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Love, Lust, and the Emotional Context of Concurrent Sexual Partnerships among Young Swazi Adults

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Abstract

Men and women in Swaziland who are engaged in multiple or concurrent sexual partnerships, or who have sexual partners with concurrent partners, face a very high risk of HIV infection. Ninety-four in-depth interviews were conducted with 28 Swazi men and women (14 of each sex) between the ages of 20 and 39 in order to explore participants' sexual partnership histories, including motivations for sexual relationships which carried high HIV risk. Concurrency was normative, with most men and women having had at least one concurrent sexual partnership, and all women reporting having had at least one partner who had a concurrent partner. Men distinguished sexual partnerships that were just for sex from those that were considered to be "real relationships", while women represented the majority of their relationships, even those which included significant financial support, as being based on love. Besides being motivated by love, concurrent sexual partnerships were described as motivated by a lack of sexual satisfaction, a desire for emotional support and/or as a means to exact revenge against a cheating partner. Social and structural factors were also found to play a role in creating an enabling environment for high-risk sexual partnerships, and these factors included social pressure and norms, a lack of social trust, poverty and a desire for material goods, and geographical separation of partners.

Keywords

couple relationships; HIV/AIDS; HIV prevention; multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships; transactional sex

Introduction

Multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships have been implicated in the spread of HIV in Swaziland (NERCHA, 2009), which has the highest HIV prevalence of any country (Bicego,

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Nkambule, Peterson, Reed, Donnell, Ginindza *et al.*, 2013). The 2006/7 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) measured HIV prevalence among adults 15 to 49 to be 26% (CSO & Macro International Inc., 2008). The subsequent 2011 Swaziland HIV Incidence Measurement Survey (SHIMS) found that prevalence had remained essentially unchanged (32% among adults 18 to 49), although HIV incidence had declined somewhat in younger age cohorts (Bicego *et al.*, 2013). According to the SHIMS, annual HIV incidence peaks at 3.1% among men ages 30 to 34, and at 4.2% and 4.1% for women ages 20 to 24 and 35 to 39, respectively. HIV prevalence peaks at 47% for men ages 35–39 and 54% for women ages 30–34 (Ministry of Health, 2012).

Data on multiple sexual partnerships in Swaziland have yielded a somewhat inconsistent picture, and to our knowledge no research has directly measured concurrent (or overlapping) sexual partnerships. In the 2006/7 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 2.3% of women and 21.4% of men reported having two or more sexual partners in the past year, among adults ages 20 to 39 who had ever had sex.ⁱ A series of national cluster surveys among young adults 18–29 found that multiple partnerships declined between 2002 and 2008, with the 2008 survey showing that 15% of women and 49% of men who reported at least one sexual partner in the past 12 months reported multiple partners in the past 12 months (Cockcroft, Andersson, Ho-Foster, Marokoane, & Mziyako, 2010). Data from the 2006/7 DHS suggest that both men and women are likely to bring HIV into a primary partnership. Among couples surveyed, in 9% of couples the woman only was infected, in 8% of couples the man only was infected, and in a further 29% of couples both partners were infected (CSO & Macro International Inc., 2008).

Multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships may be driven by structural factors such as poverty or short or long-term migration, social-level factors such as societal norms that support concurrency, and individual-level factors ranging from emotional states to alcohol dependency. Men and women from across southern Africa have reported being motivated to engage in multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships by desires for material goods, alcohol consumption, and sexual satisfaction, with social pressure and norms heavily influencing the formation of these partnerships (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Nkwe & Limwane, 2007; Parker, Makhubele, Ntlabati, & Connolly, 2007; Hunter, 2010; Mah & Maughan-Brown, 2013). Other research from the region has shown migration and geographical separation of partners to be associated with higher risk of concurrency and HIV infection (Lurie, 2006; Cassels, Manhart, Jenness, & Morris, 2013). Available data suggest that many Swazi adults in their 20s and 30s are not engaged in stable and exclusive sexual partnerships but rather engage in shorter-term, unstable, and often concurrent sexual partnerships (NERCHA, 2009; NERCHA, 2011). Rates of marriage are low, with only 42% of women and 28% of men ages 20–39 having ever married according to the 2006/7 DHS.ⁱ Being unmarried has been shown to be associated with higher HIV incidence for Swazi women (Ministry of Health, 2012).

HIV prevention efforts in Swaziland have targeted multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships and the socio-cultural context in which these partnerships occur, including a

ⁱCalculation made using datasets available at measuredhs.com.

high-profile 2006 campaign which used the slogan ‘Your secret lover (*makhwapheni*) can kill you’ (Cockcroft *et al.*, 2010). This campaign coincided with a 50% decline from 2005 to 2006 in the percentage of sexually active young men (18 to 29 years) who reported multiple partners in the past month, from 35% to 16%. Yet HIV incidence in Swaziland and across the region remains high, and to date there is little evidence that HIV prevention efforts have had significant, lasting impact on high-risk patterns of multi-partnering (Soul City Institute, 2013). In the face of few signs that cultural norms surrounding multiple and concurrent partnerships are changing, anthropologist Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala has called for “an understanding of how people conceptualise the role and meaning of multiple and concurrent relationships in their lives” as a basis for more effective HIV prevention (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009).

The goal of this research is to describe how young Swazi adults understand their own motivations in sexual partnerships, particularly partnerships which carry significant HIV risk, and to ground these narratives in their actual life experiences and relationship decisions using a life-course perspective. A life-course may be defined as “a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time” (Giele & Elder, 1998). Adopting a life-course perspective allows for analysis of a person’s life experiences within structural, social, and cultural contexts. This research focuses on answering two central questions:

1. How do young Swazi adults describe their motivations for engaging in sexual partnerships, particularly sexual partnerships which carry a high risk of HIV?
2. What social and structural factors provide an enabling environment for these motivations?

In this research we conceptualize that a person is at high risk of HIV if he or she has multiple sexual partnerships, concurrent sexual partnerships, or has a partner with concurrent sexual partners. Epidemiological evidence from Swaziland shows a clear increase in HIV risk with increasing number of sexual partners (CSO & Macro International Inc., 2008; Ministry of Health, 2012). While mathematical modeling shows that concurrency can exponentially increase the size of an epidemic (Morris & Kretzschmar 1997), the role of concurrency in HIV transmission and epidemic dynamics has been debated (Lurie & Rosenthal, 2010; Sawers & Stillwagon, 2010; Mah & Shelton, 2011; Epstein & Morris, 2011). Due to the fact that concurrency theoretically elevates one’s risk of transmitting but not acquiring HIV, we would expect to see a relationship between individual HIV risk and partner’s concurrency (Epstein & Morris, 2011). Having a sexual partner that one believes has other (concurrent) sexual partners has been associated with increased HIV risk for Tanzanian women (Msuya, Mbizvo, Hussain, Uriyo, Sam, & Stray-Pedersen, 2006; Landman, Ostermann, Crump, Mgonja, Mayhood, Itemba, *et al.*, 2008) and Ugandan men and women (Guwatudde, Wabwire-Mangen, Eller, Eller, McCutchan, Kibuuka, *et al.*, 2009), but not South African women (Jewkes & Dunkle, 2010). Having a husband who reports having extra-spousal partnerships has been found to not be predictive of HIV status for Ugandan women (Kasamba, Sully, Weiss, Baisley, & Maher, 2011). Nevertheless, it is clear that having a sexual partner who has other sexual partners places one at risk of HIV infection originating from those other partners, and that the possibility of sequential (and

highly infectious) acute infections may increase this risk (Mah & Shelton, 2011). Although this research explored sexual partnerships without regard to their level of HIV risk, this paper will focus on motivations for sexual partnerships which carry a heightened risk of HIV according to the epidemiological understanding described above.

Methods

We conducted 94 in-depth interviews with 28 Swazi men and women between the ages of 20 and 39 years (46 interviews with 14 Swazi men and 48 interviews with 14 Swazi women) to obtain a life-course perspective on their sexual relationships. Participants were interviewed three to four times each, over a period of several weeks to several months between July 2013 and February 2014, with each interview lasting from 30 to 90 minutes. Interviews were performed by same-gender Swazi researchers (who were between the ages of 25 and 35) in siSwati or in a mix of siSwati and English.

Participants were recruited from a shopping center in central Mbabane, the capital of Swaziland, on Saturday mornings, after this venue was identified as one that would be frequented by Swazis of diverse backgrounds and socio-economic strata. Participants were eligible to participate if they were between the ages of 20 and 39, ever had had sex, and were willing to talk openly about their lives, particularly about sexual partnerships. Beyond these criteria, the study sought to recruit men and women who were diverse in terms of age, socio-economic status, education level, and marital status. After a first wave of recruitment yielded participants who were primarily in their 20s and unmarried, a second wave of recruitment purposively sampled men and women who were in their 30s, and married or living with a partner.

The in-depth interviews were conducted as follows, using a semi-structured interview guide. In the first interview, participants were asked about their family background in an effort to build rapport with the participant before inquiring about more sensitive topics, and also to gain context about the participant's life. In the second interview, participants were asked to discuss their sexual partnership history, including the circumstances of each sexual partnership and their motivations and expectations for that partnership. This interview often required two sessions, depending on the number of sexual partners a participant reported and was willing to discuss. In the third interview, participants were asked to describe what they considered to be a good relationship as well as their level of satisfaction with their current relationship.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English. Data were analysed in NVivo 10 by the first author using codes developed iteratively through multiple readings of the interviews. The overall process of data analysis was conducted collaboratively through discussions amongst the study team to identify and describe themes and discuss interpretations. The first author also made extensive use of memoing, including memos about emergent themes and memos to summarize and analyse the life story of each participant. The memos summarizing each participant's life story were also coded. Interviews were iterative, in that later interviews allowed the interviewers to explore themes

mentioned in earlier interviews, seek clarification, and resolve discrepancies in the participant's story.

Drawing from methods in Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006), data were analysed inductively in order to generate a conceptual model which linked individual-level, social and structural factors to sexual behaviours (using emic understandings), and behaviours to HIV risk (using epidemiologically-derived, etic understandings). The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of The Miriam Hospital (Providence, Rhode Island) and the Scientific and Ethics Committee of the Ministry of Health in Swaziland.

Findings

The 28 participants were diverse in terms of socio-cultural and demographic characteristics (Table 1). Participants reported education ranging from no formal education to university (tertiary) education. Although all participants were recruited in central Mbabane, some lived as much as 50 kilometers from Mbabane. Participants resided in both rural and urban areas as well as in informally planned peri-urban neighborhoods known as "locations." Five women and three men were unemployed, two men were students, and the remaining participants worked in a variety of professions ranging from unskilled labor to professional occupations. With the exception of one woman, all participants were in a current sexual relationship, although approximately half of participants (seven men and eight women) were neither married nor living with their partners. Three participants had separated from spouses or been widowed (not shown in Table 1).

While the participants in this research reported diverse circumstances and motivations for sexual partnerships, several broad patterns emerged, which are summarized in the conceptual models in the Figure. The Figure presents separate models for men and women. Both men and women reported personal-level motivations (shown in circles or ovals) for having high numbers of sexual partners, concurrent sexual partners, or partnerships with a partner who had concurrent sexual partners. The arrows between these high-risk behaviours signify the relationships between them. For example, people with high numbers of partners also often reported having concurrent partners (and for men, vice-versa). Participants whose partners had concurrent partners more often reported having concurrent partnerships themselves (reciprocal concurrency). In the presence of low condom use, having a high number of sexual partners or a partner with concurrent partners leads to a heightened risk of HIV transmission. Finally, a number of social and structural factors were described as creating an enabling environment for sexual behaviours which carried a high risk of HIV transmission.

High-risk sexual partnerships

Men reported much higher numbers of partners than did women, although five men reported having only one lifetime sexual partner. Women most commonly reported having between two and four lifetime sexual partners, and all women reported at least two lifetime sexual partners, whereas the men who reported more than one lifetime sexual partner generally reported ten or more lifetime partners (Table 2). Most women reported an exact number of

sexual partners, even if in some cases they were unwilling to discuss every partnership. Men who reported more than one partner, on the other hand, could often only give estimates of their lifetime number of sexual partners. Participants often appeared uncomfortable or expressed reluctance when talking about high numbers of sexual partners or concurrent sexual partners, and men sometimes refused to answer questions about concurrency or lifetime number of sexual partners. All sexual partnerships reported in this research were heterosexual.

A majority of men and women (eight men and ten women) reported having had a concurrent sexual partnership, while three men and five women reported in at least one interview that they currently had concurrent partners. Every woman, and eight men, reported having had a partner who had had a concurrent sexual partnership (Table 3). Men and women who reported concurrent partners often said that their partners also had concurrent partners. Comparison of men's reports to women's reports revealed that women reported male concurrency as being more common than did the men in this study when reporting on their own behaviour. Six of the 14 men in this study reported that they had never had concurrent partnerships, whereas all women reported having at least one male sexual partner who had had concurrent sexual partners, and several women reported that *all* of their sexual partners had had concurrent partners during the relationship.

Many participants recognized that they were at risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, either through their own behaviour or the behaviour of their partners. Some participants reported using condoms to mitigate this risk, although condoms were more often mentioned as a means of avoiding pregnancy. Most participants reported that they did not use condoms consistently, particularly in more established relationships or in sexual encounters which involved alcohol.

Love and lust

Men who reported multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships reported a distinction between partnerships based purely on sexual desire, and relationships which they referred to as "real relationships" (*budlelwane sibili*) or "straight relationships" (*budlelwane lobucondzile*) which involved love and emotional attachment. Several men in their early and mid-20s reported frequenting drinking establishments and having sex with women they met there, in casual, alcohol-fueled, and frequently one-time encounters. In other cases, men in their 20s had casual sexual relationships with friends, relationships that did not carry the expectation of monogamy. Men often declined to describe in detail these more casual partnerships, while they were willing to talk about "real relationships". Men in their 30s and in long-term relationships explained that talking about other sexual partners (past or present) was not proper now that they were in a relationship with a woman with whom they had children, or intended to marry.

Women repeatedly used the word "lust" (*kuhawukela*) to refer to men's motivations in sexual partnerships, and like men distinguished between partnerships based on love and those based on lust. Notably, men never used the word "lust" about their sexual partnerships, although they did not deny seeking sex with women they did not love, often under false pretenses. One man in his 30s stated, '*I have had girlfriends that I just tell them*

that I am in love with them just because I want to have sex with them.’ Both men’s and women’s accounts indicated that men were much more likely to have partnerships based on lust, although women occasionally described being motivated by lust. One woman in her 20s described a sexual partnership by saying, *‘I wouldn’t say it was a relationship because we would see each other at the pub and he would buy me drinks... It was lust, that’s all.’* Women nearly universally described their relationships as being based on love. Men and women described love-based relationships using terms such as “being in love” (*ngamutsandza*) or “true love” (*lutsandvo lona*), and spoke often of loving a partner and telling him or her of that love.

Emotional needs and emotional ties

Men and women also discussed other emotional motivations for sexual partnerships, such as feeling lonely and desiring companionship. One woman, who didn’t see her main partner as often as she wished because he was working in another town, said that her secret lover “filled that space” left by her main partner. Several women also reported feeling lonely, even when they were living with a partner, because their partners spent leisure time with friends at drinking establishments rather than at home. In one case this was a contributing factor to a woman acquiring a second partner, and many women mentioned strongly disliking their partner’s habit of spending time and money drinking alcohol with friends. One woman in her 20s remarked,

‘If my boyfriend is in a good mood then it’s obvious that I will not need [my secret lover]. But if [my boyfriend] is gone with his friends [at a bar] or we had a fight then I will need to see [my secret lover].’

Some women viewed having two or more relationships as a kind of emotional insurance. If one partner was unavailable or one relationship was going through a difficult time, there were other partners that one could rely on to meet emotional and sexual needs. One woman in her 20s explained:

I think if I’m heartbroken, that’s why I’m doing this [having more than one boyfriend at a time]... I’m trying to find a serious relationship, that’s why I mix them to see the right person for me, then I’ll choose one person that I want... My steady boyfriend is not able to do some things for me so when I’m with these others I feel great and loved... Even when I have a problem they’re able to listen and comfort me like if maybe I need a shoulder to cry on and he doesn’t do that as well, if you have many boyfriends one of them will give you the shoulder to cry on.

Relationship problems, especially lack of sexual satisfaction, were believed to contribute to concurrent sexual partnerships. One woman in her 20s said, *‘People start having these extra relationships because they are having problems with their partners which they can’t work out.’* Another woman in her 20s commented, *‘If my sexual relationship with my partner is not good, and if my partner does not satisfy me sexually, it can make it easy for me to have sex with my ex-boyfriend.’*

Men and women sometimes reported being in love with more than one person at one time, or facing the temptation (*uyalingeka*) of a new sexual partner when they were already in a

relationship. One woman in her 20s said, *'It's just the experience that you can love another while you have a person you are in love with.'* Many men and women seemed to retain emotional ties and sexual attraction to previous partners, particularly if that person was someone with whom they had a child. Relationships were frequently disrupted but not really ended when one partner moved away. If the couple had occasion to see each other, they might easily resume a sexual relationship even if one or both had since acquired other partners. Co-parents were brought together not only by emotional ties but also by the practical demands of sharing guardianship of a child, and by the frequent need for the mother to collect child support payments from the father. In some cases, a woman was obligated to spend the night with a child's father, and have sex with him, in order to collect her monthly child support payment.

Another common pattern was for men and women to hold onto an existing relationship until they were sure a new relationship would work out, and prove better than the old relationship. This commonly led to the two relationships overlapping for a period of months. The new partner often knew about the old partner, or assumed that his or her new sexual partner must have a pre-existing relationship. This situation is described by the Swazi saying 'you always get a person from another person' (*umuntfu umutfola kulomunye*). Women often expressed resenting this situation, complaining about having to share their partner's time and money with another woman. In the words of one woman in her 20s:

He should have ended things with me first before starting another relationship. He should have told me that things between me and you are over... He can't have time for both of us. Maybe I need him at 7 and the other girl needs him at the same time. Then how will he manage?

Another woman in her 20s admitted she had not ended an old relationship before starting a new one:

Just because I don't know the new boyfriend yet, I can't end my [old] relationship yet. Just in case the new one is making me do things I don't like, it can be easy to carry on with my [old] relationship.

Infidelity, reciprocal concurrency, and revenge

When discussing a partner's infidelity, participants expressed strong emotions, and women often cried as they recounted their experiences. In presenting these findings we have chosen to use language such as "infidelity" and "cheated" to more accurately convey the emic perspective of participants. Participants used a siSwati term meaning to not be faithful (*akatsembeki*), and also used the English word "cheating". An important component of this emic perspective is that not all concurrency was considered to be morally equivalent. Certain types of openly acknowledged concurrency were not considered to be cheating or infidelity, while having a secret partner in a relationship that was assumed to be monogamous drew censure.

Conflict and violence, including physical violence directed at women, usually erupted in a relationship when an infidelity was suspected or discovered. Women reported feelings of deep hurt, anguish, jealousy and revenge when they discovered a partner's affair, and

despair to the extent of wanting to end their lives. In describing these situations, it was not uncommon for women to say things like, *'I trusted him'* or *'I was so surprised by his actions.'* While women freely acknowledged that infidelity was rife within their social networks, they had often believed their partnerships to be exceptions to the rule, involving true love and commitment. As one woman in her 30s said about a partner who had been repeatedly unfaithful, *'I expected him to love only me, no one else.'*

In many cases when a man was unfaithful, the man apologized and promised to end the affair, and in nearly all cases, whether the woman received such an apology or not, she chose to continue the partnership. Many women recounted stories of being cheated on repeatedly. They explained that they stayed with unfaithful partners because they had children together and did not want their children to grow up without a father, because they did not want to start a new relationship with someone else, or because they loved the unfaithful partner and hoped he would change. Financial motivations were not mentioned directly as a motivation for remaining in relationships with partners who had been unfaithful, although women were often supported financially by their unfaithful partners. Some women did end relationships with unfaithful partners, sometimes only after years and multiple betrayals. Other women seemed not to want to know about a partner's infidelity, saying that they weren't sure if their partner was faithful even in the presence of evidence that would strongly seem to suggest that he was not (such as overnight visits from an ex-girlfriend).

Women who discovered a partner had cheated sometimes retaliated by taking a concurrent partner themselves. In the words of one woman in her 20s, *'So that is why I decided to cheat on him because he is also doing it... I wanted him to feel the same pain I was going through.'* Another woman, who was in her 30s, stated, *'I wanted to get revenge [kutibuyisela] as he was in another relationship while I was staying at his parental home and I was faithful... I had this heart which was crying and seeking out for revenge.'* Reciprocal concurrency might also provide an emotional panacea for the hurt felt over infidelity, as for the woman in her 20s who said, *'Sometimes I feel happy like I won't feel hurt if [my partner] cheats on me because I know that I'm also cheating.'*

A few men reported also experiencing infidelity from a partner they loved and whom they believed to be faithful. Some of these men also felt deep hurt when betrayed, and several men refused to talk in detail about the experience as it was still such a painful memory. A notable difference between men and women, however, was that men universally refused to continue the relationship after discovering a partner they loved had been unfaithful.

In other cases a participant knew about a partner's concurrency and did not suffer emotionally over it, particularly when a woman knew her partner was already married, or in cases where partners seemed to have an agreement that their relationship would be non-exclusive. One man in his 20s explained,

I think after a while we told each other that yes, it was true love. The problem was I told her that I was dating another girl and she said she was aware, and then she revealed that she also has a boyfriend. We then agreed that we will continue having sex because we enjoyed each other's company. So it was a relationship that

understood that there is another person in it. Even if she could see me with another person [a girlfriend] she would not feel any pain because we had already talked through the matter.

Social and structural enablers for high-risk sexual relationships

Beside personal-level motivations such as the desire for sex or being in love, participants also described social and structural factors which created opportunity for, and influenced them towards, behaviours such as concurrent sexual partnerships. These factors included negative social norms, social pressure and a pervasive lack of social trust, poverty and lack of material goods, and geographical distance between partners.

Most men and women agreed that casual sex, cheating, and short-term and unstable sexual relationships were common in their social environments, and that they had few if any role models of faithful relationships. While women feared gaining a bad reputation if they had too many sexual partners, men faced potential ridicule if they did not have multiple sexual partners. One man in his 20s said,

At the township we as the youth are unemployed, [and] hooked up to alcohol and drug usage. So there is nothing that we do except that we spend a lot of time in local bars and that is where we get these girls we have sex with... Even the elders at the location [peri-urban neighborhood] would tell you that you are not clever if you have one girlfriend. They do encourage us to have sex with a lot of girls just to belong to the crew.

The high prevalence of concurrent sexual partnerships seemed to take a toll on social networks, with many participants reporting a lack of trust not only of sexual partners but also of others in their social networks. One woman in her 20s remarked,

Where I stay things are mixed up. Your friend is having an affair with your boyfriend. So you can't trust anyone and people don't respect other people's feelings. Someone will be having sex with your boyfriend whereas she is your friend.

A number of participants said their partners had cheated on them with their friends, classmates, or family members, which created stress and conflict in those relationships. A social environment characterized by low levels of trust might be considered an enabler for concurrent sexual partnerships, if people feel that establishing trusting sexual relationships in such an environment is unrealistic.

Study participants typically did not live with their sexual partners, with couples often living apart either because they were both still living at their parental homes, or because they were employed in different locations. In such cases couples might only see each other on weekends, or even less often. Infrequent visits and geographical distance between partners thus created opportunity for other sexual partners, as it was relatively easy to hide the existence of another sexual partnership. Participants acknowledged that there might be a lot they did not know about their partner's life, such as the man in his 20s who said,

It is important [to me and my partner that we not have other sexual partners], yes, but you would never know because we do not stay together. Not that I suspect her, but I think you know girls in our days they need money to do their hair, to buy clothes, and I do not have a permanent job so it can happen.

Relationships universally included the exchange of gifts and money (more often from men to women, but also at times from women to men), and the lines between transactional sex and non-transactional sex were often unclear. Men and women acknowledged the existence of certain codes of conduct, such as that if a woman accepted gifts from a man, particularly alcohol in a bar setting, she would be expected to give sex in return. Several men portrayed women as aggressively pursuing them if the women believed them to have money, with one man in his 20s saying, *‘There is a saying at the location that girls can sense a person who has money [bayamuva umuntfu lonemali].’* Female participants agreed that women could be lured into relationships by the prospect of financial support. In the words of one woman in her 20s, *‘Most women cheat because their boyfriends don’t support them financially. So if a guy comes and gives you money then you will be tempted and you will end up cheating.’*

While women clearly believed that other women commonly entered sexual relationships for financial reasons, they rarely admitted that they themselves had these motivations in a sexual relationship. Most women spoke of loving partners who financially supported them, with gifts or financial support being seen as evidence of a partner’s love rather than the reason for being in the relationship. Even women who admitted their motives were primarily financial said that over time they developed emotional attachment and love for their partners. One woman in her 20s admitted about a partner who supported her during a time of financial need, *‘I can say money also contributed a lot that I fell in love with this guy,’* while also explaining that he met her emotional needs when she felt lonely. Another woman in her 20s [revealed the way that motivations in a relationship could change, saying, *‘When we started dating I didn’t expect anything, it was just about his money, but as we continued with our relationship then I started to love him and I wished that he could marry me.’*

Proper behaviour and prohibitions against concurrency

While most participants felt that concurrent sexual partnerships were very common, this does not mean that they agreed this was a good or acceptable way to act. Few women were comfortable with either their own concurrency or that of their partners. One woman in her 20s who acquired a secret lover in reaction to her main partner’s infidelity called it a *‘mistake’* and *‘trying to solve a problem with a problem.’* Those men who reported concurrency and high numbers of sexual partners often expressed ambivalence about these behaviours, alternately speaking as if there was nothing wrong with their behaviour, and expressing a desire to live differently. The following quote from a man in his 20s illustrates this dichotomy:

Participant: I used to have multiple partners at the same time. Even with my current girlfriend I used to cheat in the past. I am trying to be faithful now because I think I have tasted fun [besengibuvile bunandzi] and I am okay.

Interviewer: What do you mean when you say you have tasted fun?

Participant: I do not know, maybe that I have gone around and had sex anyhow and now it is time I have to look for the future, have the mother of my children and marry her... Currently I have one partner and I have limited having multiple partners but truly speaking I have not quit it completely.

Most participants expressed that monogamy was best, even if they themselves were not faithful to their partners. Several participants described a past or hoped for future trajectory from multiple partnering to monogamy, or even that they had adopted monogamy during the period they participated in the research study. The threat of sexually transmitted infections and especially HIV were repeatedly invoked as a reason to be faithful, and some participants reported having a long-standing commitment to faithfulness, in order to avoid HIV. A male participant in his 20s reported, *'Me and my girlfriend went out to a restaurant and we discussed faithfulness. We came up with an agreement that we should continue be faithful to each other to eliminate the chances of contracting HIV.'* Another male participant who was in his 30s had considered acquiring another partner when his partner was away for a length of time, but says he then *'came back to my senses that I am putting my family at risk in these times of HIV,'* and decided against the affair. A recently-married male participant reported having waited until he was married to have sex, and having been faithful to his wife, citing as reasons his Christian faith and a desire to avoid HIV infection.

Discussion

The findings from this research suggest that it is highly normative for young Swazi adults, both men and women, to have multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships, and that women and sometimes men engage in sex with partners they know to have concurrent sexual partnerships. Many participants acknowledged that their behaviours were putting them at risk of HIV, but did not see these behaviours as being abnormal within their social context. Very high-risk patterns of sexual behaviour, including both having multiple and concurrent partners and staying with an unfaithful partner, accompanied by inconsistent condom use, have become normalized to the extent that most participants did not seem to question those norms. To borrow Stoebe et al. and colleague's (2011) observation about southern Africa, people "go on with their regular sex life" despite a very high risk of HIV acquisition, suggesting a normalization of HIV itself.

We also note the power of socialization and social norms in the way that men and women in this research espoused the view that women should be faithful to their sexual partners, while men's concurrency (rooted in a tradition of polygamy) was accepted and even condoned. This acceptance of men's multi-partnering was not universal, however, and some women and even men expressed the view that having multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships was not proper behaviour for men or women. We note a difference between expressed descriptive norms (the behaviours that are believed to be prevalent within a social group) and injunctive norms (the behaviours that are believed to be proper or acceptable within a social group), a difference that has been described by other research of concurrency in southern Africa (Limaye, Babalola, Kennedy & Kerrigan, 2013). Previous qualitative research in Swaziland has found that Swazis (with the exception of young men) feel that

non-marital sexual partnerships are improper and immoral, even while acknowledging that such partnerships are extremely common (NERCHA, 2011).

This paradox between actual and ideal behaviour exists not only at a social level, but at an individual level. Men with multiple sexual partners were particularly likely to express ambivalence about their own sexual behaviours. This tension may be explained by what Siu and colleagues, in their research of Ugandan men, describe as competing forms of masculinity (Siu, Seeley, & Wight, 2013). Men may choose to pursue respectability (adhering to ideal behaviour as defined by the wider society, such as marriage and sexual fidelity), or reputation (expressing a masculinity whose ideals are shaped by a male peer group, and values strength, toughness, and sexual prowess). In this research, some men chose to be faithful to their partners to avoid HIV infection, while others had large numbers of sexual partners to “belong to the crew.” In fact, men may simultaneously pursue both respectability and reputation, leading to the kind of paradoxical statements about behavioural intentions that were seen in this research.

This study supports previous research in southern Africa which has found that men and women often report loving one “main” partner, and having sex without love with other secondary (and concurrent) partners (Parker *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, many of the motivations for concurrency reported in this research have been reported elsewhere, including financial gain, sexual desire, conflicts in a relationship, desire for revenge, and alcohol use (Nkwe & Limwane, 2007; Tawfik & Watkins, 2007; NERCHA, 2011; Townsend, Mathews, & Zembe, 2012; Mah & Maughan-Brown, 2013; Tomori *et al.*, 2013). This study adds to this literature by further exploring the emotional aspects of concurrent sexual relationships, including both motivations for concurrency and emotional responses to a partner’s concurrency, and the links between these (as in the case of reciprocal concurrency).

While previous research on concurrent sexual partnerships has tended to emphasize the exchange of material goods as a motivating factor for such relationships, in our data needs for emotional insurance and assurance were discussed with more depth, nuance and frequency than were material exchanges. While gifts and money were often exchanged within sexual relationships, women in particular described these as proof or signifiers of love, insisting that love and not the gifts motivated the sexual relationship. In only a few cases did women name other motivations, such as the desire for money, gifts, or alcohol. Previous research on transactional sex has typically portrayed women as either victims driven by economic necessity (Wojcicki, 2002; Dunkle *et al.*, 2004; Tomori *et al.*, 2013), or agents actively trying to extract resources from men (Silberschmidt & Rasch, 2001; Hunter, 2002; Cole, 2004; Groes-Green, 2013). Anthropologist Mark Hunter has offered a more nuanced view of the links between economic support and love in South Africa by introducing the concept of “provider love”, and asking us to “take more seriously young South Africans’ assertions that their intimate relationships are, at some level, about love, without dismissing the material realities of life” (Hunter, 2010: 16). Anthropologist Christian Groes-Green similarly argues, based on work in Mozambique, that the exchange of sex and money “traverses every intimate relationship, whether it is momentary and strategic, as in sex work, or steady and long-term, as in marriage” (2013: 114).

It is not easy to untangle emotional from economic incentives, but this research suggests that women understood, or at least chose to represent, their motivations most often to be about love. This finding echoes those of Stoebenau and colleagues, who concluded in their analysis of transactional sexual relationships in Madagascar, Lesotho, and South Africa that “love was the overwhelming narrative for describing the motivation for gift-exchange in the context of sexual relationships” (Stoebenau *et al.*, 2011). Stoebenau and colleagues also suggest that women may shape these narratives in ways that are socially desirable, which we recognize as a very real possibility in this research. By describing their relationships as based on love and not material exchange, women in this research may have been choosing to distance themselves from transactional sex, and present their motivations in ways that they felt were more acceptable to themselves and the interviewer.

This research relied on rich qualitative data from multiple in-depth interviews with a small number of participants. Such an approach has strengths as well as limitations. Repeated interviews allowed for the building of rapport between interviewer and participant, often leading to greater willingness on the part of the participant to freely discuss his or her life story, as well as allowing the researchers to record changes in a participant’s sexual relationships over the course of the interviews. We felt that women in this study were generally more willing to talk candidly, even about painful subjects, than were men. Men may have been less willing to report both their own and their partners’ concurrency due to the stigma associated with having concurrent sexual partnerships, and the shame associated with having a partner cheat. We particularly questioned whether five of the fourteen men in this research could have had only one lifetime sexual partner, as this was not consistent with data from the 2006/7 DHS that only 10.4% of men 20–39 report one lifetime sexual partner, or with the accounts given by women in this study about men’s sexual behaviour. While we found two men’s claims to have had mutually faithful relationships credible based on the fact that they were highly religious or still quite young, the research team, including the Swazi interviewers, had doubts about the veracity of the other three men’s claims.

Notably, this research did not reinforce the conclusion of previous researchers in the region, that women tend to under-report while men tend to over-report number of sexual partners (Nnko, Boerma, Urassa, Mwaluko, & Zaba, 1994). While we have no way to verify the accounts of men or women, the female interviewers generally felt that women were being forthright about their sexual partnerships. Furthermore, while the four men who reported 20 or more lifetime sexual partners may have been over-reporting, we do not feel this is likely, given the fact that they were generally reluctant to report such a high number of sexual partners rather than eager to boast. Men who were in their 30s were particularly reluctant to divulge high numbers of sexual partners and other behaviour (past or present) that they did not feel to be proper. They may have felt it was improper to discuss such behaviours with the male interviewer, who was in his 20s and thus not perceived to be an age-mate. Nevertheless, several men in their 30s did report high numbers of sexual partners.

These concerns notwithstanding, this research may have elicited more accurate data than those that are gathered by close-ended questionnaires about sexual behaviour, such as those carried out by DHS and other large surveys. Although our sample was small and not intended to be generalisable, comparison of our findings to DHS data suggests that men may

be more likely to report high numbers of sexual partners in repeated, in-depth interviews such as those conducted in this study. Four of the fourteen men in this study reported 20 or more sexual partners whereas only 5% of men ages 20–39 surveyed by the 2006/7 DHS did so. Women's reports in this research corresponded more closely to data collected by DHS. In the 2006/7 DHS, 90.6% of women ages 20–39 reported having four or fewer lifetime partners, while eleven of fourteen women in this study reported having four or fewer lifetime partners.

This research also had the advantage of gathering information about *partners'* concurrency, which has typically not been measured in most studies of concurrency. Thus we can frame participants' risk in terms of both their own sexual behaviours and their partners' sexual behaviours, which is more epidemiologically accurate and sheds light on the broader circumstances surrounding individuals' decisions about sexual behaviour. While we relied on participants for information about their partners' concurrency, we believe that these reports were generally credible. Many participants reported firm evidence of their partners' concurrency, such as finding a partner in bed with another person, confronting the other sexual partner, or having a partner verbally confirm having another partner. If participants were misinformed about their partners' behaviours, it is likely that their reports underestimated rather than over-estimated partners' concurrency.

Due to the small sample size and nature of recruitment, participants in this study are not intended to be representative of young Swazi adults as a whole, and the conclusions presented in this article therefore may not be transferrable to other groups, within Swaziland or elsewhere. We do note that many themes that emerged in this research have also been reported among young adults in other regions of Swaziland and southern Africa, suggesting the presence of some shared sexual norms across the region.

Conclusion

Few observers of the HIV epidemic in Swaziland would deny the urgent need for a deeper understanding of the context of sexual relationships, particularly concurrent and other high-risk sexual partnerships. While well-recognized social and structural factors influence and constrain individual's behaviour, our study suggests that the decisions that young Swazi adults make about sexual behaviours are also profoundly emotional in nature. Men in particular may seek sex out of "lust", without emotional attachments, but both men and women describe relationships as being motivated by emotions, especially love. While most if not all sexual relationships involve exchanges of gifts or money, women frequently choose to represent even those relationships which involve substantial financial support as being about love. HIV prevention efforts in this context may benefit from greater consideration of the emotional underpinnings and motivations of relationships, particularly motivations such as revenge or a quest for love and emotional attachment which may lead people to make decisions which increase their risk for HIV.

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Figure 1.
Conceptual models of men's and women's motivations for high-risk sexual partnerships

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of participants

	Men (N = 14)	Women (N = 14)
Age (mean, range)	30.1, 22 – 37	29.0, 21 – 39
Education level		
Primary or less	2 (14%)	1 (7%)
Secondary	9 (64%)	10 (71%)
Tertiary	3 (21%)	3 (21%)
Current relationship or marital status		
Single	0 (0%)	1 (7%)
In a relationship (not cohabiting)	7 (50%)	8 (57%)
Cohabiting	4 (29%)	2 (14%)
Married	3 (21%)	3 (21%)
Place of residence		
Urban	4 (29%)	3 (21%)
Peri-urban	3 (21%)	6 (43%)
Rural	7 (50%)	5 (36%)

Table 2

Reported lifetime number of sexual partners

	Men (N = 14)	Women (N = 14)
1	5 (36%)	0 (0%)
2–4	1 (7%)	11 (79%)
5–9	2 (14%)	2 (14%)
10–19	2 (14%)	1 (7%)
20–29	2 (14%)	0 (0%)
30+	2 (14%)	0 (0%)

Table 3

Concurrency and Partner's Concurrency

	Men (N = 14)	Women (N = 14)
<u>Ever concurrency:</u> Reported ever having had two sexual partners at the same time	8 (57%)	10 (71%)
<u>Current concurrency:</u> Reported currently having two sexual partners at the same time	3 (21%)	5 (36%)
<u>Partner's concurrency:</u> Reported ever having a partner who had another sexual partner at the same time	8 (57%)	14 (100%)