

# Peer acceptance, belonging and self-actualisation among young women – a participatory qualitative enquiry

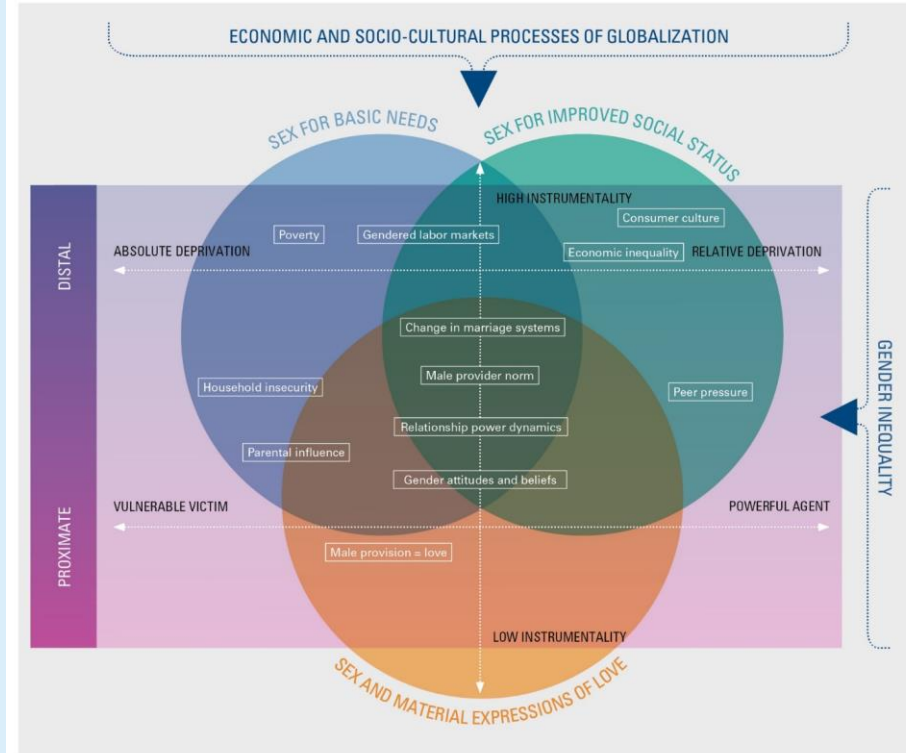
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# Definition and motivations for transactional sex (TS)

- Concept emerged in the 1900s to distinguish formal sex work from more informal exchange-based relationships;
- Defined as: *non-commercial, non-marital* sexual relationships motivated by the *implicit assumption* that sex will be *exchanged for material benefit or status*;
- Wide range of settings in sub-Saharan Africa--Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and South Africa;
- Multiple motivations: sex for basic needs, sex for improved social status & sex for material expressions of love



Stoebenau et al, 2016, Wamoyi et al 2013, 2016, Mojola 2017, Leclerc-Madlala, 2013, Ranganathan 2016, 2017, 2018

# Theoretical underpinnings

- Theories of peer conformity and sense of belonging.
- According to Erik Erikson (1968):
  - *“young people are sometimes morbidly, often curiously, preoccupied with what they appear to be, in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are...”*
- Adolescents **seek conformity** within peer groups – peer influence for neutral behaviours (clothing choices) and risky behaviours (e.g., smoking).
  - Members of the peer group can model their behaviour according to group norms;
  - Peer groups can have significant impact on adolescents’ sense of identity and development.
- **Belonging** is an individual’s perception of his/her acceptance within a social group.
  - Evidence shows that sense of belonging affects adolescent’s mental health, self-esteem and perceptions of others;
  - In Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory (1943) the need to belong preceded in importance only by basic biological needs and a desire for safety.





## Study background and design

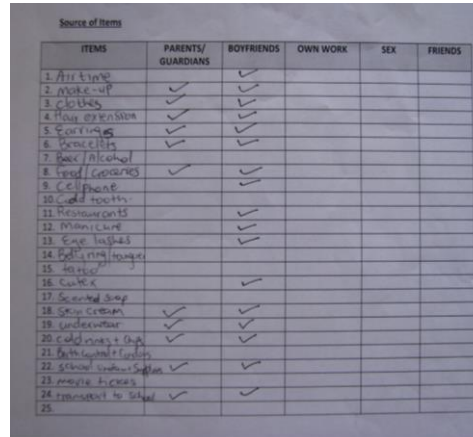
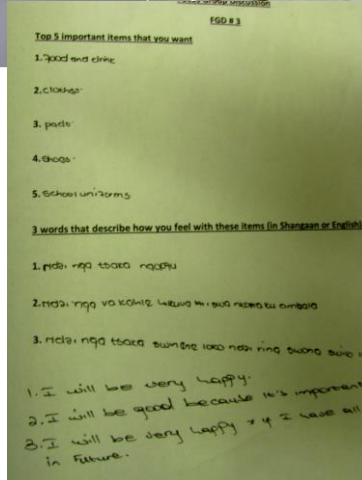
- Qualitative study embedded in the HPTN 068 (Swa Koteka) cash transfer trial in rural South Africa.
- The Agincourt Health and Demographic Surveillance Site (AHDSS) used as sampling platform.
- Eligibility criteria for young women :
  - Young women aged 13-20 years
  - Enrolled in grades 8,9,10 or 11 at one of the schools in the AHDSS area
  - Parent or guardian who lives with young woman and consents to study procedures
  - Having a bank account or post office account
- Five focus group discussions & 19 in-depth interviews.
- For participatory exercise, 35 young women across 5 FGDs.

## Participatory qualitative study to assess 'needs and wants'

## 1. Categorise as needs and wants



### 3. Check strategies for obtaining items



- To help conceptualise needs and wants, 3 exercises with young women:
- First, categorise items consumed as needs (red) and wants (blue)
- Second, rank order top 5 items by personal importance & 3 words to describe how items made them feel
- Third, check the source of items (boyfriends, family, etc)

## 2. Rank order items

# Categorisation of needs and wants

- Needs → items for survival  
Wants → items that are desirable but one can live without it
- Four categories for items:
  - personal enhancement
  - practical
  - expensive
  - entertainment.
- Needs – practical items, some personal enhancement items (perfumes, hair extensions) and some expensive items (clothes and shoes).
- Wants mostly items for personal enhancement and entertainment and expensive items (phones, food)

Groupings	Items	Need	Want
Personal Enhancement Items	Expensive perfume	Need	
	Hair extensions	Need	
	Lingerie (fancy underwear (such as Jockey)	Need	
	Toiletries (scented soap, skin cream, body lotion, powder, roll-on deodorant)	Need	
	Make-up (eyebrow pencil, mascara, false eye lashes, eye liner)		Want
	Cosmetics (Moisturising cream, nail polish (Cutex), skin-brightening cream, lip balm, bag, hair control)		Want
	Salon treatment (hairdressing/hair highlighting, relaxing, dyeing, manicure, waxing)		Want
	Accessories (watches/handbag)		Want
	Jewellery (bracelets, earrings, necklace, gold tooth)		Want
	Body piercings (belly-ring, nose-ring, tongue-ring, tattoo)		Want
Practical Items	Clothes	Need	
	Ordinary cell phone and airtime	Need	
	Shoes	Need	
	Female items (underwear, sanitary pads)	Need	
	Food, groceries	Need	
	School uniforms/supplies	Need	
	Transport to school/work	Need	
	Birth control/condoms	Need	
Expensive Items	Expensive clothes (skinny jeans, hlokolozu (mini skirt), tekies (trainers), branded clothes)	Need	
	Fancy shoes (high heels, Carvela (expensive Italian branded shoes)	Need	
	Expensive phones (blackberry/camera phone/Nokia/x2)		Want
Entertainment/leisure	Expensive foods (chocolate, yoghurt, grapes, restaurant)		Want
	Beer/alcohol		Want
	Cold drinks and chips, Ultramel (ready-made custard), Lays (potato crisps)		Want
	Movies/music and travelling		Want
	Pocket money		Want

# Young women's perceptions of needs and wants

**Many 'needs' appeared to be more about the need to conform or the need to boost status.**

*'Perfume is attractive to me because when I smell it from someone smelling good, then tell myself that it's an expensive perfume, so that is why it becomes attractive to me'*

*FGD, girls aged 18-21 high SES*

**Food and nice uniforms perceived as necessary to avoid being teased and feeling humiliated than as barriers to school attendance.**

*I: What happens if you do not have one of the items that you need?*

*P: Like school uniform, I won't go to school without enough uniform. And when I wear a skirt that is tearing and then my friends laugh at me.*

*FGD, girls aged 18-21 low SES*

**Items classified as 'wants' appear to be in order to identify with certain role models within peer groups**

*P1: Even if you can bathe and wear nice clothes but if you didn't put make-up aah...you are not really (another peer's name]*

*P2: It is just because most young women nowadays.. they like fashion.. that is why if you don't have make-up you will not feel good. FGD, girls aged 18-21, high SES*

# Meanings attached to items

## Reasons given for needing items were:

- to survive (*“as we need food and clothes to survive”*),
- to look and feel attractive (*“I want to be someone who looks cute to people”*),
- to feel accepted (*“to be part of the group - to wear similar clothes, have the same hairstyle and wear the same earrings as friends”*)

## Feelings associated with items (needs or wants)

*“would be very happy”, “be proud”, “feel safe with food and school uniforms”, “feel like other people” “feel thankful”, “feel recognised by others” “feel like life would go smoothly”, “feel important”, “will feel like others”, “feel comfortable”, “will feel happy and at peace”, “will feel respected and life will be simple and easy”*



# Blurry distinction between needs and wants

Perception of **need** rather than an **actual need** is important.

*P2: Blackberry is too expensive and I'm still a school child, and parents cannot afford to buy me Blackberry. I will be fine if I can have cell phone worth R150 (\$9). The most important thing is to communicate.*

*P3: It is necessary to have Blackberry, because you will chat for free on Facebook and BBM.*

*P1: It is not necessary because even if you don't chat it doesn't mean that you are not a human being.*

*P3: That is why I said my need is not your need.*

*FGD, girls ages 18-21, high SES*

Motivations include materialistic desires and **pressure to conform to peer group expectations** of being symbols of sophistication

*P: [I want these expensive clothes] because they are needed and that everyone wish they can have it...that if I found myself having this I will be 'the' person among the people and when people see me coming from there they will turn their heads and look at me.....*

*IDI, aged 20y*

# Strategies for accessing items

- Parents appear to be a source for items that are considered practical.
- When parents are unwilling to 'indulge' or provide an extra allowance for fancier items, young women appear to enter into relationships or in some cases odd jobs or friends help with money.

*P2: Some ask from friends or relatives.*

*P3: And some their boyfriends pay for them.*

*P2: And some they look for jobs like go to a certain household and ask to sweep the yard and then when they pay you R50 (~£3) you can be able to buy a skirt.*

*FGD, low SES*

- Relationships appear as a steady conduit for the flow of money or gifts -- almost all young women appear to have at least one boyfriend providing them with gifts or money.

# Overall takeaway: Motivations to acquire items extend beyond basic and consumption needs to fulfil higher order needs

- Maslow's hierarchy of needs framework -- notions of survival extend beyond biological & physiological needs (food, clothing, shelter)
  - Hierarchical approach does not apply;
  - The need for belongingness within their peer group, as well as the need to fulfil their status and esteem needs are perceived to be essential to their survival;
- In situations of extreme poverty, unstable household structure, scarce economic opportunities, young women have admitted needs (practical items) and then hidden gendered needs that are wants and aspirations.
  - Hidden needs (expensive clothes, make-up, cosmetics) play a pivotal role in young women's quest for feeling attractive, achieving happiness & feeling successful.
- Hence classification of items as a need and a want are arbitrary -- motivations for accessing such items are not driven merely by survival or consumerism.
- Motivations driven by higher order needs such as: the need to belong, being accepted within peer groups, having higher self esteem and the need to boost status that are significant for self-actualisation among rural young women.

A photograph showing the lower half of a person, specifically their legs and feet. They are wearing a light blue denim skirt with a ruffled hem and black high-heeled pumps with a textured upper and a shiny toe cap. The person is standing on a light-colored, possibly concrete, floor.

## THANK YOU & SOME CITATIONS

- Slide 1, 3 and 10: © [Meghna Ranganathan](#)
- Stoebenau K, et al. Revisiting the understanding of “transactional sex” in sub-Saharan Africa: a review and synthesis of the literature. Soc Sci Med. 2016;168:186–97
- Wamoyi et al (2016). Transactional sex and risk for HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis. J Int AIDS Soc.;19(1):2099
- Mojola S. Love, money, and HIV: becoming a modern African woman in the age of AIDS. Oakland: University of California Press; 2014.
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- Ranganathan et al (2018) *‘It’s because I like things... it’s a status and he buys me airtime’*: exploring the role of transactional sex in young women’s consumption patterns in rural South Africa (secondary findings from HPTN 068) Reproductive Health. 15:102
- Ranganathan et al (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.