power, in these relationships. Female students, for instance, successfully employed strategies that enabled them to avoid having to reciprocate sexually for the ‘gifts’ that they received from their male partners. Where this was not possible, female students could usually exercise some level of control over the frequency and timing of sex in these relationships. The thesis has further illustrated that transactional sex relationships are a strategy that both young women and the men they

date use to compete for social status in their peer groups. Consequently, these relationships are often beneficial in non-sexual ways to both parties.

A second aspect of youth sexual agency that is ignored by most studies and HIV prevention practitioners pertains to how young people make sexual decisions. It is generally believed that, because of their ages, young people are incapable of making the ‘right’ choices regarding their bodies and sex. The decisions that youth eventually make, especially when they do not conform to the ‘ABCs’ (abstain, be faithful, condom use) of HIV prevention, are often dismissed as ‘irrational’ and poorly thought out. This thesis, however, proves otherwise. For many students in this study, the decision to be sexually active was often carefully thought out and was weighed against other factors. For instance, both female and male students prioritized pleasure over protection. As one of my female participants acknowledged, ‘I know that there isn’t much of difference between having sex with a condom and having sex without a condom, but condoms are too clinical. I like to know that it is just me to him, not me to him via a plastic!’ A male student, in turn, admitted that ‘in that moment, you don’t think of condoms. I have had unprotected sex many times even though I had condoms in my pockets the whole time!’ Again pleasure trumped protection. Dismissing young people’s decisions as ‘irrational’ is problematic because it forecloses any opportunity for gaining any in-depth understanding of young people’s particular social realities and how these shape their sexual practices and choices.



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