



'I trap her with a CD, then tomorrow find her with a big old man who bought her a smart phone'. Constructions of masculinities and transactional sex: a qualitative study from North-Western Tanzania

Lottie Howard-Merrill , Joyce Wamoyi , Daniel Nyato , Nambusi Kyegombe , Lori Heise & Ana Maria Buller

To cite this article: Lottie Howard-Merrill , Joyce Wamoyi , Daniel Nyato , Nambusi Kyegombe , Lori Heise & Ana Maria Buller (2020): 'I trap her with a CD, then tomorrow find her with a big old man who bought her a smart phone'. Constructions of masculinities and transactional sex: a qualitative study from North-Western Tanzania, Culture, Health & Sexuality, DOI: [10.1080/13691058.2020.1832259](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2020.1832259)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2020.1832259>



© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 29 Oct 2020.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 452





View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

'I trap her with a CD, then tomorrow find her with a big old man who bought her a smart phone'. Constructions of masculinities and transactional sex: a qualitative study from North-Western Tanzania

Lottie Howard-Merrill^a, Joyce Wamoyi^b, Daniel Nyato^b, Nambusi Kyegombe^a , Lori Heise^a and Ana Maria Buller^a 

^aDepartment of Global Health and Development, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK; ^bDepartment of Sexual and Reproductive Health, National Institute for Medical Research, Mwanza, Tanzania

ABSTRACT

Men's role in transactional sex is relatively unexplored, limiting initiatives to prevent exploitative transactional sex and its negative health implications for girls and women. We addressed this literature gap by conducting eight focus group discussions and twenty in-depth-interviews with boys and men aged 14 – 49 years in 2015 in Tanzania. We employed a novel combination of theoretical perspectives – gender and masculinities, and social norms – to understand how transactional sex participation contributes to perpetuating gendered hierarchies, and how reference groups influence men's behaviour. Findings signal two gender norms that men display within transactional sex: the expectation of men's provision in sexual relationships, and the expectation that men should exhibit heightened sexuality and sexual prowess. Adherence to these expectations in transactional sex relationships varied between older and younger men and created hierarchies among men and between men and women and girls. We found that approval of transactional sex was contested. Although young men were likely to object to transactional sex, they occupied a structurally weaker position than older men. Findings suggest that interventions should employ gender synchronised and gender transformative approaches and should prioritise the promotion of alternative positive norms over preventing the exchange of gifts or money in relationships.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 April 2020
Accepted 30 September 2020

KEYWORDS

Transactional sex; social norms; hegemonic masculinity; homosociality; sexual exploitation

CONTACT Lottie Howard-Merrill  Lottie.Howard-Merrill@lshtm.ac.uk

Note: Since this research was carried out, Lori Heise has moved to the Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, MD, USA

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

Introduction

Existing research from public health and human rights documents a strong association between transactional sex and negative mental, physical and sexual health outcomes for girls and young women. According to this literature, transactional sex—defined as ‘non-commercial, non-marital sexual relationships motivated by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material support or other benefits’ (Stoebenau et al. 2016, 193)—can lead to STIs and unwanted pregnancy, as well as poor developmental and social outcomes, including low educational attainment and entrenched poverty (Luke and Kurz 2002). Adolescent girls and young women account for 26% of new HIV infections in Southern and Eastern Africa (UNAIDS 2020) and in this context transactional sex has been identified as one of the risky sexual behaviours associated with girls and young women being 2.5 times more likely to contract HIV than their male peers (Muthoni et al. 2020). Engaging in transactional sex can also allow girls and young women to exert agency to achieve their goals by accessing resources that would be otherwise unavailable to them (Ranganathan et al. 2017; Mojola 2014; Wamoyi et al. 2010). Researchers have argued that far from signifying a special “type” of sexual relationship, giving gifts and financial support is a common way of showing love in many sexual relationships (Hunter 2010).

This paper adds to a literature that goes beyond discussing the health impacts of engaging in transactional sex by interrogating motivations and emic (local) perspectives on transactional sex in Tanzania and Uganda (Kyegombe, Meiksin, Namakula, et al. 2020; Kyegombe, Meiksin, Wamoyi, et al. 2020; Wamoyi et al. 2019; Wamoyi et al. 2018). It informs the broader transactional sex literature, which tends to depict transactional sex in one of three broad paradigms (Stoebenau et al. 2016). In the first of these, girls and women participating in transactional sex are portrayed as vulnerable victims of structured gender inequalities (Fielding-Miller and Dunkle 2017; Dunkle et al. 2007). In the second, girls and women are portrayed as agentic individuals who consciously choose to engage in transactional sex to access status through fashionable clothes, mobile phones and other consumer goods (Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001). In the third paradigm, transactional sex is conceptualised as a material expression of love, and includes the concept of ‘provider love’ (Stark 2017; Hunter 2010; Wamoyi et al. 2010). Within this last paradigm transactional sex is considered a “gift relationship” which encompasses love, moral and reciprocal obligations, and material benefits for women and girls (Hunter 2010). Lived experiences of transactional sex in particular, and sexual relationships more broadly, rarely fit neatly into a single paradigm and it is possible that girls’, women’s and men’s experiences of material exchange in transactional sex may span exploitation, agency and love over different relationships or over the course of one relationship (Singleton, Sabben, and Winskell 2020).

While important steps have been taken away from a monolithic characterisation of girls in transactional sex relationships as ‘vulnerable victims’ (Wamoyi et al. 2019; Stoebenau et al. 2016; Shefer 2016), less is known about how men experience these relationships (Hunter 2010; Groes-Green 2009). Much of the existing literature relies exclusively on community narratives or young women’s accounts (Strebel et al. 2013; Jewkes, Dartnall, et al. 2012; Shefer and Strebel 2012), disregarding the relational

quality of transactional sex and failing to incorporate men's perspectives (Jewkes, Dartnall, et al. 2012). It likewise ignores the existence of multiple masculinities, the diversity of men's sexuality (Shefer and Strelbel 2012; Barker 2005) and the intersection of masculinities with variables such as socio-economic status and age (Dworkin, Fleming, and Colvin 2015). Evaluation of efforts to reduce transactional sex in South Africa and Tanzania have shown little effectiveness (Kaufman et al. 2016; Van der Heijden and Swartz 2014; Kaufman et al. 2013; Brouard and Crewe 2012), which highlights the risks of both framing men as a homogenous group, and adopting shaming and punitive approaches to working with men and adolescent boys.

Motivated by preventing sexual exploitation of adolescent girls, this paper considers men and boys' roles in and perceptions of transactional sex between adult men and girls, using social norms and gender power theory.

Theoretical grounding

We used an interdisciplinary theoretical approach to explore the complexities of men's engagement (or not) in transactional sex. We drew on feminist theories of gender and masculinities to understand how men's participation in transactional sex produces and reproduces gendered hierarchies (Beasley 2008; Schippers 2007; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Connell 1987). We also employed concepts of reference groups and social sanctions from social norms theory to understand how men's attitudes towards transactional sex are formed, and how their behaviours within transactional sex are regulated and maintained (Mollborn 2017; Mackie et al. 2012; Bicchieri 2005). This combination perspective facilitated the two complementary avenues of questioning, explained here.

Hegemonic masculinity and gendered hierarchies

The concept of hegemonic masculinity refers to the gender norms, values, attitudes and behaviours in a given society that perpetuate gender inequality, and which legitimise and maintain the subordination of women to men (Connell 1987). We used this concept to understand how men's participation in transactional sex serves to reproduce and reinforce gendered inequalities. Given the aforementioned lack of analysis from the male perspective, we focus in this paper on men's accounts and behaviour; however it should be noted that women can also contribute to upholding hegemonic masculinities and reinforcing gender inequality (Schippers 2007). This has been discussed in relation to transactional sex elsewhere in the literature (Stoebenau et al. 2019; Wamoyi et al. 2019; Wamoyi et al. 2018).

The gender expectations and behaviours that make up hegemonic masculinity also create and perpetuate inequalities between men leading to the establishment of "superior" and "inferior" masculinities (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Men can validate or discredit other men depending on how they perform masculinity in the transactional sex arena. For example, some may consider those men who are able to attract many girlfriends through gifts and economic support as 'superior' to those who cannot. These gendered interactions between men are captured by the concept of 'homosociality', which refers to social bonds within same-gender groups, through

which gendered expectations can be validated. Importantly, masculinities are fluid and dynamic (Groes-Green 2009), and individuals enacting subordinated masculinities can resist hegemonic expectations, for example by rejecting transactional sex.

Using masculinities theory allowed us to consider gender and power in our analysis, dimensions often missing from social norms research (Cislaghi and Heise 2019). However, masculinities theory alone does not explain how men's perceptions of and behaviours within transactional sex are regulated. Social norms theory provides a useful auxiliary tool to explore how the interdependence of men's behaviour shapes their attitudes towards transactional sex and their behaviours within transactional sex relationships.

Social norms, sanctions and reference groups

Social norms are informal rules, or mutual social expectations, that govern behaviour and enforce conformity to a standard of social correctness (Cislaghi and Heise 2019). They concern beliefs about which behaviours are frequently enacted, and which are socially accepted or rejected (Bicchieri 2005).

Social norms reflect the beliefs and behaviours of dominant social groups. Although not inherently negative, social norms often reflect existing inequalities within communities, and normalise harmful behaviours (Mollborn 2017; Marcus and Harper 2014). One example of a social norm from within this context is that girls are expected to engage in sex with a man if they accept his gifts (Wamoyi et al. 2019).

Social norms are adhered to and reproduced within groups of people, called reference groups. Norms are maintained by sanctions, which reward people who conform to prevailing norms, and penalise those who do not (Mackie et al. 2012). For example, girls who do not receive gifts in exchange for sex may be seen as 'unlucky' by their reference group, comprised of girls their age (Wamoyi et al. 2019).

Methods

This study was conducted to inform the development of a multi-component intervention to prevent transactional sex between adult men and girls in Tanzania. Data were collected in Mwanza between January and November 2015. Purposive sampling of participants and sites ensured the inclusion of a range of socio-demographic characteristics, including gender; age; and type of residence (rural and urban). Although women and girls were also recruited, this paper focuses on the data from men. The data includes four focus group discussions (FGDs) and 12 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with older men over the age of 24, two FGDs and four IDIs with men ages 19-24 years, and two FGDs and four IDIs with boys and young men 14-18 years old.

The FGD facilitators and IDI interviewers were trained social scientists with Bachelors or Masters degrees, and experience collecting data on sensitive topics and working with vulnerable populations. The data collection team used a snowball methodology to identify FGD participants. Selection criteria included engagement in various forms of informal employment, including subsistence farming and petty trade; and presence in market centres. Following the FGDs, the researchers invited FGD participants to be interviewed in

further IDIs. They invited men and boys who mentioned partaking in transactional sex or who were especially active during the discussion.

Focus groups began by exploring general issues around transactional sex between older men and younger women and girls. We avoided asking about personal experiences unless participants volunteered the information, which some did. During the IDIs, interviewers asked direct questions about the participant's experience of age-disparate transactional sex, capitalising on the trust and rapport established during the FGDs. Male researchers conducted all FGDs and IDIs in Kiswahili, in locations that participants considered private. After transcription in Kiswahili, the transcripts were translated into English. Transcripts included both Kiswahili and English so researchers could easily refer to the verbatim text.

Using a thematic analysis approach, the first author (LHM) coded data through a systematic process of examining, organising and tagging (Green et al. 2007) using pre-defined codes informed by the existing literature on transactional sex, the aims of the study, and previous analysis by the research team. This included codes for reference groups, sanctions, normative beliefs about masculinities and transactional sex as well as gender and power dynamics within transactional sex. Additional themes developed during the analysis including 'commitment', and 'genuine love'. Crosscutting themes, such as 'pressure to provide' and 'competition between men', helped organise the data and identify relationships between themes in a thematic network (Attride-Stirling 2001).

Situating exceptional cases within the themes, rather than excluding them, established rich and nuanced datasets within themes. The researchers developed and refined existing codes, where necessary, iteratively revisiting the data and the literature. In terms of reporting, we have included quotes that represented the views of the majority of participants and ensured that data was included from all 20 IDIs and eight FGDs. In order to ensure that the data interpretation remained embedded in the structural and cultural context, the first author (who joined the research team after data had been collected) sought critical input and insight from the co-authors to ensure that their knowledge of the original study and previous findings (Wamoyi et al. 2019; Wamoyi et al. 2018), as well as their local expertise, informed all stages of data analysis and write up. LHM also turned to bilingual team members to verify the interpretation of the data when needed.

Ethical approval was granted by the Medical Research Coordination Committee of the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) in Tanzania and the Ethics Committee at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) in the UK. Before taking part in the research, participants gave oral and written informed consent after being informed about the aims, risks and benefits of the study. Those under 18 years gave their assent in addition to the consent provided by their parents/carers. All transcripts were anonymised, guaranteeing participants' confidentiality. All participants quoted below were given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Researchers followed ethical and safety guidance for research on violence perpetration (Jewkes, Dartnall, et al. 2012). No disclosures were reported to relevant local authorities because they did not trigger the study's reporting criteria at the time of data collection—namely no individuals were deemed to be in immediate danger and research participants did not identify specific victims of violence.

Findings

Results cover the two dominant sets of gender norms that men frequently display within transactional sex – men are expected to provide economically within relationships, and men should demonstrate their masculinity through heightened sexuality and sexual prowess – and provide examples of men who questioned the practice of transactional sex. Below, we show how norms, relevant reference groups, and associated sanctions, influence men's participation in and perceptions of transactional sex relationships.

'One day I called her, when she came I said [...] "your gift is here" [...] I wanted to have sex': Competition and performing the masculine provider norm

Older men described leveraging their earning power to 'trick and trap' girls into exploitative and sexually coercive transactional sex. Some men targeted vulnerable and economically dependent girls, offering to exchange sex for basic needs, such as clothes for school.

Her shape convinced me, and I cheated her, I made love with her by forcing her [...] I started wanting her, I started attracting her with money [...] one day I called her, when she came I said [...] "Your gift is here" [...] I wanted to have sex. She was scared [...] I penetrated until there was a problem, until she bled. (Fadhili, IDI, older man speaking about a 16-year-old girl)

There are [school] students with a money emergency [...] it is very easy to convince a child, like that. You tell her "You see your friend, she is eating chips and you are unable to afford food. I am ready to buy you chips, then we shall [have sex], what do you say?" (John, IDI, older man)

In contrast, younger men's accounts were notable for the challenges they faced to provide in romantic relationships, for example working long hours in low paid and labour-intensive jobs. One young man shared: 'Since you love her you are forced to do these things [...] we end up in jail, for instance if I go to steal.' (Abasi, IDI)

For younger men in particular, the ability to provide in relationships directly influenced standing in their reference groups. For example, men's ability to provide for their girlfriends was thought to directly indicate their future ability to provide in marriage to people in their community. One young man said 'if you cannot provide for your lover [...] you are showing that your [future] family will sleep hungry, because you cannot [work hard] to get money' (Daniel, IDI, young man). Financial independence from parents, earning and provision were likewise important to young men in signifying their 'coming of age'.

Another thing that removes [boys and men] from childhood is when they start to struggle with responsibilities, when he has a family that depends on him, and he has stopped depending on his parents, and they depend on him. (Emmanuel, FGD, older men)

The importance of economic provision to younger men's status, and both younger and older men's differing ability to earn and provide, meant that transactional sex became a site of friction between men. Younger men were often outcompeted by older men capable of providing more expensive gifts in transactional relationships.

Kwasi, for example, a young man FGD participant said: 'I trap her with a CD, then tomorrow find her with a big old man [...] he has bought her a smartphone. She abandons me and goes to the other.' Losing a sexual partner to another man in this way was not only a personal blow, but it also caused younger men to lose status among their peers.

Young men described the lengths they would go to to avoid this loss of status. For some young men the social sanction of being "out-competed", and perceived status loss due to failure to provide, provoked them to threaten violence against male competitors in their reference group or against previous girlfriends who left them for a transactional sex relationship with an older man.

'The body is harassing you': Performing and questioning the heightened sexuality and sexual prowess norm

Data revealed the importance of sexual prowess and sexual desire in conferring status on men within a particular male reference group. Most participants framed sex as an uncontrollable bodily need, strong enough to 'push your consciousness', or cause them to act beyond reason (Edwin, IDI, older man). Sexual desire was considered a marker of manhood and signified boys' transition to becoming men. Godfrey, a young man FGD participant, said that if a young man reaches adulthood without having sex they experience 'sex stress'.

You have sex because the body needs it, but it is not because you have time to have sex [...] when the body wants it, you feel as if the body is harassing you. (Edwin, IDI, older man)

Among adult men, monogamy was believed to be unlikely to satisfy sexual needs and curiosity. One older man estimated that '88% of men' engaged in sexual relationships outside of marriage due to "uncontrollable lust" (Samson, IDI). Many older men used narratives of heightened sexuality to justify their participation in transactional sex, noting their perceived curiosity or desire to try new things — 'changing the taste of love like food' (Raymond, IDI).

Participants' also suggested that transactional sex provides men with a means to demonstrate sexual prowess. There were jointly reinforced expectations among men that they should be able to satisfy their sexual partners.

There is a saying [among men] that [girls] say: "take me and turn me upside down like a chapatti in your bed" [...] it means that, whenever she needs you have to satisfy her. (Juma, FGD, adult men)

Men from both age groups also achieved 'swag' or 'fame' by boasting to others about the large number and young age of their transactional sexual partners.

I feel happy when I break a child's virginity [...] when you tell (your friends) that "I have broken ten girls' virginity", then another one tells you "I have broken two", you tell him "I am the one who was the highest". (Fadhili, IDI, adult man)

When you are with her, [people see] that you have a small girl, [...] people see that you are sharp, and they ask you "how did you get her?" (John, IDI, older man)

Men expressed dissatisfaction with their wives' sexual performance, particularly in comparison to sex with girls in transactional sex. Participants described having an attraction to younger girls and women, in preference to older women, because of the 'lust of their body' (Baraka, IDI, older man).

You know an adult woman who has given birth two or three times [...] she can't be the same as a girl. A girl, her body is strong. I mean when you enter usually they are tight [...] because a woman starts [work] at three o'clock at night [...] When she comes to sleep you can't turn her [...] she denies. (Nelson, IDI, adult man)

Finally, men who were unwilling or unable to 'seduce' women and girls were ridiculed and accused of lacking confidence by other men in their reference groups.

'I think his muscles are small': Questioning transactional sex

Our analysis revealed that not all men engaged in or condoned transactional sex and some men drew on competing social norms and values to discredit others engaging in transactional sex. Two younger men IDI participants (Yesse and Lugenge) challenged the belief that it was men's responsibility to provide economic support suggesting that both men and women should contribute financially to relationships. In FGD10, one participant argued that gift giving may offend a girl by suggesting that she is a 'prostitute'. A younger boy in FGD02 said: 'What is money? That is deceitful love. Find someone who loves you, [and] stop with the money.' Another young man argued that men who relied on gift giving to attract girls were incapable of seducing girls and women otherwise, accusing them of having small muscles and doubting their masculinity.

A man who gives out money to get sex [...] his muscles are small [...] he doesn't have true love [...] money is something you might get, or you might not get [...] so when you don't have money, it stops there. (Kibingo, FGD, young men)

A boy FGD participant, Upendo, accused men participating in transactional sex of exploiting girls and failing to fulfil their role as responsible and family-centred older men in the community.

Four of the 12 older men interviewed, and one FGD participant explicitly rejected transactional sex. Most of these older men disparaged transactional sex on the basis that men who engage in transactional sex relationships outside of their marriages were not able to fulfil their provider role within their families. One man (Ernest, IDI, older man) decided to stop engaging in transactional sex relationships outside of marriage in order to better provide for his family. Another described the regret he felt when reflecting on previous transactional sex relationships: 'I start to remember that money, I get angry with these women I spent a lot of money on' (Yacoub, IDI, older man). When asked about transactional sex with younger girls, one man shared,

He has lost his self-awareness that he has responsibility for a family [...] he forgets that when he has more than one partner, then the expenses he is going to spend will be too high, and there are important things that his family is going to miss. (Kiganda, IDI, older man)

Two older men said that rejecting transactional sex was important for a man to maintain dignity in the community, serve as a good role model, and act as a protector to his family and children.

[My friends] always come [and say] “the wife at home is tiresome my friend, escort me here” [... but] I don’t need to embarrass myself, to lose my dignity and respect to the people. (Fadhili, IDI, older man)

So, to me I see them as though they are stupid, fools who are spoiling children. An old man of fifty years cannot move with a child of sixteen years. If you give birth to a child, what will he [the child] call you? (Salumu, FGD, boys)

Similarly, one man regretted his involvement in previous transactional sex relationships after discovering his school-age daughter was involved in a transactional sex relationship with an older man. He said this experience had helped him understand the negative health implications of transactional sex for both his daughter and his family (Nathaniel, IDI, older man).

Discussion

This paper provides insight into men’s views of and behaviours within transactional sex. Transactional sex provides an arena in which men can enact two gendered norms central to the construction of dominant masculinities: economic provision in sexual relationships, and the display of heightened sexuality and sexual prowess.

Men described material provision in relationships as central to ‘being a man’, a prerequisite for all sexual relationships, an expression of love, and a means of capitalising on women’s and girls’ and women’s material dependence through transactional sex. Our findings show how transactional sex can enable men to fulfil the gendered norm of men’s material provision, by perpetuating women’s’ and girls’ economic dependence on men, and highlighting men’s social dominance over women (Magni et al. 2020; Fielding-Miller and Dunkle 2017; Jewkes, Morrell, and Lindegger 2012; Beasley 2008; Dunkle et al. 2007; Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001).

Participants also portrayed transactional sex as one way in which to realise their ‘bodily need’ for regular sex with multiple partners, preferably young women or girls, outside of marriage. These narratives enabled men to align with a hegemonic masculinity and differentiate themselves from their wives’ unsatisfactory sexual performance, and/or girls who are easily manipulated.

Our analysis showed that men controlled and coerced women and girls through transactional sex. These findings resonate with other studies in the region that have also found a link between transactional sex and men’s attempts to uphold gendered inequalities (Magni et al. 2020; Closson et al. 2020),

Findings also showed how transactional sex created and reinforced hierarchies among men, where young men were commonly inferior to older men. For both younger and older men, economic provision is an expected and desirable social norm (Bicchieri 2005), but it was not easily attainable for the younger men in transactional sex relationships in our sample. Young men were often outcompeted for sexual partners by older men pursuing transactional sex with younger girls. Failed provision led to a loss of status in peer groups of men, when men were left by their transactional

sex partners, or were outperformed by men who were more capable of providing, as previously discussed in the literature (Groes-Green 2009; Stark 2017).

Findings support the idea that peers represent an influential reference group for men (Sedgwick 2015; Hammarén and Johansson 2014) and that the act of enforcing sanctions, may itself allow men to reproduce hegemonic ideals of masculinity (Tucker and Govender 2017; Messerschmidt 2019). Our social norms analysis showed how non-conformity with gender expectations—ability to provide and sexual prowess—was policed through negative sanctions (Cislaghi and Heise 2019; Marcus and Harper 2014). Young men described mitigating the threat of social sanctions by adopting pre-emptive behaviours and narratives, showing that social sanctions directly impact men's participation in and views about transactional sex relationships, in line with literature on social norms and men's engagement in intimate partner violence (Mulawa, Kajula, and Maman 2018; Cislaghi and Heise 2019).

Men in this study did not uniformly participate in or condone transactional sex. Some older participants criticised men's participation in transactional sex relationships when this compromised their ability to provide for their family, and jeopardised their ability to maintain a partner and home, which resonates with studies from different contexts (Closson et al. 2020). Younger men expressed different criticisms of transactional sex, by suggesting that girls who demanded gifts were not 'moral' and therefore not 'desirable'. Young men used narratives of romantic love and trust and their ability to seduce girls without gifts to distance themselves from older men participating in transactional sex, a pattern found in the literature on transactional sex from other contexts (Stark 2017).

Rejecting transactional sex rarely meant that men challenged hegemonic masculinity in its entirety. Men who challenged transactional sex commonly appealed to alternative masculine norms, or different elements of the same masculine norms, such as being a 'real man' able to seduce girls and women without money or fulfil his responsibility to provide for his family and protect children in the community. This suggests that men are able to choose from various strategies to observe the masculine norms related to economic provision and sexual prowess, and that there can be multiple norms regulating individuals' behaviours (Mollborn 2017).

This research has shown that transactional sex sits at the intersection of multiple, at times conflicting gender norms for men. We have shed light on the complexities of men's choice of whether or not to engage in transactional sex relationships. Study findings also highlight the importance of reference groups in shaping men's involvement in transactional sex.

Limitations

This study is not without limitations. Purposive sampling of participants who were in transactional sex relationships provided a strong ecological validity, but limited generalisability to a wider population. It also prevented a detailed exploration of the views and behaviours of older men who have never taken part in transactional sex. Social desirability bias may have influenced the validity of the data, as the researchers may have represented a new reference group for the research participants, and therefore

garnered different responses compared to those they felt were accepted or common within their naturally occurring reference groups.

Public health implications

Findings suggest that successful interventions should foster reflection about hegemonic gender norms, rather than aiming to prevent the exchange of gifts or money in relationships in isolation. We have shown how formative research can identify examples of resistance and positive alternatives to harmful normative gendered expectations, to use in interventions with men of different ages (Flood 2015; Dworkin, Fleming, and Colvin 2015). We have also shown that reference groups of men could be mobilised through interventions to mutually encourage each other to sustainably adopt alternative behaviours, so as to prevent sexual exploitation in their relationships and communities.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper we have explored the multiple ways in which men adhere to the gendered norms of economic provision and heightened sexuality and sexual prowess through participating in and/or challenging transactional sex relationships. Using social norms theory, we have shown how men's perspectives on transactional sex are influenced by reference groups of other men, and how men negotiate gender expectations to avoid status loss and sanctions. Finally, we have highlighted how age and access to resources shape men's attitudes toward transactional sex and more importantly, how transactional sex relationships can drive and reinforce gendered inequalities.

Acknowledgements

We thank the field researchers from the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) in Tanzania, for their help with data collection. Thanks also go to the men who participated in the study for sharing their perspectives and experiences. Finally, we thank Rebecca Meiksin for feedback at the review stage.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the OAK foundation under grant number OCAY-16-180 (Howard-Merrill, Buller, Wamoyi, Nyato, Kyegombe and Heise). The views expressed are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily represent the views of the OAK foundation.

ORCID

Nambusi Kyegombe  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3986-0361>

Ana Maria Buller  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3007-9747>

References

- Attride-Stirling, J. 2001. "Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Research* 1 (3):385–405. doi:[10.1177/146879410100100307](https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410100100307)
- Barker, G. 2005. *Dying to Be Men: Youth, Masculinity and Social Exclusion*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Beasley, C. 2008. "Rethinking Hegemonic Masculinity in a Globalizing World." *Men and Masculinities* 11 (1):86–103. doi:[10.1177/1097184X08315102](https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X08315102)
- Bicchieri, C. 2005. *The Grammar of Society: The Nature and Dynamics of Social Norms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brouard, P., and M. Crewe. 2012. "Sweetening the Deal? Sugar Daddies, Sugar Mummies, Sugar Babies and HIV in Contemporary South Africa." *Agenda* 26 (4):48–56. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day017>. doi:[10.1080/10130950.2012.757862](https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2012.757862)
- Cislaghi, B., and L. Heise. 2019. "Gender Norms and Social Norms: Differences, Similarities and Why They Matter in Prevention Science." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 42 (2):407–422. doi:[10.1111/1467-9566.13008](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13008)
- Cislaghi, B., and L. Heise. 2019. "Using Social Norms Theory for Health Promotion in Low-income Countries." *Health Promotion International* 34 (3):616–623. doi:[10.1093/heapro/day017](https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day017)
- Closson, K., A. Hatcher, Y. Sikweyiya, L. Washington, S. Mkhwanazi, R. Jewkes, K. Dunkle, and A. Gibbs. 2020. "Gender Role Conflict and Sexual Health and Relationship Practices Amongst Young Men Living in Urban Informal Settlements in South Africa." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 22 (1):31–47. doi:[10.1080/13691058.2019.1568578](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2019.1568578)
- Connell, R. W. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W., and J. W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19 (6):829–859. doi:[10.1177/0891243205278639](https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639)
- Dunkle, K. L., R. Jewkes, M. Nduna, N. Jama, J. Levin, Y. Sikweyiya, and M. P. Koss. 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* (1982) 65 (6):1235–1248. doi:[10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.04.029](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.04.029)
- Dworkin, S. L., P. J. Fleming, and C. J. Colvin. 2015. "The Promises and Limitations of Gender-transformative Health Programming with Men: Critical Reflections from the Field." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 17 (sup2):128–143. doi:[10.1080/13691058.2015.1035751](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1035751)
- Fielding-Miller, R., and K. Dunkle. 2017. "Constrained Relationship Agency as the Risk Factor for Intimate Partner Violence in Different Models of Transactional Sex." *African Journal of AIDS Research : AJAR* 16 (4):283–293. doi:[10.2989/16085906.2017.1345768](https://doi.org/10.2989/16085906.2017.1345768)
- Flood, M. 2015. "Work With Men to End Violence Against Women: A Critical Stocktake." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 17 (sup2):159–176. doi:[10.1080/13691058.2015.1070435](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1070435)
- Green, J., K. Willis, E. Hughes, R. Small, N. Welch, L. Gibbs, and J. Daly. 2007. "Generating Best Evidence from Qualitative Research: The Role of Data Analysis." *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 31 (6):545–550. doi:[10.1111/j.1753-6405.2007.00141.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-6405.2007.00141.x)
- Groes-Green, C. 2009. "Hegemonic and Subordinated Masculinities: Class, Violence and Sexual Performance Among Young Mozambican Men." *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 18 (4): 286–304.
- Hammarén, N., and T. Johansson. 2014. "Homosexuality: In Between Power and Intimacy." *SAGE Open* 4 (1):215824401351805. doi:[10.1177/2158244013518057](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013518057)
- Hunter, M. 2010. *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Jewkes, R., E. Dartnall, and Y. Sikweyiya. 2012. *Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Perpetration of Sexual Violence*. Pretoria: Sexual Violence Research Initiative, Medical Research Council.
- Jewkes, R., R. Morrell, and G. Lindegger. 2012. "Hegemonic Masculinity/Masculinities in South Africa: Culture." *Men and Masculinities* 15 (1):11–30. doi:10.1177/1097184X12438001
- Jewkes, R., R. Morrell, Y. Sikweyiya, K. Dunkle, and L. Penn-Kekana. 2012. "Transactional Relationships and Sex with a Woman in Prostitution: Prevalence and Patterns in a Representative Sample of South African men." *BMC Public Health* 12 (1):325 doi:10.1186/1471-2458-12-325
- Kaufman, M. R., A. Mooney, B. Kamala, N. Modarres, R. Karam, and D. Ng'wanansabi. 2013. "Effects of the Fataki Campaign: Addressing Cross-Generational Sex in Tanzania by Mobilizing Communities to Intervene." *AIDS & Behavior* 17 (6):2053–2062. doi:10.1007/s10461-013-0428-x
- Kaufman, M. R., S. W. Tsang, A. Mooney, A. McCartney-Melstad, A. K. Mushi, and B. Kamala. 2016. "'Protect Your Loved Ones from Fataki': Discouraging Cross-Generational Sex in Tanzania." *Qualitative Health Research* 26 (7):994–1004. doi:10.1177/1049732315583823
- Kyegombe, N., R. Meiksin, S. Namakula, J. Mulindwa, R. Muhumuza, J. Wamoyi, L. Heise, and A. M. Buller. 2020. "Community Perspectives on the Extent to Which Transactional Sex is Viewed as Sexual Exploitation in Central Uganda." *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 20 (1):11 doi:10.1186/s12914-020-00228-w
- Kyegombe, N., R. Meiksin, J. Wamoyi, L. Heise, K. Stoebenau, and A. M. Buller. 2020. "Sexual Health of Adolescent Girls and Young Women in Central Uganda: Exploring Perceived Coercive Aspects of Transactional Sex." *Sexual and Reproductive Health Matters* 28 (1):1700770. doi:10.1080/26410397.2019.1700770
- Leclerc-Madlala, S. 2003. "Transactional Sex and the Pursuit of Modernity." *Social Dynamics* 29 (2):213–233. doi:10.1080/02533950308628681
- Luke, N., and K. Kurz. 2002. *Cross-generational and Transactional Sexual Relations in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women.
- Mackie, G., F., Moneti, E. Denny, and H. Shakya. 2012. *What are Social Norms? How Are They Measured*. San Diego: University of California, Center on Global Justice/UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/protection/files/4_09_30_Whole_What_are_Social_Norms.pdf
- Magni, S., A. Hatcher, J. Wamoyi, and N. Christofides. 2020. "Predictors and Patterns of Transactional Sex with Casual Partners among Adult Men Living in an Informal Urban Area, South Africa." *AIDS Behav* 24 (9):2616–2623. doi:10.1007/s10461-020-02818-0
- Marcus, R., and C. Harper. 2014. *Gender Justice and Social Norms—Processes of Change for Adolescent Girls: Towards a Conceptual Framework 2*. London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI)
- Messerschmidt, J. W. 2019. "Hidden in Plain Sight: On the Omnipresence of Hegemonic Masculinities, Keynote Address at the 2nd International Symposium on Men and Masculinities, September 12–14, 2019, Istanbul Turkey." *Masculinities Autumn* 12:14–29.
- Mojola, S. A. 2014. *Love, Money, and HIV: Becoming a Modern African Woman in the Age of AIDS*. Oakland: Univ of California Press.
- Mollborn, S. 2017. *Mixed Messages: Norms and Social Control Around Teen Sex and Pregnancy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mulawa, M. I., L. J. Kajula, and S. Maman. 2018. "Peer Network Influence on Intimate Partner Violence Perpetration among Urban Tanzanian Men." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 20 (4): 474–488. doi:10.1080/13691058.2017.1357193
- Muthoni, C. N., S. M. Kneipp, M. W. Gichane, C. E. Caiola, A. E. Pettifor, and J. R. Williams. 2020. "A Systematic Review of HIV Interventions for Young Women in Sub-Saharan Africa." *AIDS & Behavior* [published online ahead of print, 2020 May 14] doi:10.1007/s10461-020-02914-1
- Ranganathan, M., C. MacPhail, A. Pettifor, K. Kahn, N. Khoza, R. Twine, C. Watts, and L. Heise. 2017. "Young Women's Perceptions of Transactional Sex and Sexual Agency: A Qualitative Study in the Context of Rural South Africa." *BMC Public Health* 17 (1):666. doi:10.1186/s12889-017-4636-6

- Schippers, M. 2007. "Recovering the Feminine Other: Masculinity, Femininity, and Gender Hegemony." *Theory and Society* 36 (1):85–102. doi:10.1007/s11186-007-9022-4
- Sedgwick, E. K. 2015. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Shefer, T. 2016. "Resisting the Binarism of Victim and Agent: Critical Reflections on 20 Years of Scholarship on Young Women and Heterosexual Practices in South African Contexts." *Global Public Health* 11 (1–2):211–223. doi:10.1080/17441692.2015.1029959
- Shefer, T., and A. Strelbel. 2012. "Deconstructing the 'Sugar Daddy': A Critical Review of the Constructions of Men in Intergenerational Sexual Relationships in South Africa." *Agenda* 26 (4):57–63. doi:10.1080/10130950.2012.760837
- Silberschmidt, M., and V. Rasch. 2001. "Adolescent Girls, Illegal Abortions and "Sugar-daddies" in Dar es Salaam: Vulnerable Victims and Active Social Agents." *Social Science & Medicine* 52 (12): 1815–1826. doi:10.1016/S0277-9536(00)00299-9
- Singleton, R., G. Sabben, and K. Winskell. 2020. "The Spectrum of Sexual Transaction: Representations in Young Africans' HIV-themed Creative Narratives." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* :1–17. doi:10.1080/13691058.2020.1727568
- Stark, L. 2017. "Cultural Politics of Love and Provision among Poor Youth in Urban Tanzania." *Ethnos* 82 (3):569–591. doi:10.1080/00141844.2015.1080749
- Stoebenau, K., L. Heise, J. Wamoyi, and N. Bobrova. 2016. "Revisiting the Understanding of "Transactional Sex" in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature." *Social Science & Medicine* (1982) 168:186–197. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.09.023
- Stoebenau, K., N. Kyegombe, J. B. Bingenheimer, I. Ddumba-Nyanzi, and J. Mulindwa. 2019. "Developing Experimental Vignettes to Identify Gender Norms Associated With Transactional Sex for Adolescent Girls and Young Women in Central Uganda." *Journal of Adolescent Health* 64 (4):S60–S6. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.11.009
- Strelbel, A., T. Shefer, C. Potgieter, C. Wagner, N. Shabalala. 2013. "She's a Slut... and It's Wrong': Youth Constructions of Taxi Queens in the Western Cape." *South African Journal of Psychology* 43 (1):71–80. doi:10.1177/0081246312474415
- Tucker, L. A., and K. Govender. 2017. "Sticks and Stones': Masculinities and Conflict Spaces." *Gender and Education* 29 (3):352–368. doi:10.1080/09540253.2016.1156059
- UNAIDS. 2020. *UNAIDS Data 2020*. Geneva: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.
- Van der Heijden, I., and S. 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 : AJAR* 13 (1):53–63. doi:10.2989/16085906.2014.886602
- Wamoyi, J., A. M. Buller, D. Nyato, N. Kyegombe, R. Meiksin, and L. Heise. 2018. "'Eat and You Will Be Eaten': A Qualitative Study Exploring Costs and Benefits of Age-Disparate Sexual Relationships in Tanzania and Uganda: Implications for Girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health Interventions." *Reproductive Health* 15 (1):207. doi:10.1186/s12978-018-0650-0
- Wamoyi, J., L. Heise, R. Meiksin, N. Kyegombe, D. Nyato, and A. M. Buller. 2019. "Is Transactional Sex Exploitative? A Social Norms Perspective, with Implications for Interventions with Adolescent Girls and Young Women in Tanzania." *PLoS One* 14 (4):e0214366. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0214366
- Wamoyi, J., D. Wight, M. Plummer, G. H. Mshana, and D. Ross. 2010. "Transactional Sex Amongst Young People in Rural Northern Tanzania: An Ethnography of Young Women's Motivations and negotiation." *Reproductive Health* 7 (1):2. doi:10.1186/1742-4755-7-2