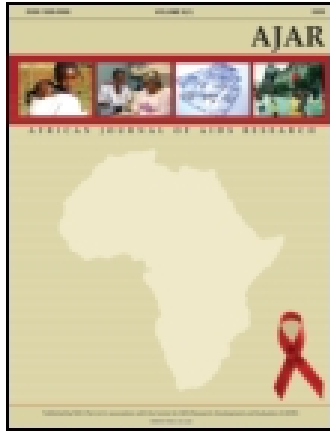


This article was downloaded by: [University of Cape Town Libraries]

On: 20 August 2014, At: 07:24

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



African Journal of AIDS Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/raar20>

'Something for something': The importance of talking about transactional sex with youth in South Africa using a resilience-based approach

Ingrid van der Heijden^a & Sharlene Swartz^{bc}

^a Gender and Health Research Unit, Medical Research Council, PO Box 19070, Tygerberg 7505, South Africa

^b Human Sciences Research Council, Private Bag X9182, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa

^c University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa

Published online: 06 May 2014.

To cite this article: Ingrid van der Heijden & Sharlene Swartz (2014) 'Something for something': The importance of talking about transactional sex with youth in South Africa using a resilience-based approach, African Journal of AIDS Research, 13:1, 53-63

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2989/16085906.2014.886602>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

‘Something for something’: The importance of talking about transactional sex with youth in South Africa using a resilience-based approach

Ingrid van der Heijden^{1*} and Sharlene Swartz^{2,3}

¹Gender and Health Research Unit, Medical Research Council, PO Box 19070, Tygerberg 7505, South Africa

²Human Sciences Research Council, Private Bag X9182, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa

³University of Cape Town, Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa

*Corresponding author, e-mail: iheijden@mrc.ac.za

Transactional sex is a common feature of sexual relationships in South Africa but has severe health implications for those who engage in it. This paper presents perspectives on transactional sex based on interviews and focus group discussions with young people in Gauteng and Limpopo, South Africa. The discussions were part of an evaluation of a peer education programme promoting HIV prevention called *Vhutshilo*, aimed at 14–16 year olds. The session on transactional sex entitled ‘Something for Something’ evoked strong responses from youth. Youth recognised transactional sex as a common phenomenon in their communities and associated it with many risks. However, when comparing young people’s qualitative responses to the impact of the session as measured by the quantitative impact survey, no significant differences were discernible between youth in the programme and those in a control group who were not exposed to the session. Further analysis showed that the content of the session was limited to the negative consequences and health risks of transactional sex and focused mostly on the adverse contexts in South Africa that force youth into such relationships. The session did little to situate transactional relationships within the everyday realities of sexual decision making and youth values of peer status and consumerism. We argue that the session’s findings reveal a narrow understanding of the dynamic contexts under which transactional sex occurs and fails to take into account the resilience of youth to make choices of whether or not to engage in such relationships, and how they can engage in these types of relationships safely. We conclude that HIV prevention curriculums need to leverage youth resilience and protective skills within the confines of difficult economic and social circumstances to allow them to successfully navigate safer sexual relationships.

Keywords: transactional sex, HIV/AIDS, sexual health, youth, risk behaviour, peer education, resilience, agency

Introduction

Transactional sex is a complex but everyday phenomenon in South Africa and an important risk factor in perpetuating the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Given South Africa’s high levels of poverty, studies show that transactional relationships (in which sex is exchanged for material goods or other support) are common. They are perceived to be essential among those who engage in them; and relationships with older men in return for some form of benefit are considered the norm among young women (Swart-Kruger and Richter 1997, MacPhail and Campbell 2001). Numerous researchers have sought to make sense of its proliferation, especially considering the health risks associated with it and its link to HIV infection (Hunter 2002, Selikow et al. 2002, Wojcicki 2002a, Leclerc-Madlala 2003, Dunkle et al. 2004, Hallman 2004, Hallman 2005, Bhana 2012). Given the high level of transactional sex amongst young people (especially young women), a key question to be asked is how best to intervene and educate young people about transactional sex.

This paper offers an evaluation of a recent youth peer education programme for vulnerable youth in South Africa that included a session on transactional sex. It evaluates

the session in the context of the overall objectives of the programme and places it in conversation with current literature and a youth resilience framework. We begin by surveying the literature on transactional sex, especially as it pertains to sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa.

Transactional sex, risk, consequences and economic vulnerabilities

Overall, the literature describes the many risk behaviours, negative consequences and social and economic vulnerabilities associated with sexual exchange relationships, and also how youth actively seek out and negotiate such relationships for their perceived social, economic and material benefits.

The economic and social vulnerabilities and negative consequences, including the health risks associated with transactional sex include teenage pregnancy, abortions, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and increased exposure to HIV. Research in South Africa also describes violence and forced sex as particular risks entwined in transactional sex, especially if a younger person refuses sex or tries to end the relationship (Jewkes et al. 2001, Dunkle et al. 2007). For example, in the Cape Town township of Khayelitsha most young women’s sexual

initiation and ongoing sexual relationships were characterised by violence (Wood et al. 1998). Furthermore, sexual coercion was reinforced by female silence and submission, and their acceptance of gifts of clothing and money from their male partners (Wood et al. 1998). Bhana's (2012) interviews with teenage girls in Durban townships reveal how young women were scared of their partners' violent conduct within an intimate relationship, and this fear was extended to male teachers who dated younger women to 'feed off their economic circumstances' (Bhana 2012: 355). Also, a common feature of transactional sexual relationships is that the financial provider or partner is often significantly older, described as a 'sugar daddy or mommy'. These relationships have implications for condom-use and negotiation; young women report that it is difficult to insist on their use when confronted with an older person (Ankomah 1998).

Youth expectations of benefit from sexual relationships

While the risks and negative consequences underlying transactional sex are well documented, young people's underlying decision-making dynamics and their expectations of sexual relationships are less understood. Some studies report that there is a lot to gain from relationships in which there is some type of exchange, especially by young females who initiate and negotiate transactional relationships. Hunter (2002: 108) summarises by saying, 'Indeed, today it is virtually taken for granted that sexual relationships will be cemented with gifts from men', and that men are often conceived of in purely material terms by women (Selikow et al. 2002). Wamoyi et al. (2011) found that for both young and older women in Tanzania, the practice of transactional sex was widely accepted and it was the *absence* of transaction in sexual encounters that was considered demeaning to women. These women reported that sexual relationships needed to be reciprocal and mutually beneficial and therefore men needed to 'reimburse' women who have sex with them with material benefits and sexual pleasure. For them, sex without transaction is not mutual. Here, young women perceived themselves as 'clever' and 'lucky' to be created women because they could easily exploit their sexuality for pleasure as well as material needs and saw the female body as a useful 'shop' (Wamoyi et al. 2011). A Tanzanian study (Maganja et al. 2007) comprising 60 in-depth interviews and 14 focus groups with young men and women aged 16–24 years old in Dar es Salaam revealed similar findings. Both young men and young women described monetary or material exchange as common place in casual relationships, but young women voiced exchange expectations from their committed partners as well, and young men were aware that women initiated casual partnerships with the *expectation* of financial support. Furthermore, Wamoyi et al. (2011) found that young women viewed transactional sex as socially or 'morally acceptable', unlike 'prostitution', as they had control over which partner to choose.

Findings from the literature argue that transactional sex relationships allow young people to consume more luxury goods like cell phones, hairdos and pedicures and allow young women to fashion themselves as 'more sophisticated', 'more successful' and 'more sexually appealing

than their peers' (Masvawure 2010: 861). Located at a Zimbabwean university campus, Masvawure's ethnographic study (2010) found that the value of transactional sex lies more in its prestige rather than actual economic benefits of money and material resources. He interviewed male and female students who had been or were currently involved in a transactional sexual relationship. While young people acknowledged that many young women are pushed into transactional sex because of economic need, those interviewed concluded that youth do not engage in transactional sex only for 'survival', but to 'be seen on campus' (Masvawure 2010). He found that young women tended to date older wealthier men because they were attractive as sexual partners and had desirable levels of social and peer status.

Youth are not passive but display thoughtful decision making strategies

Interviews with young women and men in urban townships in South Africa reveal that young women 'are not always passive participants in the sexual promiscuity of youth' (2002: 26). Atwood et al. (2011) and Silberschmidt and Rasch (2001) have noted that young people have varying perceptions of risk, and that risky behaviour is driven by individual decisions and rational choices where young women and men are willing or voluntary partners and active social agents in engaging in high-risk sexual relationships.

So for example, Verheijen (2011) shows how women are often agents rather than victims in their relationships, and sometimes actively manipulate transactions within their relationships. Verheijen (2011) reports that for young single women in Malawi, sexual relationships act as a form of 'insurance' by reducing the likelihood of social exclusion and increasing community support in tough times. In post-conflict Liberia, Atwood et al. (2011) found that among females transactional sex was not prevalent at first sexual encounter. However, young women reported that their relationships became transactional when they understood the financial freedoms and peer respect and social status they would gain; 'transactional sex appeared to provide adolescent females with a type of social agency, within the confines of their difficult economic circumstances' (Atwood et al. 2011: 115). The evidence from the literature concludes that individual risk taking behaviours are nested within complex sexual economies and that HIV prevention interventions should both discuss the risks inherent in transactional relationships, and leverage young people's, especially female's, agency and protective skills in negotiating these risks.

To evaluate a peer education programme that deals with transactional sex, we used these key findings from the literature along with a youth resilience framework that focuses on youth assets and protective factors to better understand how to incorporate meaningful discussions of transactional sex into HIV prevention and sexual health promotion programmes.

A youth resilience framework

Research on adolescent behaviour has predominantly focused on risk factors. This risk-focused approach has

included examining deficits in a youth's life that may contribute to their engagement in risky health behaviours. This approach holds the limitations and negative impacts of a youth's environment instead of regarding their individual capacities to navigate difficult circumstances and contexts. More recently, an increased awareness of what makes adolescents vulnerable and the factors that protect them from self-destructive behaviours has stimulated an interest in identifying protective (or promotive) factors, assets and skills that diminish the chances of negative health outcomes for adolescents (Rink and Tricker 2003, Zimmerman et al. 2013). Such a strengths-based approach also identifies factors which maximise opportunities for youth to attain and maintain health and wellbeing — factors that help youth avoid risks they will inevitably face in their lives, making them resilient (Rink and Tricker 2003).

A resilience-based approach to youth development is based upon the principle that all young people have the ability to overcome adversity and achieve positive outcomes despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Rutter 1987). Youth who have good or desirable outcomes in the face of high risk are considered resilient (Rew and Horner 2003). The youth resilience framework involves a shift from vulnerability to resilience, and from risk variables to the process of *negotiating* risk situations (Rutter 1987). Resilience means that youth can cope with trauma and stress and circumvent negative pathways linked with risks (Zolkoski and Bullock 2012).

A youth resilience framework addresses individual, family, and community risk factors and protective resources that may be harnessed in interventions designed to prevent or reduce health risk behaviours and associated negative outcomes in adolescence (Rew and Horner 2003). It provides a framework for understanding how youth may overcome risk exposure, which is significant in designing interventions for prevention (Zimmerman et al. 2013). For example, Zimmerman et al. (2013) identified how promotive factors such as ethnic identity, social support and prosocial involvement helped non-White youths overcome risks associated with violence, the effects of stress, depression and suicide, and negative health behaviours. These helped to disrupt the paths to negative outcomes. The empirical results from his resilience research revealed how promotive factors such as these need to be recognised and enhanced as prevention strategies in interventions for youth, to help them overcome adversity.

In this paper, we put our findings from the evaluation through a resilience approach, which recognises two issues. First, that youth have the capacity, or agency, to identify problems and activate solutions and protection both within and out of transactional relationships. Second, interventions need to identify and develop these protective skills in order for youth to avoid transactional sex or to prevent the negative consequences of such relationships.

Study design

This paper focuses on youth perspectives on transactional sex based on interviews and focus group discussions with young people in Gauteng and Limpopo, South Africa. These discussions were part of a larger evaluation of a

peer education HIV prevention programme called *Vhutshilo* (Tshivenda for 'life'). The evaluation was conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council in 2009 and is reported on in Swartz et al. (2012).

The Vhutshilo curriculum

Vhutshilo is a 13-week curriculum designed for vulnerable youth, aged 14–16 years, living in peri-urban and rural areas, delivered by trained older peer educators from the same background and community, aged 17–19 years old. Underpinning *Vhutshilo*'s philosophy is that young people learn from interactions with their peers through group orientated and participatory activities within a structured curriculum. The curriculum included 13 sessions that were delivered by peer educators in participant's mother tongue. Sessions involved activities targeting normative determinants of risky behaviour — such as substance abuse, condom use and unhealthy (including transactional) sexual relationships — and aims to develop protective skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, help-seeking and supportive behaviours (Deutsch and Enoch 2009). *Vhutshilo* is designed to unsettle, provoke and stimulate discussion around situations members may actually face on a daily basis and feelings they have (Deutsch and Enoch 2009). The topics in the curriculum were chosen as being more appropriate to debate amongst peers, rather than taught by adults, aiming to undo cultural and traditional beliefs, bridge the generational gap of sex education and allow peers to experience discomfort together and foster a context of mutual help.

The programme included a session called *What are you really getting out of it: 'Something for Something' relationships* that encouraged youth to talk about transactional sex. This 'Something for Something' session aims to: (1) help participants identify elements that make a relationship a 'something-for-something' relationship; and (2) teach young people about the risks of HIV exposure in exchanging sex for gifts and favours (or having a 'sugar daddy') (Deutsch and Enoch 2009). The session also has a secondary aim that encourages members to think of other ways to get the gifts and favours they may want. The session uses a short story about Anna and her friend Thandi. Thandi is given new clothes by her boyfriend; Anna recognises the danger in this and asks Thandi what her 'boyfriend' might expect in return. The session uses the story to initiate a debate about what drives young people to engage in transactional sex; what the consequences of such relationships are; and how transactional sex is different from a 'healthy relationship'.

Methods and participants

A range of methods, both quantitative and qualitative, were used to evaluate the impact of the programme. First, 68 *Vhutshilo* members and 69 control group members were asked to complete a questionnaire at baseline, post-intervention and at three month follow-up. Participants came from 6 urban and rural sites in Gauteng and Limpopo and were 61% female and 39% male. The communities in which *Vhutshilo* was run were under-resourced, with high levels of unemployment and little infrastructure. The control group that was not receiving the *Vhutshilo* programme was

recruited from nearby sites that had similar community conditions; participants were of similar gender, age and socio-economic status.

The survey questionnaire comprised 92 items and used multiple item indicators in Likert-type questions to measure changes in help seeking and perceived support, decision making skills, HIV knowledge, sexual and health behaviours, attitudes and intentions (Swartz et al. 2012). The questionnaire was available in participant's choice of language.

The qualitative component of the evaluation was intended to be more in-depth, participatory and youth friendly and aimed to uncover participants' changes in health behaviours, attitudes and intentions. Post-intervention, *Vhutshilo* group members were also asked to complete an assessment sheet in their language of choice responding to each individual session where they were asked to name the session 'most liked', 'most disliked', 'most remembered', and 'learnt the most' and to give reasons for this. Trained fieldworkers who are fluent in isiZulu, Sesotho and English from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) also observed sessions and completed observation sheets that measured participants' interactions and responses during the sessions. Post-intervention, a subsample of *Vhutshilo* participants, approximately 5 from each site ($n = 32$), were invited to participate in a focus group facilitated by trained researchers that asked a series of open-ended questions about what they liked or disliked about each session and from which they had learned the most. From this sub-sample, a further 14 youth participated in individual face-to-face interviews which included questions that focused on risky scenarios that youth may encounter in everyday life and on which they were asked to comment, especially regarding coping strategies used and help-seeking behaviours employed.

Analysis

Quantitative data were double captured, cleaned and statistical analyses restricted to those who completed the survey at all three points (a response rate of 79%). Student's *t*-tests were conducted on each of the multi-itemed indicators to ascertain whether differences in answers were statistically significant or only due to chance across all three points. In this paper we report only on those survey questions that relate to transactional sexual relationships (questions 14, 32 and 90). The qualitative data, upon which this paper is primarily focussed, were audiotaped, translated and transcribed verbatim, and in the case of lesson observations, recorded on observation sheets. Data from the assessment worksheets were collated and summarised. Thematic analyses were utilised to interpret and code interview and focus group transcripts.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained for the study from the HSRC research ethics committee and from the Harvard School of Public Health Office of Regulatory Affairs and Research Compliance Institutional Review Board. All researchers underwent ethics training in informed consent, confidentiality, the principle of minimising harm (Boyden

and Ennew 1997) and sensitivity in working with vulnerable populations (Swartz 2011).

With regard to consent, fieldworkers and programme staff worked together to ensure that consent was obtained and was informed. Anticipating problems of language and poor literacy levels, we ensured consent forms were available in the mother-tongues of all participants and their parents or guardians. Consent was verbal with written supporting documents. In addition to consent from guardians and/or caregivers, assent was obtained from participants who were under the age of 18 years. Peer educators who were 18 years old and above gave consent in their own capacity.

Since many of the topics were of a sensitive and personal nature, we offered participants the choice not to respond to questions that made them feel uncomfortable. If they chose to respond and felt discomfort as a result, we offered help through referrals for counselling. Participants were given assurances of confidentiality in individual interviews, but warned of the limits of confidentiality in group discussions. In ensuing publications, including this paper, pseudonyms are used for all participants.

Limitations of the study

The study used a small sample, not representative of all youth; findings are therefore not generalisable. While the overall study comprised 183 participants, data for this paper were drawn primarily from the 32 participants responding to the qualitative evaluation. We recognise that the quantitative results revealed no significant change in youth behaviour, attitudes, knowledge and intentions and therefore used the qualitative data to reveal more nuanced findings in how they reacted to and viewed the session on transactional sex. However, the insights derived from this study are applicable to revising both the *Vhutshilo* curriculum and other curricula designed to engage youth in discussions of transactional sex in their everyday contexts.

While there were a possible six 'Something for Something' sessions that might have been observed, researchers only managed to observe half of these. Sessions were not always run consecutively and this hindered capturing more sessions. Sometimes, due to lack of money, sessions had to be rescheduled and researchers were not informed of changes. However, we relied on other sources of data, not only the observations, and we feel that this is sufficient. We also acknowledge the issue of social desirability in participant's answers. Respondents to the questionnaire and qualitative self-reports may have over-reported 'good behaviour' or under-reported undesirable behaviour, a bias that may interfere with the interpretation of average tendencies and individual differences in behaviour change.

Our findings are presented first as an overview of youth responses to the session, followed by a quantitative measure of changed knowledge, attitude or intention, as a result of the session. Thereafter we consider the young people's discussions regarding the drivers of transactional sex and its negative consequences, including 'health risks', 'moral shame', and 'security and instability' that emerged from the data.

Findings: Youth responses to the session ‘Something for Something’

Overall findings from the evaluation showed that *Vhutshilo* youth had a broader emotional repertoire than those in the control group. They were able to identify support networks, displayed a sense of positive future orientation and recognised multiple concurrent partnerships as dangerous behaviour that increased their risk for HIV (Swartz et al. 2012). The lesson assessment sheets completed by participants ($n = 73$) revealed that the ‘Something for Something’ session evoked strong responses from young people, with more reporting it ‘most liked’, ‘best remembered’ and ‘session that most made me think’ than any other session. Around a quarter of participants reported it ‘most liked’, more than sessions on ‘Supporting friends’, liked by 10%, and

‘Having healthy relationships’, liked by only 5% of participants (Figure 1). Large proportions of youth also recognised it as the most memorable (‘best remembered’) (32%) and most significant (‘most made me think’) session (18%) (Figure 2). A total of 15% of youth also rated the session as one of the least favourite sessions (‘sessions disliked’), supporting our contention that responses to it were strong, sometimes contradictory, and the session itself definitely provocative. Moreover, the observational data revealed that there was a high level of engagement by group members during this session and the topic resonated with participants who recognised transactional sex as prevalent in their community and among their friends: *‘It’s something that happens daily, it happens all the time...We know it among our peers’* (Babalwa, female, 16 years old, Gauteng).

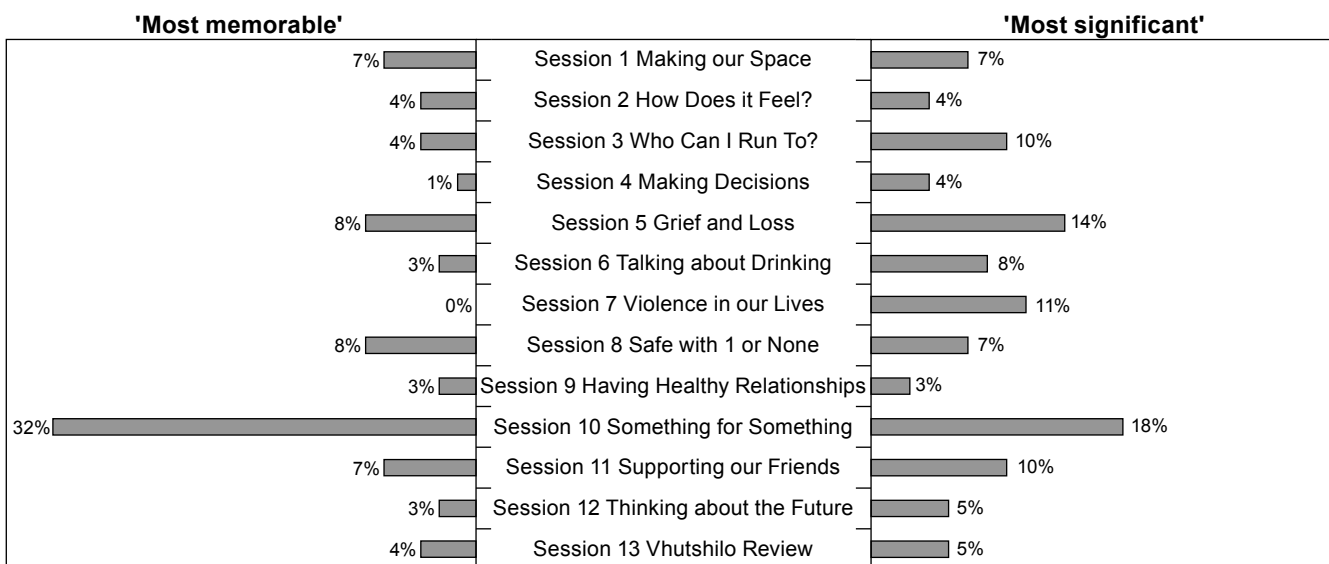


Figure 2: Proportion of youth who rated each session ‘most memorable’ and ‘most significant’ ($n = 73$)

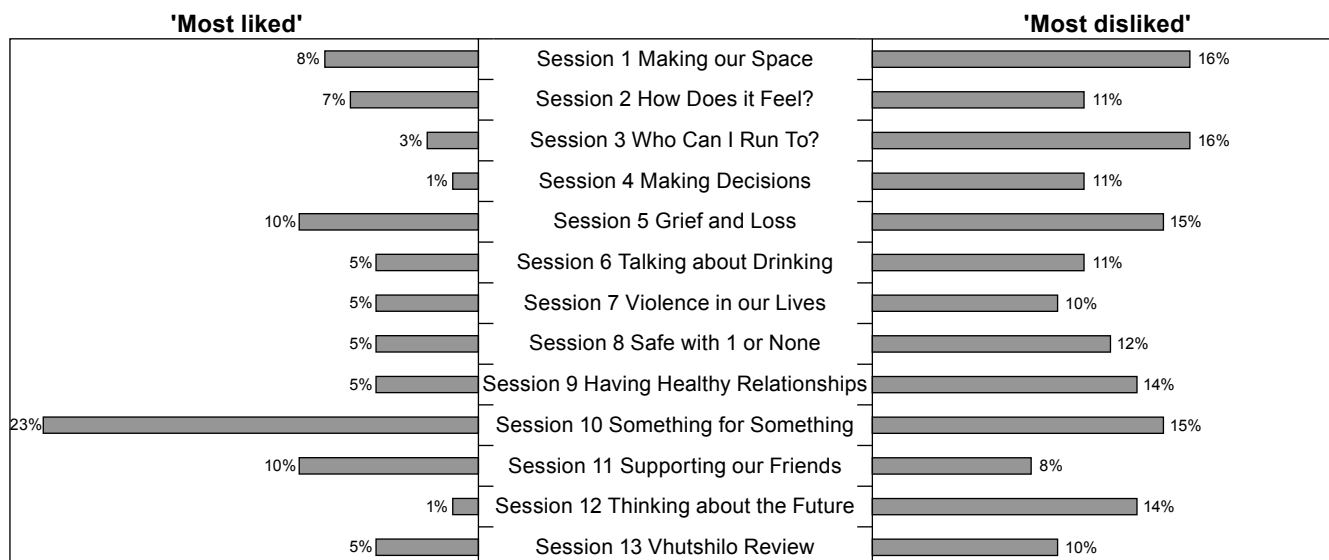


Figure 1: Proportion of youth who rated each session ‘most liked and ‘most disliked’ ($n = 73$)

Measurement of change as a result of the session

Although these lesson assessments, interviews and focus group discussions showed that youth learnt the most and rated the 'Something for Something' session as significant and memorable, our survey data did not reveal any statistically significant changes between control group and *Vhutshilo* participants (post-test or delayed post-test) on questions relating to knowledge, attitudes and intentions around transactional sex. The questions that dealt with the issue of transactional sex focused on the attitude towards the relationship between sex and gifts (question 14); beliefs about offering sex in exchange for gifts (question 32); and evaluations about one's own ability to resist sex when offered money or gifts (question 90). Table 1 summarises young people's responses.

For both questions 14 and 32 most youth strongly disagreed that gift giving placed an obligation on the recipient with regards to sex or that having sex for gifts was morally right. For both questions the strength of the disagreement increased dependent on whether youth were in the control group or intervention group. In other words, those who had been through the *Vhutshilo* programme, and the 'Something for Something' session tended to disagree even more strongly than those who had not. This conviction remained in place, even increasing somewhat four months later. With regards to those who agreed or strongly agreed, 11% of individuals in the control sample indicated that a girl must have sex with a boy if he gives her a gift. For those who received *Vhutshilo* peer education, this percentage was slightly lower at 10%, but further decreased to only 5% after 4 months. With regards to question 32, whether it's acceptable (or 'okay') to have sex with someone to get nice things, similar trends were encountered among those who agreed. Approximately 8% of the control sample believes it's okay to have sex to get nice things, while only 5% in the *Vhutshilo* group agree or strongly agree. After four months, the percentage of those who strongly agree drops to zero. None of these changes, however, were found to be significant at the 95% confidence level of significant.

With regards to question 90, whether respondents believed they would be able to refuse sex with someone who is offering money or a gift, the trend was also similar. More youth who had been through the programme said

they would be able to refuse sex in exchange for a gift (46% post-test, 53% delayed post-test) compared with those who did not go through the programme (38%). However, when statistical tests measuring strength of association were applied, no significant relationship between the time periods and the ability to refuse sex with someone who is offering them money was found (Cramer's V 0.063; $p = 0.775$).

However, it was during the focus groups and interviews that key messages emerged on what the participants *had* gained from the session's content and facilitation. The main key messages that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the session included the economic and social drivers of transactional sex, and the negative consequences of sexual exchange relationships, including health risks, moral shame and the instability of such relationships.

Drivers of transactional sex

In the session, the peer educators first explain that the relationship Thandi (the character around whom the narrative revolves) has with her 'boyfriend' is what some people call a 'something-for-something' relationship. They ask participants to consider and discuss what might have motivated Thandi to engage in transactional sex. During the session, *Vhutshilo* participants debated a range of factors or situations that might propel youth to engage in transactional sex that included economic and social drivers.

Participants spoke about Thandi's constraining economic context. Not unlike many of them, they recognised that she lived in a poor community and did not have enough money to buy food to feed her family, revealing that food insecurity was closely associated with transactional sex: '*Young people they give sex because they need food*' (Tumi, female, 15 years old, Gauteng). The absence of caregivers in her household was also considered a factor leading to her to engaging in transactional sex. One participant explained that perhaps Thandi was the oldest sibling and therefore had the added responsibility of having to find the financial resources to help her other siblings. From interviews and focus groups it was apparent that both young men and young women participants recognised that poverty was an important driver of transactional sex and that these economic constraints were common in their communities.

Table 1: Survey questions dealing with transactional sex

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q14 If a boy gives a girl presents, she must have sex with him					
Control ($n = 67$)	44%	37%	8%	8%	3%
Post-test ($n = 68$)	47%	38%	5%	7%	3%
Delayed post-test ($n = 40$)	55%	32%	8%	0%	5%
Q32 I believe it's OK for someone to have sex to get nice things					
Control ($n = 68$)	52%	33%	6%	5%	3%
Post-test ($n = 67$)	64%	26%	5%	3%	2%
Delayed post-test ($n = 40$)	68%	24%	3%	5%	0%
Q90 Do you think you will be able to refuse sex with someone who is offering money or a gift?			Yes	No	Maybe
Control ($n = 69$)			38%	49%	13%
Post-test ($n = 68$)			46%	44%	9%
Delayed post-test ($n = 39$)			53%	37%	11%

Peer pressure was identified as a social driver 'pushing' youth to date 'sugar daddies'. For participants, 'competing with friends' was linked with a desire to be accepted into the peer group. When they noticed that their friends were dating an older, richer man, they felt pressured to do the same: '*When we see them with their nice things... we think we need a boyfriend too*' (Tsakane, female, 14 years old, Limpopo). Youth also recognised that alcohol and drug abuse, rampant in their communities, made youth vulnerable to transactional sex: '*Young people are facing alcohol challenges, and it is the cause of transactional sex and teenage pregnancy. It causes HIV and AIDS because they drink and do things they didn't plan to do*' (Ayanda, female, 17 years old, Gauteng).

Taken together, these social and economic factors reflect the vulnerabilities youth face, and highlight some of the drivers of transactional sex.

The negative consequences of transactional sex

The curriculum prompts peer educators to discuss the consequences of transactional relationships by stating the following: 'When this temptation comes up, it is important to think about the risks involved in such relationships: for our health, our relationships with those close to us, and how we feel about ourselves. We have so much to lose!' (Enoch and Deutsch 2008: 84). Peer educators then ask youth to consider why they are better off not having 'something-for-something' sex. Young people were well aware of, and able to talk about, an array of risks and negative consequences of transactional sex. They focused in particular on health risks, moral shame, and relationship instability.

Health risks

Participants spoke of the health risks connected to transactional sex relationships that included HIV, STIs, teenage pregnancy and gender based violence. One participant responded, '*They get HIV through selling their bodies because they do not know the people who are buying them things - who they are going with...if they have got HIV or not*' (Tsakane, female, 14 years old, Limpopo) and another said, '*There are risks that might lead you to being infected with HIV, STIs, and pregnancy*' (Katlego, female, 16 years old, Gauteng). Participants also identified exposure to a wider sexual network of multiple or concurrent partners in transactional sex: '*You also expose yourself to sleeping with different people*' (Thokozani, male, 17 years old, Gauteng). Participants acknowledged the coercive nature of transactional sex and that the consequences of these relationships were irreversible, '*If a boy wants a girl to do something, she will do it even if it is against her will because if she does not do it, the boy might beat her up...Most boys are savages and girls are being fooled by most boys. So in that way boys' lives are different from girl's lives*' (Sibusiso, male, 15 years old, Limpopo). The risk of coercive force had a gender component to it too, '*Boys do not have manners, they can take you by force and go and have sex with you without your will, but girls will never do that*' (Tsakane, female, 14 years old, Limpopo). Transactional sexual relationships were overall deemed unhealthy by peer educators and group members, and in interviews, youth

described how gender further made young women vulnerable within transactional sexual relationships.

Moral shame

Youth agreed with peer educators that there was a lot to lose and that transactional sex came with moral penalties too: '*There is nothing for mahala [free]*' (Katlego, female, 16 years old, Gauteng). Young people reported that youth may be ostracised for engaging in transactional sex and it was frequently raised that one may 'lose one's reputation' if you have a sugar daddy. Group members and peer educators moralised transactional sex and likened it to prostitution: '*One might lose their dignity, people might see you. For instance you go and become a prostitute. You go and sell your body then you get money. I think that thing is very, very shameful*' (Simphiwe, male, 17 years old, Limpopo). Tsakane defined transactional sex in terms of its immorality: '*Something for something is like selling your body!*' (Tsakane, female, 14 years old, Limpopo). However, Dina tried to explain that engaging in transactional sex should not automatically result in being chastised for immoral behaviour: '*Dating a sugar daddy does not make you promiscuous; it may be because of your family's situation*' (Dina, female, 14 years old, Limpopo). So while young people spoke easily of transactional sex, much discussion related to moralising discourses.

Security and instability

Youth were able to identify the presence of love and trust in 'healthy' relationships, whereas transactional relationships were seen as lacking in love and honesty and were not considered 'legitimate': '*I've learnt many things from [Vhutshilo]... like in a healthy relationship there has to be trust, communication, love. You have to be there for each other. And love each other for who you are and not pretend*' (Thokozani, male, 17 years old, Gauteng). A participant added, '*In "Something for Something" I learned maybe a person loves you for your money and not for the person you are*' (Zandile, female, 15 years old, Gauteng). The instability of transactional sex relationships was related to men being undependable: '*You can never ever depend on 'something-for-something' relationships... One could be pregnant with the man's baby — that is risky as that man will not leave his family to support your child*' (Dina, female, 14 years old, Limpopo). Youth also made the clear link between these unstable partnerships and the risk of HIV infection.

Discussion

As we have mentioned before, the *Vhutshilo* curriculum aims to provoke discussions about everyday feelings youth may have or situations they might face. The purpose of the session on 'Something for Something' was 'To teach members about the risks of exchanging sex for gifts and favours and to help them to think of other ways to get these things' (Deutsch and Edoh 2008: 80). Our findings, as described, show a familiarity with and understanding of transactional sex. Also noticeable was the enthusiasm with which youth engaged in discussion around this topic, more so than others. Transactional sex was seen as prominent in their communities and it resonated with their contexts and

was clearly part of their everyday experience. This familiarity creates an opportunity to include the topic in HIV/AIDS interventions for youth, and to specifically engage them around issues of protection and encourage agency in sexual relationships.

While youth were well aware of the risks and negative consequences inherent in transactional sexual relationships, deeming them unhealthy and illegitimate, they were not given the opportunity to engage in the everyday features of relationships that are often ambiguous. Furthermore, engagement with the complexities of transactional sex might have been a sound platform on which to discuss choices and alternative ways of obtaining food and gifts, which was not ultimately discussed in the sessions observed or by participants in their evaluations.

This focus on vulnerability instead of agency is also highlighted in the findings from the session, instead of the motivations that may be considered rational choices for personal and social gain. The session presented such relationships as exploitative and coercive, socially immoral and as a situation where sex is exchanged for economic survival. Self-respect and maintaining dignity were stressed by participants as a learning outcome from the session, and transactional sex was regarded as prostitution by most. However, the literature tells us that the practice of transactional sex needs to be considered as more ambiguous and fluid than commercial sex or prostitution (Wamoyi et al. 2011, Wojcicki 2002b). As said at the beginning of this article, the literature argues that both young women and men feel they have a lot to gain, and less to lose from such relationships, such as financial freedoms, luxury goods, social and peer respect and sexual pleasure (Masvawure 2010, Atwood et al. 2011).

Authors such as Silberschmidt and Rasch (2001) and Atwood et al. (2011) have noted that young people have varying perceptions of risk, and that risky behaviour is driven by individual decisions and rational choices where young women and men are willing and voluntary partners, and active social agents in engaging in high-risk sexual relationships (Tyler and Johnson 2006). Nyanzi et al. (2001) also found that young women in Uganda were able to successfully avoid or delay sex while still increasing the frequency of gifts, showing that receiving a gift does not guarantee sexual access. Furthermore, research has found that few young women have partners who are more than 10 years older than them, the average age between them being 6 years (Moore et al. 2007: 46).

Young men and women are not always hapless victims in sexual relationships and can make decisions to enter into transactional sex as a creative way to assert themselves and benefit from it materially and socially, while simultaneously protecting themselves within these relationships. Our observations therefore lead us to conclude that the session fails to consider a wider view of transactional sexual relationships.

Furthermore, at the end of the session peer educators ask participants to consider that 'Sometimes young people might be tempted to have sex with other people in exchange for money or gifts because they think they have no other way of getting those things' (Deutsch and Enoch 2009: 80). However, during lessons we noticed that the

discussion did not progress to talking about how youth can overcome their socio-economic constraints in other ways and protect themselves from its negative consequences. This is a further flaw in the session.

Implications of findings

Based on the reviewed literature and the findings from our evaluation, we have been able to conclude that the implementations of the *Vhutshilo* session 'Something for Something' missed the mark in the overall aim of provoking and unsettling youth attitudes towards transactional sex. By allowing negative outcomes to become the focus, its approach is limited both in its ability to shed light on youth assets and strengths that could become the focus of intervention, and focus on how youth can respond and protect themselves in risk circumstances.

Given the preventative material in *Vhutshilo*, the session does well to highlight the inherent risks in 'something for something' relationships, especially those risks linked with HIV. But there is a chance for the *Vhutshilo* programme to engage in the different sides of transactional sex to connect with what is really going on in communities and youth sexual liaisons, and get youth to develop protective tools and assets to negotiate sexual decision making and relationships for themselves, and for their own reasons. This means a focus on why risky behaviour is frequently continued despite awareness of its negative health consequences.

Recognising that youth have decision-making capabilities and may enter relationships aware of risks, but also cognisant of perceived benefits, social expectations and personal gains, has implications for how HIV prevention and sexual health promotion interventions might be designed and how materials might be approached. Youth face multiple risk factors that lead them to engage in transactional sex. Youth are also attracted to transactional sexual relationships for the benefits they can gain that can help offset these risks. Our findings suggest that *Vhutshilo* needs to be broadened to consider how young people negotiate both the initiation and consequences of their sexual relationships, and how youth can circumvent negative outcomes. In doing so, the design of the intervention needs to consider these risk factors and what protective factors may be nurtured to improve how youth safely navigate their transactional relationships.

Curriculums that help youth to identify risks, but also identify their capacities to navigate these risks while maintaining some of the benefits, may be more relevant and helpful given the everyday realities youth face. For example, youth need to be engaged in discussions of more complex dilemmas of risk and gains that are implicit in transactional relationships. By acknowledging that receiving money or gifts for sex is not necessarily a coercive force, but rather can be a routine aspect of dating (Moore et al. 2007) the session could have provided young people with a platform from which to choose how and why they engage in different types of sexual relationships, acknowledging the various ways in which both young males and females can be active actors in transactional sex relationships.

Young people should be encouraged to openly debate the circumstances that are exploitative in such exchanges,

as well as the those that are instrumental. The story about Thandi and her friend used in the session is too simple, and more complex anecdotes could be included to highlight the complexities of transactional sexual relationships and harness youth assets and protective skills within such relationships. For example, the session needs to bring up both the personal and situational factors which hinder the use of condoms in sexual exchange relationships (Ankomah 1998). It needs to discuss with youth that relationships with older men will compromise their capacity to negotiate condom use, and how they can deal with this, by developing communication and negotiating skills. Debates around gifts or money as a barrier to condom use and issues of male dominance also need to be initiated. Furthermore, its preventative content needs to warn young people of the risks and undesirable health outcomes such as unintended pregnancy, sexual victimisation and violence, mental ill-health, and contracting HIV and STIs, but also engage them in the values of consumerism and peer influence that drive them to seek out such relationships.

Values of consumerism and peer pressure

Foremost, youth did and need to discuss the range of circumstances or drivers that prompt transactional relationships such as poverty and food insecurity, the expected economic and material gains, the enhanced social or peer status, and emotional love and security youth may get from such relationships. Also, the values and expectations of relationships by young men and young women also need to be explored. Transactional sex needs to be located within adolescent's reflections on love, sexuality, HIV and peer pressure, as everyday occurrences. Material should critically engage in the underlying values behind motivations for sex for exchange relationships, such as peer status, consumerism and sexual pleasure. This could help meet the goal of enabling youth to make informed decisions about what kind of sexual relationship they engage in and get youth to consider other constructive ways to attain peer status and luxury goods. By engaging youth on their expectations of relationships and the values they hold, prevention programmes can build intervention material that is relevant and sensitive to young people's everyday experiences. There is a need to create more mature and responsible attitudes about making responsible choices and changing values and mind-sets in youth (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001) so that they may be safer in risky environments.

Training of peer educators — Beyond current perceptions and experiences

Since we have shown that the session's findings reveal only a narrow understanding of the dynamic contexts under which transactional sex occur, there is a need for improved preparation of peer educators who engage in this topic with young people. Prevention programmes should also not underestimate the educational capital and cognitive ability of youth to deal with complex issues. At the end of one of the sessions that we observed, a peer educator summed up the session by saying, '*We agree that being in a something-for-something relationship means you are selling your body... it is equivalent to prostitution because there is an exchange of money and goods*' (Simpfiwe, male, 17 years

old, Limpopo). This conclusion is problematic since it simplifies the phenomena and fails to fully engage with notions of protective factors of those involved in transactional sex.

If prevention lessons are well structured and sufficiently theorised around youth resilience and decision making, young people will be better equipped to make the connections between voluntary or involuntary sexual relationships. Peer educators need to critically engage with these connections during their training. By so doing we acknowledge, as the literature rightly portrays, that transactional sex is an everyday feature in the lives of young people; and that while HIV and other health risks form part of its consequences, young people must be assisted to navigate complex social contexts, economic needs and consumption values. Furthermore, speaking realistically and openly about the benefits and expectations of sexual relations, including those of transactional sexual relationships, has the potential for helping young people make rational decisions including evaluating costs and benefits whereas in the absence of such consideration they may only remain passive victims of an everyday phenomenon.

We recommend that interventions that include components on transactional sex among youth are based on a resilience framework: one that identifies protective factors, assets and strengths that diminish the chances of negative health outcomes for adolescents by ensuring young people identify risks, think deeply about possible choices and activate solutions in the face of the contextual limitations of poverty (Rink and Tricker 2003). *Vhutshilo* endeavours to harness protective skills that focus on problem-solving, decision-making, help-seeking and supportive behaviours, but individual strengths and community and peer assets need to be promoted, rather than focusing on problems (Rutter 1987, Resnick 2000). Individual coping styles, decision making, self-esteem, assertiveness and communication with partners need to be promoted and will help youth to better navigate their sexual relationships. Moreover, gender and power relations need to be strongly woven into all discussions on sexual relationships.

Positive peer support is an important protective resource and a marker of resilience among African youth (Theron et al. 2013), and peers have increasingly more influence on health-promoting behaviours than adults or parents. A peer education intervention such as *Vhutshilo* can help foster positive peer reinforcement and support and allows for debates about everyday youth experiences because it creates a space different to normative education for young people to engage in issues related to transactional sex with one another.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to show the importance of talking to youth in adverse contexts in South Africa about transactional sex. While it has highlighted the missed opportunities that were observed in the implementation of the *Vhutshilo* programme's 'Something for Something' session, it has nevertheless provided numerous avenues for reflection and change for future interventions. Using the features of a resilience framework, it has shown the importance of

talking to youth rather than keeping silent about transactional sex relationships since it forms such a central part of their milieu. Clearly, what 'Something for Something' does achieve is helping youth *avoid* the risks of transactional sex — a key feature of resilience theory. However, it would be even more effective if peer educators and their adult supervisors would place greater emphasis on the resilience outcome of *finding alternatives* to engaging in transactional sex, *keeping safe in the midst of involvement* in transactional sex and *understanding the many good reasons why* youth who do engage in transactional sex, do so. This would make it easier for those seeking help on any of these resilient outcomes to ask for and find it.

Acknowledgments — The authors acknowledge their collaboration with Dr Charles Deutsch of the Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) and Barbara Michel of the Centre for the Support of Peer Education for the invitation to evaluate the implementation of the Vhutshilo peer-led curriculum. Appreciation is also due to HSRC fieldworkers, Nomhle Ndimande and Amanda Rozani, for collecting primary data from participants in their own languages.

The authors — Ingrid van der Heijden (MA) is a senior researcher at the Gender and Health Research Unit of the Medical Research Council in South Africa. She is an anthropologist with an interest in HIV/AIDS risk reduction and prevention interventions among vulnerable populations in South Africa. She is an advocate of participatory research and has evaluated multiple peer education prevention interventions for youth.

Sharlene Swartz (PhD) is a sociologist and Research Director in the Human and Social Development unit of the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa, and an adjunct Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Cape Town. She is also a visiting research fellow at the Centre for Commonwealth Education at the University of Cambridge. Her interests include youth poverty, social exclusion and moral development. She has a long history with peer education, having investigated the role of peer education in HIV and AIDS prevention and implemented peer education programmes as a youth development practitioner. She is a nationally rated South African researcher.

References

- Ankomah A. 1998. Condom use in sexual exchange relationships among young single adults in Ghana. *AIDS Education and Prevention* 10: 303–316.
- Atwood KA, Kennedy SB, Barbu EM, Nagbe W, Seekey W, Sirleaf P, Perry O, Martn RB, Sosu F. 2011. Transactional sex among youths in post-conflict Liberia. *Journal of Health and Population Nutrition* 29: 113–122.
- Bhana D. 2012. 'Girls are not free' — In and out of the South African school. *International Journal of Educational Development* 32: 352–358.
- Boyden J, Ennew J (eds). 1997. *Children in focus: A manual for experiential learning in participatory research with children*. Stockholm: RäddaBarnen.
- Deutsch C, Edoh M. 2008. *Vhutshilo 2: Peer-led prevention and support groups for 14–16-year-old OVC pilot test version*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard School of Public Health.
- Deutsch C, Enoch M. 2009. *VHUTSHILO 2 peer-led prevention and support groups for 14–16-year-old OVC*. Unpublished draft manual. CSPE, South Africa.
- Dunkle KL, Jewkes R, Nduna M, Jama N, Levin J, Sikweyiya Y, Koss MP. 2007. Transactional sex with casual and main partners among young South African men in the rural Eastern Cape: Prevalence, predictors, and associations with gender-based violence. *Social Science & Medicine* 65: 1235–1248.
- Dunkle K, Jewkes R, Brown H, Gray G, McIntryre J, Harlow S. 2004. Transactional sex among women in Soweto, South Africa: Prevalence, risk factors and association with HIV infection. *Social Science & Medicine* 59: 1581–1592.
- Hallman K. 2005. Gendered socioeconomic conditions and HIV risk behaviours among young people in South Africa. *African Journal of AIDS Research* 4: 37–50.
- Hallman K. 2004. Socio-economic disadvantage and unsafe sexual behaviors among young women and men in South Africa. Policy Research Division Working Paper No. 190. New York: Population Council.
- Hunter M. 2002. The materiality of everyday sex: Thinking beyond prostitution. *African Studies* 61: 99–120.
- Jewkes R, Vundule C, Maforah F, Jorandaan E. 2001. Relationship dynamics and teenage pregnancy in South Africa. *Social Science & Medicine* 52: 733–744.
- Kaufman CE, Stravrou SE. 2004. 'Bus fare please': The economics of sex and gifts among young people in urban South Africa. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 6: 377–391.
- Leclerc-Madlala S. 2003. Transactional sex and the pursuit of modernity. *Social Dynamics* 29: 213–233.
- MacPhail C Campbell C. 2001. 'I think condoms are good but, aai, I hate those things': Condom use among adolescents and young people in a southern African township. *Social Science & Medicine* 52: 1613–1627.
- Maganja RK, Maman S, Groves A, and Mbwambo JK. 2007. Skinning the goat and pulling the load: Transactional sex among youth in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. *AIDS Care* 19: 974–981.
- Masvawure T. 2010. 'I just need to be flashy on campus': Female students and transactional sex at a University in Zimbabwe. *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12: 857–870.
- Moore AM, Biddlecam AE, Zulu M. 2007. Prevalence and meanings of exchange of money of gifts for sex in unmarried adolescent sexual relationships in sub-Saharan Africa. *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 11: 44–61.
- Nyanzi S, Pool R, Kinsman J. 2001. The negotiation of sexual relationships among school pupils in south-western Uganda. *AIDS Care* 13: 83–98.
- Resnick MD. 2000. Protective factors, resiliency, and healthy youth development. *Adolescent Medicine: State of the Art Reviews* 11: 157–164.
- Rew L, Horner SD. 2003. Youth resilience framework for reducing health-risk behaviors in adolescents. *Journal of Pediatric Nursing* 18: 379–388.
- Rink E, Tricker R. 2003. Resiliency-based research and adolescent health behaviors. *The Prevention Researcher* 10: 1–4.
- Rutter M. 1987. Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 57: 316–331
- Selikow T-A, Zulu B, Cedras E. 2002. The ingagara, the regte and the cherry: HIV/AIDS and youth culture in contemporary urban townships. *Agenda* 53: 22–32.
- Silberschmidt M, Rasch V. 2001. Adolescent girls, illegal abortions and 'sugar-daddies' in Dar es Salaam: Vulnerable victims and active social agents. *Social Science and Medicine* 52: 1815–1826.
- Swart-Kruger J, Richter L. 1997. AIDS-related knowledge, attitudes and behavior among South African street youth: Reflections on power, sexuality and the autonomous self. *Social Science & Medicine* 45: 957–66.
- Swartz S. 2011. 'Going deep' and 'giving back': strategies for exceeding ethical expectations when researching amongst vulnerable youth. *Qualitative Research* 11: 47–68.

- Swartz S, Deutsh C, Makoe M, Michel B, Hamilton Harding J, Garzouzie G, Rozani A, Runciman T, van der Heijden I. 2012. Measuring change in vulnerable adolescents: Findings from a peer education evaluation in South Africa. *SAHARA-J: Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS* 9: 242–254.
- Theron L, Liebenberg L, Malindi M. 2013. When schooling experiences are respectful of children's rights: A pathway to resilience. *School Psychology International*, doi:10.1177/0142723713503254.
- Tyler KA, Johnson KA. 2006. Trading sex: Voluntary or coerced? The experiences of homeless youth. *The Journal of Sex Research* 43: 208–216.
- Verheijen J. 2011. Complexities of the transactional sex model: Non-providing men, self-providing women, and HIV risk in rural Malawi. *Annals of Anthropological Practice* 35: 116–131.
- Wamoyi J, Fenwick A, Urassa M, Zaba B, Stones W. 2011. 'Women's bodies are shops': Beliefs about transactional sex and implications for understanding gender power and HIV prevention in Tanzania. *Archive of Sexual Behaviour* 40: 1–15.
- Wojcicki JM. 2002a. 'She drank his money': Survival sex and the problem of violence in taverns in Gauteng province, South Africa. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 16: 267–293.
- Wojcicki JM. 2002b. Commercial sex work or *ukuphanda*? Sex-for-money exchange in Soweto and Hammanskraal area, South Africa. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 26: 339–370.
- Wood K, Maforah F, Jewkes R. 1998. 'He forced me to love him': Putting violence on adolescent sexual health agendas. *Social Science & Medicine* 47: 233–242.
- Zolkoski SM, Bullock LM. 2012. Resilience in children and youth: A review. *Children and Youth Services Review* 34: 2295–2303.
- Zimmerman MA, Stoddard SA, Eisman AB, Caldwell CH, Aiyer SM, Miller A. 2013. Adolescent resilience: Promotive factors that inform prevention. *Child Development Perspectives* 7: 215–220.