



Looking for the one(s): young love and urban poverty in The Gambia

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The title for this paper draws on a sub-title used in Chant, Sylvia (2011 forthcoming), "Youth and sexuality", in Gareth Jones, Sylvia Chant, Katherine Brickell and Sarah Thomas de Benítez, *Bringing Youth into Development*, Zed Press, London.

ABSTRACT This paper explores the strategic use of sexual relationships in bolstering the economic well-being of young low-income women and men in The Gambia, West Africa. While other studies of sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond have demonstrated the importance of intimate (and often cross-generational) relationships for young women as a means of accessing resources, less is known in this regard about their male counterparts. This study points to the increasingly prominent place of cross-generational relationships, related to international tourism, in the livelihood strategies of young men struggling for employment in a constrained labour market. For poor young Gambian women and men, resource scarcity seems to be associated with a prioritization of the instrumental and material over the affective or recreational value of sexual partnerships, often resulting in multiple, concurrent relations. However, manifold considerations come into play in the relationship decisions of young women and men, indicating the importance of close attention to social and cultural as well as economic factors.

KEYWORDS cross-generational relationships / gender / international tourism / sexuality / The Gambia / urban poverty

I. INTRODUCTION

When access to resources is limited, relationships with those who do have access are likely to assume more importance. Sexual relationships – often with more than one partner at a time – are one such means of supplementing livelihood options, as evidenced in research among poor urban young women and men in The Gambia. Looking for the one(s) who can fulfill various basic survival needs and/or aspirations for socioeconomic (and geographic) mobility is significant, even if relationship decisions and behaviours are also driven by other factors such as physical attraction, pleasure, emotional satisfaction, gendered norms and identities, kin-based expectations, concerns for social respect (from parents as well as peers), and marital prospects. While a multiplicity of interests affect the formation of sexual partnerships beyond, as well as within, The Gambia,⁽¹⁾ we are also eminently aware of the need to avoid the traditional oppositional dichotomy of "economic interests" and "emotional attachment" that has frequently characterized historical and contemporary writings about African sexuality and intimacy from a Eurocentric perspective. Thomas and Cole, for example, note that Western

researchers who have documented sex as a means of economic survival in African settings have often missed the "...subtle and ubiquitous intertwining of emotions and materiality",⁽²⁾ which in the context of invidious relativist comparisons has, at its logical extreme, tended to dismiss the presence of sentiment in sexual exchanges, and to stigmatize African intimacy. As summarized by Helle-Valle,⁽³⁾ the common Western privileging of "...romantic love and/or personal pleasure (physical and psychological)..." as "...the 'proper' motives for engaging in sex...", has led to a gaze on African intimate relationships whereby "...strategic, materially oriented uses of sexuality are strictly tabooed – being forcefully embodied in our image of 'the prostitute'." This is despite the fact that the term "transactional sex" was coined precisely to distinguish sexual relations involving material exchange from "prostitution".⁽⁴⁾

With these considerations in mind, we draw on primary fieldwork in The Gambia to illustrate how young love is negotiated in the context of urban poverty, and how it is often differentiated on the basis of gender. Consonant with findings from other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, young women's premarital relationships and marriage decisions are frequently driven by motives of economic support that often push them into unions with older men ("sugar daddies"). The terms of courtship with such men may be considerably more favourable than often turns out to be the case in practice within marriage. However, while it may be true that "girls" (as unmarried females are called in The Gambia) are disadvantaged in terms of education and employment compared with their male peers, the latter are no less needy or desirous of income – indeed, their families often prioritize their advancement in anticipation of returns. However, when jobs are scarce, young men are unable to live up to expectations. They can neither fulfill family obligations nor attract committed partners. In a situation of urban poverty, young women tend to sideline poor young men for reasons pertaining to social respect and economic security. Thus, gendered socialization needs to be regarded as influencing men's as well as women's sexual subjectivities and behaviours.

In the particular context of The Gambia, inadequate employment opportunities coupled with severe restrictions on emigration to "Babylon" (a colloquial Gambian term referring to the Global North, especially Europe) have underlined the importance of another kind of sexual strategy for which opportunities have flourished in the wake of international tourism development. To secure economic advancement through overseas migration or remittances and social respect at home, young Gambian men often cultivate relationships with older foreign female (and sometimes male⁽⁵⁾) visitors. In the absence of viable economic alternatives, international and inter-generational sexual relationships are often perceived as highly desirable.

II. METHODOLOGY

Our discussions on the inter-relations between young love and urban poverty are based on findings from a study conducted in 2008 and 2009 in Greater Banjul, the main metropolitan area of The Gambia. In-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions were held with a total of 65 young women and men, 60 of whom were aged 30 or under. Most were in low-income occupations or unemployed and were selected

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1. See Moore, Henrietta (2010), "Subjectivity, sexuality and social inequalities", in Sylvia Chant (editor), *International Handbook of Gender and Poverty: Concepts, Research, Policy*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, pages 35–40; also Cole, Jennifer (2009), "Love, money and economies of intimacy in Tamatave, Madagascar", in Jennifer Cole and Lynn M Thomas (editors), *Love in Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pages 109–134; Thomas, Lynn M and Jennifer Cole (2009), "Thinking through love in Africa", in Jennifer Cole and Lynn M Thomas (editors), *Love in Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pages 1–30; and Smith, Daniel Jordan (2009), "Managing men, marriage and modern love: women's perspectives on intimacy and male infidelity in southeastern Nigeria", in Jennifer Cole and Lynn M Thomas (editors), *Love in Africa*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pages 157–80.

2. See reference 1, Thomas and Cole (2009), page 24.

3. Helle-Valle, Jo (2006), "Understanding sexuality in Africa: diversity and contextualized dividuality", in Signe Arnfred (editor), *Rethinking Sexualities in Africa*, 2nd edition, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, pages 195–210.

4. See reference 1, Thomas and Cole (2009), page 9.

5. We did not find direct evidence of this in our own survey (see next section), so are omitting discussion of same-sex, international, cross-generational relationships here (see also Chant, Sylvia (2011 forthcoming), "Youth and sexuality", in Gareth Jones, Sylvia Chant, Katherine Brickell and Sarah Thomas de Benítez (editors), *Bringing Youth into Development*, Zed Press, London. Note also that we found scant evidence of young Gambian women with older foreign men, possibly

because our sample included a wide range of young people rather than being dedicated merely to those who made their main living out of sex work. Indeed, the phenomenon of partnerships between young Gambian women and older foreign men is also discussed less in the literature except in the context of child prostitution (see Bijnisdorp, Mireille and Michael Montgomery (2003), "Gambia... the smiling coast: a study of child sex tourism in The Gambia and the involvement of Dutch tourists", Child Protection Alliance/The Hague: Terre des Hommes, Netherlands, Bakau). One plausible reason for limited coverage in the literature of Gambian female-foreign male relationships is because such relationships are viewed as "normal" or "expected" and, as such, less remarkable than others. We are grateful to Katja Jassey for drawing our attention to this last point.

6. Chant, Sylvia and Gareth A Jones (2005), "Youth, gender and livelihoods in West Africa: perspectives from Ghana and The Gambia", *Children's Geographies* Vol 3, No 2, pages 185-199; also Chant, Sylvia (2007), *Gender, Generation and Poverty: Exploring the "Feminization of Poverty" in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 428 pages; and Chant, Sylvia and Gareth A Jones (2009), "Globalizing initiatives for gender equality and poverty reduction: exploring 'failure' with reference to education and work among urban youth in The Gambia and Ghana", *Geoforum* Vol 40, No 2, pages 184-196.

7. Thanks to David Ansari for drawing attention to the need to edit lightly in order to convey sense in some instances.

8. World Bank (2009), "The Gambia: country brief", World Bank, Washington DC, accessed 12 April 2010 at <http://go.worldbank.org/ZFRMVB5M0>.

9. United Nations Development Programme (2009), *2009 Human Development Report: Gambia*, Human Development Report Office, UNDP, New York, accessed 12 April 2010 at

on the basis either of their involvement in earlier research⁽⁶⁾ or on our independent social interactions in The Gambia (for example, meetings at homes, markets, social events) rather than via a random sampling frame. Additional perspectives on sexuality were sought from a small group of older individuals to garner a sense of how norms and practices had changed over time. Supplementary background consultations were held with medical doctors, NGO personnel, representatives of international agencies and other local professionals and cultural experts. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. We have left extracts unaltered or minimally edited to maintain authenticity,⁽⁷⁾ although pseudonyms have been used to preserve anonymity.

III. POVERTY

In The Gambia, a small, predominantly agricultural country, despite considerable recent urbanization young love is negotiated in context of widespread poverty. The Gambia's gross national income per capita is US\$ 320⁽⁸⁾ and its Human Development Index rank is 168th out of 182.⁽⁹⁾ The urban poverty headcount rose from 40 per cent in 1992 to 57 per cent in 2003.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the major metropolitan areas of Banjul and Kanifing, 46 per cent of households are food insecure.⁽¹¹⁾ Jobs are scarce (urban youth unemployment is estimated at 22 per cent⁽¹²⁾) and "decent work" less accessible still. The Gambia is unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goal of halving income poverty by 2015.⁽¹³⁾ The global financial crisis has made national economic growth and urban livelihoods increasingly precarious due to fewer tourist arrivals, lower remittances and a declining re-export trade.⁽¹⁴⁾ As summarized by Nyanzi: "*In The Gambia, successful livelihoods among youths are challenged by unemployment, underemployment, low employability due to limited skills, early school dropout, high inflation rates and fledgling groundnut prices.*"⁽¹⁵⁾

IV. SAFETY NETS AND SEXUALITY

While it is often supposed that kin provide safety nets,⁽¹⁶⁾ and indeed consanguineal and affinal relatives in The Gambia are rarely denied the opportunity to share meals or stop-gap accommodation, support of a more substantial or permanent nature may be virtually impossible where people belong to the large cohort of long-term poor. Since "everyone is suffering" (as Ndey, an unemployed 23-year old single mother observed), few have surplus to redistribute. Furthermore, direct requests, especially for money, are regarded as somewhat "shameful", especially when they extend beyond parents and siblings. This is partly because respect is a critical goal in inter-personal relations. Repeated "begging", especially for resources of any magnitude, prejudices the regard in which those soliciting favours are held. Requests may not always be kept private by donors, which poses the threat of gossip or back-biting, leading ultimately to humiliation and damaged self-esteem for those seeking help. For young men in particular, who according to local norms should be providing for their kin rather than being provided for, soliciting assistance can be tantamount to an admission of their failure to live up to masculine ideals.

Sexual relationships offer something of an alternative, partly because resource transfers are regarded as an integral aspect of wooing one's partner(s) and making an effort to please them, especially in the context of male behaviour towards women. And in the case of young men who form relationships with wealthier women from other countries, the endemic poverty of The Gambia can be used to evoke a diffuse "pity", which justifies men's need for financial and other assistance but also "saves face" through sparing them from forced disclosure of personal failings or disadvantage.

V. GENDER DIMENSIONS OF ACCESS TO ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Many discussions of sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa emphasize that because income poverty is feminized, it is young women rather than young men who pursue sexual relationships for economic gain.⁽¹⁷⁾ The initial premise, at least, may be true in the Gambian context. Professionals in government, international development agencies and NGOs maintain that women suffer disproportionately from income poverty, even if there are insufficient sex-disaggregated data to substantiate the claim.⁽¹⁸⁾ There is evidence, however, that ideals of men as breadwinners and women as home makers lead parents to prioritize boys' education.⁽¹⁹⁾ Female literacy and net primary enrolment rates thus lag behind those of their male counterparts.⁽²⁰⁾ Furthermore, even when education is equivalent employers discriminate on the basis of gender. Thus women are disproportionately concentrated in low-paid informal work.⁽²¹⁾ Women are also severely disadvantaged in access to, and command over, property, which limits their possibilities for operating independent small-scale businesses. Last but not least, young women face even more barriers to international immigration than their male counterparts. Although sex-disaggregated statistics on international migration from The Gambia are not available, the sex ratio in the 15 to 64 age group is only 0.98 males per one female. This compares with a masculinized sex ratio at birth of 1.03, of 1.01 under the age of 15, and an overall ratio of 1:1. Despite women's slightly longer life expectancy (57 compared to 54), the sex ratio in the 65-plus cohort is even, at 1:1.⁽²²⁾ This suggests that "missing men" in the 15 to 64 age group may be accounted for partly by male-biased diasporic movement.

While young women may have less access to economic resources than their male peers, the latter's need for income can be equally if not more pronounced, given that young men's social respect is largely contingent upon providing for their natal (as well as conjugal) kin. Even though most parents accordingly prioritize the education of sons, this by no means guarantees them access to employment.⁽²³⁾ Aspirations and expectations of progress are rarely fulfilled.⁽²⁴⁾ Although men may have an edge over women in the labour market, economic satisfaction can remain elusive. With the demands of their families weighing heavily on their shoulders, men in The Gambia also regard relationships as a means of procuring resources. Despite the conventional tendency to focus solely on male-to-female resource transfers,⁽²⁵⁾ our research reveals that young men as well as young women in The Gambia have an incentive, as well as the opportunity, to access material benefits through sexual liaisons.

http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_GMB.html.

10. Department of State for Finance and Economic Affairs (DOSFEA) (2006), *Poverty Reduction Strategy: 2007–2011*, Republic of The Gambia, Department of State for Finance and Economic Affairs, Banjul, page 26.

11. National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) (2009), "Food vulnerability in the urban areas of Banjul and Kanifing municipality", National Nutrition Agency, Government of The Gambia, Banjul.

12. Heintz, James, Carlos Oya and Eduardo Zepeda (2008), "Towards an employment-centred development strategy for poverty reduction in The Gambia: macroeconomic and labour market aspects", Country Study No 16, International Poverty Centre in cooperation with Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Brasilia, page 23.

13. International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2009), "The Gambia: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, annual progress report, Joint Staff Advisory note", IMF Country Report No 09/76, International Monetary Fund, Washington DC, page 4.

14. See reference 8.

15. Nyanzi, Stella (2010), "Ghettoization, migration or sexual connection? Negotiating survival among Gambian male youths", in Sylvia Chant (editor), *International Handbook of Gender and Poverty: Concepts, Research, Policy*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, page 207.

16. Cox, Donald and Emmanuel Jiménez (1990), "Achieving social objectives through private transfers: a review", *The World Bank Research Observer* Vol 5, No 2, pages 205–218.

17. Campbell, Catherine and Andrew Gibbs (2010), "Gender, poverty and AIDS: perspectives with particular reference to sub-Saharan Africa", in Sylvia Chant (editor), *International Handbook of Gender and Poverty: Concepts, Research, Policy*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, pages 327–332; also Madise, Nyovani, Eliya Zulu and James Ciera (2007), "is

poverty a driver for risky sexual behaviour? Evidence from national surveys of adolescents in four African countries", *African Journal of Reproductive Health* Vol 11, No 3, pages 83–98.

18. See reference 6, Chant (2007).

19. See reference 6, Chant and Jones (2005); also Jah, Omar (2007), "Women and Islam: a case study of The Gambia", ActionAid The Gambia, Kanifing; also Touray, Isatou (2006), "Sexuality and women's sexual rights in The Gambia", *IDS Bulletin* Vol 27, No 5, page 78.

20. Touray, Katim, Cherno Jallow and Burama Jammeh with the assistance of Emily Sarr (2005), "Reaching out to the people: a review of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the local level in The Gambia", Policy Analysis Unit of the Office of the President, Government of The Gambia, Banjul, pages 8, 12, 13; also Statehouse The Gambia (2007), "Budget speech 2007", Statehouse, Banjul; and see reference 12, page 29.

21. See reference 6, Chant (2007); also see reference 6, Chant and Jones (2009); see reference 12; Chant, Sylvia (2011 forthcoming), "Youth and employment", in Gareth A Jones, Sylvia Chant, Katherine Brickell and Sarah Thomas de Benitez (editors) (forthcoming), *Bringing Youth into Development*, Zed Press, London; and Williams, Emma Ann (2010), "The role of education in transitions to womanhood: the case of The Gambia", unpublished MPhil dissertation, Department of Geography, Coventry University.

22. Central Intelligence Agency (2010), *World Factbook*, accessed 26 May 2010 at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2018.html>.

23. See reference 21, Chant (2011 forthcoming); also see reference 6, Chant (2007), pages 184–196.

24. See reference 21, Chant (2011 forthcoming); also Jeffrey, Craig (2008), "Generation nowhere: rethinking youth through the lens of unemployed young men",

VI. COURTSHIP, MARRIAGE AND PREMARITAL SEXUAL RELATIONS

As suggested above, short-term financial returns are not the only factor motivating intimate relations among youth. Another major element is the incentive to find a desirable spouse. Given the importance of marriage in conferring social respect and the status of full adulthood upon women and men in The Gambia,⁽²⁶⁾ the vast majority of youth express a desire to be married, even if the expectation that husbands should provide wives with accommodation means that men can (and indeed are often forced to) delay marriage until as late as 40. Premarital dating enables informed selection. This is perhaps especially critical for women who are anxious to choose wisely given that they will have minimal negotiating power as wives, that divorce is strongly condemned, and that they, unlike men, lack the socially sanctioned option of polygamy. Most young women maintain that they are looking for someone who is respectful, hard-working and caring, which is not to say that all are in a position to choose their husbands. Some, especially from the Fula and Mandinka groups, are married off quickly or forced to wed relatives or family friends, both to improve household financial security and to strengthen kin cohesion.⁽²⁷⁾ Keen to maintain family peace, social respect and economic security, many young women succumb to arranged marriages. Some contend that the prevalence of arranged marriages is in decline. According to Kadijatou (aged 21), for instance: "*Nowadays changes are coming... people are having different styles, the children are disobeying their parents to marry their real love.*" However, what happens in practice often proves rather different. Indeed, when Kadijatou was asked whether her parents might allow her to marry outside her ethnic group, she conceded that "*...they would refuse because [in] their culture you must marry a Serahule*" (this particular ethnic group is frequently noted as subscribing strongly to endogamy).

Although the vast majority of Gambian women marry young (53 per cent by the age of 20, with the median age at marriage being only 17 in 2006⁽²⁸⁾), premarital relations, which for some young girls commence shortly after menarche, can be pleasurable and rewarding for other reasons. For example, possibly because men are less secure with girlfriends than wives, they tend to show greater appreciation and do more for the former. Indeed, even if men are already married, perhaps to more than one wife (around 40 per cent of marriages in the country are polygamous), or have more than one girlfriend, the latter tend not to know about the other women in men's lives (except the spouses, whom they disregard), and as such feel more special and better romanced. Nor do girlfriends have to perform the domestic chores that fall to wives, even if they may prepare culinary treats as an indication of their domestic prowess and promise. Men also tend to be less controlling with girlfriends in terms of how they dress, where they go and what they do for a living. Such differences are partly because there are no established authoritative codes governing premarital dating and because, due to social and religious opprobrium, dating is largely discreet. Although there is often tacit acceptance by older people that premarital relationships can provide economic opportunities for the family and wider kin group, they do not tend to intervene in courtships to the same extent as in marriages, where in-laws can often enforce young women's subservience. Last but not least is the reality of

sexual double standards. Polygyny before and after wedlock is widely tolerated, but women risk serious censure, if not divorce, as a result of extra-marital relations. This means that premarital dating provides a unique opportunity, where “looking for the one” may involve looking for more than one relationship at a time, as discussed in further detail below.

VII. FACTORS DISCOURAGING PREMARITAL SEXUAL RELATIONS

Despite the window of opportunity for young urban women provided by premarital courtships, virginity remains highly valued by families. For a young woman to respond precociously to amorous overtures would jeopardize respect from her admirers and society at large.⁽²⁹⁾ Open female promiscuity is condemned and fear of humiliation instills compliance. Public shaming by boyfriends is not uncommon, as described by John, a 35-year old unmarried wood carver:

“You know some boys here, they used to fuck girls here and embarrass you [the girl], insult you, do bad things, insulting you, insult your parents... [they say]: ‘You are a prostitute’, in front of people.”

This trend was also noted by one of our female interviewees, Anne Marie, an 18-year old schoolgirl:

“They go and sit at the road. When you passing, they say: ‘Hey, I was having sex with this girl.’ They will say many things about you.”

Similarly in marriage:

“If you get small problem with your husband, your husband used [i.e. is accustomed] to say to you: ‘You are not a virgin by the time I meet you. I don’t even see nothing, you go and give yourself to boys’, and that will pain you... people will hear that. It’s not good, it’s not good.”

Mindful of these public pressures, young women tend to be very secretive about their sexual liaisons, even if some parents accept the idea of boyfriends. But most disastrous of all is the damning evidence of premarital sexuality: pregnancy. This may shame the girl to the extent that it not only derails her own marriage prospects but also those of her sisters. While some young men wed their pregnant partners, the majority do not. Similarly, although family members may support their daughters to bring up children, sometimes by caring for their progeny themselves, not all of them do. This can lead girls to abandon babies at hospitals or on the steps of the Department of Social Welfare (“baby dumping”), or try to kill them, or turn to prostitution to cover costs.⁽³⁰⁾ Wary of such risks, and in a context where parents generally discourage sex among their unmarried daughters, some mothers actively advise the latter on birth control, especially if they themselves have been exposed to reproductive and sexual health awareness programmes.⁽³¹⁾

Exhortations to observe sexual restraint may be more common for young women but are not entirely one-sided. Male elders also encourage young men to refrain from sexual relations where marriage is not on the cards as this flouts the principles of Islam, the reported religion of more than 90 per cent of the population. As Omar, a 27-year old cloth

Progress in Human Geography Vol 32, No 6, pages 739–758; and Mains, Daniel (2007), “Neoliberal times: progress, boredom and shame among young men in urban Ethiopia”, *American Ethnologist* Vol 34, No 4, pages 659–673.

25. See reference 17, Madise et al. (2007); also Global Health Council and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation (GHC/WAFHF) (2004), “Commitments: youth reproductive health, the World Bank and the Millennium Development Goals”, GHC/WAFHF, Washington DC; Maticka-Tyndale, Eleanor, Melanie Gallant, Chris Brouillard-Coyle, Dan Holland, Karen Metcalfe, Janet Wildish and Mary Gichuru (2005), “The sexual scripts of Kenyan young people and HIV prevention”, *Culture, Health and Sexuality* Vol 7, No 1, page 37; and Weiser, Sheri, Karen Leiter, David Bangsberg, Lisa Butler, Fiona Percy-de Korte, Zakhe Hlanze, Nthabiseng Phaladze, Vincent Iacopino and Michele Heisler (2007), “Food insufficiency is associated with high-risk sexual behaviour among women in Botswana and Swaziland”, *PLOS Medicine* Vol 4, No 10, pages 1589–1598.

26. See also Skramstad, Heidi (2008), “Making and managing femaleness, fertility and motherhood within a Gambian urban area”, unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, page 111.

27. See reference 5, Chant (2011 forthcoming).

28. See Gambia Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (GCEDAW) (2006), *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 4th Periodic Report of The Gambia, June 2006*, Second draft, GCEDAW, Banjul, page 53; also Taal, A B S (2003), “Youth culture tackling poverty and promoting sustainable development through multi-sectoral approach in The Gambia”, SPACO, Banjul, page 27.

29. See reference 6, Chant (2007); also see reference 19, Jah (2007); and see reference 20, Touray et al. (2005).

30. See reference 5, Chant (2011 forthcoming).

31. See reference 5, Chant (2011 forthcoming).

32. See reference 1, Cole (2009); also see reference 1, Smith (2009); Ankomah, Augustine (2004), "Ghana", in Robert Francoeur and Raymond Noonan (editors), *The Continuum Complete International Encyclopaedia of Sexuality on the Web*, Continuum, New York, pages 467–478; Ansari, David and Allyn Gaestel (2010 forthcoming), "Senegalese religious leaders' perceptions of HIV/AIDS and implications for challenging stigma and discrimination", *Culture, Health and Sexuality*; Bajaj, Monisha (2008), "Schooling in the shadow of death: youth, agency and HIV/AIDS in Zambia", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* Vol 43, No 3, pages 307–329; Karlyn, Andrew (2005), "Intimacy revealed: sexual experimentation and the construction of risk among young people in Mozambique", *Culture, Health and Sexuality* Vol 7, No 3, pages 279–292; Glover, Evam Kofi, Angela Bannerman, Brian Wells Pence, Heidi Jones, Robert Miller, Eugene Weiss and Joana Nerquaye-Tetteh (2003), "Sexual health experiences of adolescents in three Ghanaian towns", *International Family Planning Perspectives* Vol 29, No 1, pages 32–40; Jassey, Katja (2005), "In the eyes of the beholder: male and

trader, put it: "...in some compounds [homes], if you bring your girlfriend, man, you have hell... they will hate you... insult you... girlfriends aren't allowed in our society, frankly." Against this socio-religious backdrop, few male participants admit to actively pursuing sexual experimentation with short-term partners. Instead, virtually all stress they want a "serious" (i.e. committed, modest, respectful and long-term) girlfriend. However, with time, trust and the narration of life histories, it became apparent that not all girlfriends are sought as marriage material. Some relationships are primarily for sexual satisfaction, as well as to serve as evidence of masculine pride and prowess to other males.

To facilitate sexual relations in a context where young women have much to lose, especially in terms of social respect, gifts are presented as economic incentives as well as symbols of affection.

VIII. SEXUAL EXCHANGE

Among young Gambians who enter into premarital sexual relationships, the practice of gift-giving (henceforth "sexual exchange") appears to be as well established as it is in many other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly where there are age and wealth disparities between partners.⁽³²⁾

There are many reasons and precedents for sexual exchange. In non-sexual as well as sexual relationships, "caring for someone" (be it a parent, sibling, partner or friend) means helping them financially.⁽³³⁾ As Ramatoulie, a 22-year old hairdresser moving on from a long-term relationship explained: "If you love someone, you have to spend." Momodou, a 26-year old taxi driver, similarly maintained that: "I like to spend for my girlfriend... just to show her that I love her, even not that, I like to help her, you know."

Although the flow of gifts is generally from men to women, the reverse is also true. Even if the biggest female-to-male resource transfers tend to occur in the context of "bumster-toubab" (Gambian-white foreigner) relationships, as discussed below, this is by no means unknown in other intimate partnerships. For example, one of our male respondents, Mohammed (a 24-year old who in order to "get by" works intermittently as a chef, electrician and plumber), reported that his girlfriend used to allocate him half of the money her parents gave her for school: "This is the most thing I like, that's why I like, because she did so many favour for me, you know."

Where both partners are poor, gifts are typically quite modest – body lotion, mobile phone credit (which enables one's beloved to text back and arrange liaisons), a taxi fare or a soft drink. The gesture itself is usually appreciated if the young man in question is in straitened circumstances.⁽³⁴⁾ By the same token, the bigger and more frequent the gifts, the greater the likelihood that the relationship will become stronger and more enduring, especially from the perspective of the primary recipient.

Although the economic dynamics of relationships can be uppermost, they are usually played down in favour of caring and emotional discourses. Indeed, pursuit of partners with the sole purpose of financial benefit – and in exchange for sexual favours – is, unsurprisingly, rarely articulated or celebrated in such stark terms. For example, if one's "boyfriend" is a financially well-off older man ("sugar daddy"), a girl tends to protest that she loves him and resolutely denies that she, unlike "other girls", gives

sex out of pecuniary motives, even if she knows her friends really know through their giggling or quiet raising of the eyebrows. A similar form of "double-speak" is showcased in other instances, such as with Mam, a 22-year old unemployed woman. On being asked about the importance of the financial dimensions of relationships, Mam maintained that: "*Money isn't important, all I want is love and care, a man who will love and care for you... he can be poor.*" Yet when Tobaski (the most important festival of the Islamic year) came and Mam's boyfriend did not buy her new clothes and shoes, she was infuriated. The relationship has since ended.

Mam's reaction may stem from the symbolic value of gifts in representing the extent of a partner's affection. For example, Ngeer, the 24-year old unemployed daughter of an *alkalo* (village chief), claimed she knew her boyfriend truly loved her "...because he give me a phone – a V3." A suitor's love is also taken as evident if he engages in other substantial expenditure such as paying for a girlfriend's school fees or buying her elaborate garments for special occasions such as naming ceremonies.

Demonstrating love, in turn, is among the major reasons motivating male gift-giving, with proof of masculine power and potential for provision constituting another important element. Hadim, a 28-year old teacher trying to earn enough so that he can provide for, and thereby marry, his fiancée, explained: "*Pride will not allow you to be seeing your girlfriend every day or every time and that she needs something and that you cannot at least solve one or two problems of hers [...] you will have to give her something to solve her problems.*" By solving present-day problems, men simultaneously indicate their commitment and capacity to take care of future wives.

Another important reason for gift-giving is to overcome girlfriends' resistance to sexual intercourse,⁽³⁵⁾ either by (falsely) conveying emotional commitment (using the symbolic value of gifts) or by direct financial incentive.

Suspecting that men may be motivated by the expectation of sexual favours, some young women do not accept money or gifts. They may be anxious about the consequences of accepting money, either because this would suggest that their motives were not "pure", or because of concerns about losing their virginity or their reputation for "seriousness". As Anne Marie explained:

"When the boy [...] keep on giving me money every day, one day he will [...] tell me: 'I want to sleep with you, you eating my money, every time, can't you sleep with me?' You refuse, he'll just force me ... When they're giving you money they want something in return."

This was echoed by young men, such as Ibrahim, a 22-year old hotel cabaret performer:

"When you know man give you [girlfriend] money every time, you know he also expect something from you, he also beg you something, so, and you will feel shy to deny."

Ibrahim further explained that if a girlfriend does not reciprocate with sexual attentions, her expectant boyfriend may force her to comply:

"When you know man always give you [girlfriend] money, but still she will not give you any chance to have her... So, some, that makes them to... because he spend always, she don't spend."

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33. See reference 1, Cole and Thomas (editors) (2009); also Nyanzi, Stella, Robert Pool and John Kinsman (2001), "The negotiation of sexual relationships among school pupils in southwestern Uganda", *Aids Care* Vol 13, No 1, pages 83–98.

34. See reference 1, Thomas and Cole (2009).

35. See Swidler, Ann and Susan Cotts Watkins (2007), "Ties of dependence: AIDS and transactional sex in rural Malawi", Working Paper CCPR-2007-025, California Centre for Population Research, Los Angeles, page 32; also see reference 33, Nyanzi et al. (2001).

36. See reference 25, Maticka-Tyndale et al. (2005), page 34. Not all young women, of course, necessarily wish to refuse these advances.

Since acceptance of gifts arouses male expectations of reward and, in turn, weakens their capacity to refuse sexual advances, girls must balance their short- and longer-term needs and wants.⁽³⁶⁾ In the short term, sexual exchange enables girls to help their parents, to support their own schooling, or to impress their friends with new clothes or hair-dos, and thereby compensate for poorly paid (or no) work while avoiding shameful, and often unsuccessful, begging. Indeed, although parents may disapprove of daughters having boyfriends, they may tolerate the situation if they themselves can gain some benefit, or may even (albeit subtly) “*encourage them to the bad*” (i.e. direct them to lucrative partnerships), as articulated by Anne Marie. By the same token, and from a longer-term perspective, young women’s reciprocation (i.e. having sex) risks the contradictory predicament of being disrespected by boyfriends, future husbands, their families and the wider community, especially if out-of-wedlock pregnancy occurs. Many single female participants said that because of these problems they did not want boyfriends. They regarded education and work as preferable to short-term financial gain. As Anne Marie explained:

“I don’t like having boyfriends because they are not serious, and they used to force you for sex. Some, they used to give you money and say: ‘Let me have sex with you’, and me, I don’t used to do that. That’s why now I don’t even have a boyfriend. I don’t trust the boys now. I want to follow my education. If I stay here, have my good job and help my mum, that’s what I plan. Sometimes when I don’t have money I will think and think and think: What can I do? I will go and work! I will go and find a job so that I have money.”

For some young women who manage to get relatively well-paid jobs, the prospects for negotiating the terms of premarital relationships are likely to be stronger, as evidenced in a recent World Bank study on Malawi where a cash transfer programme appears to have reduced young women’s sexual activity, teenage pregnancy and early marriage.⁽³⁷⁾ However, even if some young women still choose to have boyfriends, primarily for pleasure and recreation and on their own terms, others may have little option other than to accept boyfriends as a route to greater financial security and to access goods that they could otherwise not afford.

IX. MAXIMIZING RETURNS: MULTIPLE PARTNERSHIPS

In a context of widespread economic hardship not all young men can satisfy financial requests. Many struggle on low, irregular incomes and are dependent on their families for food, shelter and even daily living expenses. Some do have disposable income but, in order to fulfil their filial duty and secure respect from natal relatives, they may find themselves having to prioritize buying a bag of rice for household use over “frittering” away money on girlfriends. Moreover, it is often judged unwise to invest scarce resources in a girl who may later disappoint by being unfaithful, even if not spending may jeopardize a relationship or its sexual exclusivity. Indeed, ask any young Gambian man and he will tell you that most girls “follow money”. They pursue males for money, evaluate the financial status of those who proposition them, and desert or are unfaithful to

37. Baird, Sarah, Ephraim Chirwa, Craig McIntosh and Berk Özler (2009), “The short-term impacts of a schooling conditional cash transfer programme on the sexual behaviour of young women”, Policy Research Working Paper 5089, Impact Evaluation Series No 40, World Bank Development Research Group, Poverty and Inequality Team, Washington DC.

those who are short of funds. As expressed by Mohammed, a 24-year old chef, electrician and plumber:

“If you are chasing a girl, before she accept, she will like to know whether you are [financially] strong or not... They don't care for boys unless you get. That is the main problem here in The Gambia between the boys and the girls.”

An ever present threat to young men is that the women they are interested in may be enticed by the appearance of more financially rewarding relationship opportunities. In the words of Baboucar, a 27-year old tailor:

“You see your friend, his [the girl's] boyfriend, having car, you know, and they're enjoying, having good time, giving them [the girl] money so they [she] can buy clothes, you know, she can wake up, she can buy breakfast, you know.”

It is also recognized that in order to maximize their economic returns, young women may engage in multiple relationships. A number of male informants (especially taxi drivers who knew their movements) told us about girls who were having affairs with up to four men, and had an array of mobile phones to show for it (all on different networks to ensure that a liaison with one man would not be interrupted by a call from another, or discovered as easily, given the common practice for partners to check each others' text messages).⁽³⁸⁾

As part and parcel of the perceived prevalence of pecuniary motives in young women's sexual strategies, young Gambian men often refer to being sidelined by women of their own age. As expressed by Abdoulie (a 30-year old woodcarver who shares a bed with a male friend due to a lack of alternatives), “...rather than to be with someone who is the same age, they will underrate because you've got nothing to give.” Almost all male participants complained that “material love” and “the vanity system” make it “very hard” for those without cash to find true love. Almost invariably, they also attributed the termination of past relationships to their weak financial positions. Sar, a 27-year old handyman, said that his girlfriend of four years left him for another man (financially) “stronger than him”. Unlike her new paramour, Sar said that he “...don't got much...” and could “...not follow in doing so many things for her.” Saul, a 24-year old woodcarver, similarly explained that when he was unable to satisfy the material requests of a previous girlfriend she would “...change her face”, become “...so stressed” and sometimes “...not even speak with him”. Furthermore, even if poor young men are accepted, these relationships are often insecure: their girlfriends may leave them later for a better offer or take on additional partners – being with one man for love and another (or more) for economic security.⁽³⁹⁾

Young men's frustration at their sexual marginalization tends to be channelled into expressions of resentment against girls for being “materially minded” rather than being directed to rich “old daddies” or structures of economic inequality. This in a sense credits women with agency, and contrasts with the findings of research in Mandeni, South Africa, where the sexual marginalization of poor young men appears to be associated with antagonism towards wealthier men's domination of, and consumption within, the sexual economy.⁽⁴⁰⁾

38. See reference 5, Chant (2011 forthcoming).

39. See reference 1, Cole (2009) on Madagascar; also see reference 1, Smith (2009) on Nigeria.

40. Hunter, Mark (2002), “The materiality of everyday sex: thinking beyond ‘prostitution’”, *African Studies* Vol 61, No 1, pages 109–110.

Men's financial insecurity jeopardizes not only premarital dating but also their marriage prospects. Although Saul loved his second girlfriend, and her parents approved of him, since he was not in a position to provide independent accommodation or contribute to the costs of upkeep on her family compound, the relationship came to a halt. Francis, a 34-year old woodcarver, similarly lost a girlfriend to an arranged marriage because he was "...not yet strong enough and they would not wait." Their co-worker, Solomon (27 years old), also wanted to marry his girlfriend but he was "... not that much strong and not ready to handle myself, or someone else... Even myself... to take care of myself is a problem." While pride usually prevents confessions of feeling devalued by partners, families and society at large, these tended to surface over time with those to whom we became trusted confidantes.

What we find then is that the stage of "youth" seems to be expanding; bleak economic realities prevent young men's social graduation to adulthood. This Gambian dynamic of prolonged adolescence is echoed by research on urban Egypt,⁽⁴¹⁾ Ethiopia⁽⁴²⁾ and Madagascar,⁽⁴³⁾ and is widely regarded as a negative state by young men themselves, as well as by others.

For women, by contrast, we contend that prolonged adolescence may turn out to be more favourable, not least because it provides them with a greater array of options and freedoms than they generally have in marriage. In light of this, while most studies on sexuality highlight young women's vulnerability and weak capacity to refuse intercourse, demand contraceptives or terminate physically abusive relationships,⁽⁴⁴⁾ our research suggests that more attention should be given to constraining influences on the manoeuvres of men, particularly young low-income men.

X. JUSTIFICATIONS FOR SEXUAL EXCHANGE AND MULTIPLE RELATIONSHIPS

Although, as previously noted, young women themselves generally play down multiple partnerships, they also maintain that men tend to be financially irresponsible as well as unfaithful, especially once married, so they might as well be with "strong" men who can afford to help them out. This resonates with work in Malawi where Moore,⁽⁴⁵⁾ with reference to fieldwork by Swidler and Watkins,⁽⁴⁶⁾ notes that: "*Both women and men try not only to secure a 'main' partner, but a series of back-ups or 'spare tyres' as they are known in the Malawian context, in case things go wrong or the fortunes of the main partner take a downward turn.*" One of our interviewees, Fatoumata, a 24-year old hairdresser, confessed to having two boyfriends and being unsure about which admirer to settle on – one being relatively young (in his thirties) with some prospects, although the major appeal resided in his good looks and charm, and the other being a man in his fifties who was providing substantial economic support to her and her family.

Even if accepting money may entail sexual favours for men whom young women do not find especially attractive, this also ensures that young women derive some benefit from boyfriends, who are widely portrayed as "unserious" (unfaithful). Such stereotypes are not unwarranted. Baboulowe (27, a tailor) and Momodou (26, a taxi driver) labelled their

41. Singerman, Diane (2007), "The economic imperatives of marriage: emerging practices and identities among youth in the Middle East", Working Paper 6, Wolfensohn Centre for Development/ Dubai School of Government, Dubai.

42. See reference 24, Mains (2007).

43. Cole, Jennifer (2005), "The Jaombilo of Tamatave (Madagascar), 1992–2004: reflections on youth and globalization", *Journal of Social History* Vol 38, No 4, page 897.

44. Dunkle, Kristin L, Rachel Jewkes, Mzikazi Nduna, Jonathan Levin, Yandisa Sikweyiya and Mary 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 and Medicine* Vol 65, No 6, pages 1235–1248.

45. See reference 1, Moore (2010), page 39.

46. See reference 35, Swidler and Watkins (2007).

dating strategy "...the four Fs – 'find them, friend them, fuck them, forget them'." Mindful of such pitfalls, Soffie (21, unemployed) explained:

"This small, small [young and financially weak] boyfriends, she will love them. After, those boys they are going to find another person, every time your heart will break, it's better to find a big [financially strong] boyfriend who will give her, because if she has nobody she will go and have sex with them anyway so it's better for him [her] to have a big boy, it's better than having sex with this small boy, they cannot give her anything, they know that she is no more a virgin, [s]he can go and find a big man who can give her."

Such advice turned personal when Soffie (who has a 71-year old sugar daddy as well as a younger lover) mocked Chilel (a 22-year old single mother with three boyfriends) for being with "small boys". In defence, Chilel protested that her partners gave her substantial amounts of money. In such circles, having a generous boyfriend who provides money and new clothes for naming ceremonies, weddings and "neighbourhood programmes" (community parties and processions), thereby disguising poverty, is instrumental to self-esteem and respect.

The concern to disguise poverty relates to our earlier discussion of the shame of being poor⁽⁴⁷⁾ and the consequent reluctance to reveal personal difficulties by asking for help. However, the particular risks associated with asking for money are reduced in the context of intimate relations. This is partly because those asking are generally young women, who are not supposed to be breadwinners. Thus it is less shameful for them to admit to financial weakness. For a young man to reveal his girlfriend's financial problems would also require him to divulge that he is solving those problems with money and thereby implicitly paying for sex (with a girl whom others might regard as "using" him). This runs the risk of undermining his masculinity. As such, expenditure on girlfriends is rarely discussed openly with male peers. Nor are young men prone to be candid with their families about sexual exchanges, not only because of the opprobrium attached to premarital relations but also because families may get jealous of resource transfers going outside the household. To reveal a girlfriend's secrets would also betray trust from the man's side, even if his girlfriend(s) may flaunt gifts as evidence of adoration. So for those keen to retain affections, requests and related problems are kept as discreet as possible.

By the same token, in a general context of secrecy and subterfuge most men come to distrust women's motivations, recognize that their partners may be unfaithful and adjust their own commitment accordingly, most notably in the form of maintaining a string of concurrent partnerships or "back-up girlfriends".⁽⁴⁸⁾ Although men's engagement in multiple sexual relations arguably has deep historical roots, not least in its formal incarnation in polygamous marriage, young men in our survey almost invariably justified their behaviour as a response to the fickleness of women. As reported by Alieu, a 26-year old taxi driver, for example: "*They [girls] are looking for the vanity system... so that's why a lot of boy become playboy, because of the girls. Here it is not easy to have true love if you don't have cash.*" Add to this the fact that men may also actively foster relationships with foreign women to maximize economic gain, and a situation arises in which neither women nor men trust each other very much.⁽⁴⁹⁾

47. See reference 6, Chant (2007).

48. See reference 1, Moore (2010); also see reference 35, Swidler and Watkins (2007).

49. See reference 32, Jassey (2005).

XI. THE ECONOMICS OF YOUNG MEN'S SEXUAL STRATEGIES: "BUMSTER-TOUBAB" RELATIONSHIPS

Given the constraints to forging partnerships with Gambian women of their own age, and in light of limited local employment opportunities and mounting restrictions on overseas migration, a number of men pursue sexual relationships with more mature, non-Gambian female tourists or expatriates. Men who seek *toubab* partnerships are often referred to as "bumsters", especially where they routinely hang out on the beach or in other tourist spots such as bars and nightclubs in the hope of expanded possibilities for economic gain or a much-coveted visa to "Babylon".⁽⁵⁰⁾

While "bumster-toubab" relationships may appear at odds with the notional norm of Gambian men as providers, the actual workings of these relationships often enable men to fulfil this role, not only for their natal kin but also for Gambian wives and girlfriends.⁽⁵¹⁾ This ensures a higher standard of living and also respect. As confirmed by one of our respondents, Alieu, a 26-year old taxi driver: "*Even if you have your own mamma, European old mamma, you live any time, better than these people here.*" And 27-year old Sea Boy, so named by his 50-year old Belgian girlfriend whom he had met on the beach, seemed fiercely proud running a small taxi business that she had helped him establish: "*I am in a good situation now. I am having cars. I have small thing [money] to help my family. And we travel...*", the latter being a virtually ubiquitous aspiration for young Gambian men.⁽⁵²⁾ Equally paramount is to obtain and demonstrate signs of success. For those who have managed to secure a *toubab* wife, these conventionally include, inter alia, a compound, a car and remittances from overseas employment.

But money alone is not enough. Careful stage-managing of public appearances is also required to secure respect. For example, on evenings out with his friends, Canadian Jen's husband (a Gambian waiter) arranges that she gives him money in advance so that in front of friends he assumes his proper place as provider.

Financial rewards are also not the only incentives. Kebba and Pa Modou, two 24-year old security guards at a Belgian-run school, now seek a "white lady", "*...because they are easy to go with... they never lie to you... and they know what is love.*" In contrast, their "material-minded" ex-Gambian girlfriends "*...pretend, but they don't give real love to you... they betray you.*" Sheik, a 24-year old gym attendant, similarly declared: "*I see no love in The Gambia here without money. I want a white lady who will love me for my very self.*" Recognizing that this discourse may have been used strategically because we were both foreigners from "Babylon", the comments chime with those made to Jassey (admittedly another Western woman) that "*... if you were lucky you would get more love from the white women because they cared for you and didn't just want their money like the local girls.*"⁽⁵³⁾

For economic advancement, social respect and emotional security, "bumster-toubab" relationships can be mutually beneficial,⁽⁵⁴⁾ even if negative stories abound about betrayed *toubabs* whose lovers wave them off from Banjul International Airport only to await the possibilities of "new prey" disembarking from the charter flight that they themselves are leaving on, or who bring their foreign wives back to The Gambia to the unforewarned and rather brutal shock that the men already have a girlfriend, wife, children or all three. There are also dissatisfied Gambian men. For example, unable to obtain a visa to her native Canada or a smart

50. See reference 15; also see reference 32, Jassey (2005); see reference 25, Maticka-Tyndale et al. (2005); and Nyanzi, Stella, Ousman Rosenberg-Jallow, Ousman Bah and Susan Nyanzi (2005), "Bumsters, big black organs and old white gold: embodied racial myths in sexual relationships of Gambian beach boys", *Culture, Health and Sexuality* Vol 7, No 6, pages 557–569.

51. See reference 32, Jassey (2005), page 22.

52. On the desire for migration, given young men's frustrations with alternatives in the context of neoliberal restructuring, see reference 24, Mains (2007).

53. See reference 32, Jassey (2005), page 20.

54. See reference 50, Nyanzi et al. (2005), page 566.

compound in The Gambia, Jen's Gambian waiter husband reported feeling frustrated and "embarrassed" that he has "...been married three years, with nothing to show for it."

Although "bumster-toubab" relationships form part of diversified livelihood strategies used by young Gambian men to fulfil local constructions of masculinity in a context of economic scarcity, this situation is not entirely without historical precedent. Just as young Gambian women have often been attracted by the possibilities of economic security with marriage to an older male, young men (*waxam bane* in Wolof, the indigenous lingua franca) in the past sometimes made the passage from "small boy" to aspired adult male (*maag*) status by marrying an older Gambian woman (*jeg*), who could not only prove to the rest of the community that he was "strong enough" to win the regard of a mature companion but who could also help set him up in business and as the main breadwinner. However, in the contemporary context, such cross-generational relationships between young men and older women have tended to increase with the growth of international tourism, since foreign women are comparatively rich by Gambian standards as well as being unconstrained by local mores of female sexuality. While in a variety of contexts young women are more likely to "follow money" because they are less financially secure⁽⁵⁵⁾ in The Gambia, young men are usually no less preoccupied by monetary security and advancement, and have an opportunity, through international tourism, to use sex as a basis of economic gain. In light of this it is appropriate to explain the gendered dynamics of sexuality-based resource transfers, not only with reference to the characteristics of gift seekers but also to the characteristics of gift givers. The gendered direction of resource transfers is shaped by the availability of people whose "respect" is not jeopardized by engaging in out-of-wedlock sexual relations and who have the disposable income to entice potential partners. Among Gambians, it has traditionally been men rather than women who fulfil these conditions. Yet this has now been disrupted by the influx of relatively rich, older foreign women seeking romance on terms that are radically different from those that might apply between young Gambian male and female peers.

55. See reference 17; also Poulin, Michelle (2007), "Sex, money and premarital partnerships in southern Malawi", *Social Science and Medicine* Vol 65, No 11, pages 2383–2393.

XII. CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Young people's sexual relations in The Gambia appear to be heavily influenced by the often intersecting concerns of economic security and social respect, as well as being motivated by affection, pleasure and the desire for physical and emotional intimacy and support.

In some cases, young people's desires are fulfilled by one partner alone. In such cases, gift-giving may be used to symbolize appreciation, commitment, concern to help one's beloved and ability to spend. However, one person is not always enough. Perhaps a partner's commitment is doubted, or another relationship is regarded as more sexually appealing or more financially lucrative either in the short or long term. Such considerations tend to undermine commitments to monogamous premarital and conjugal relationships.

In a context of resource scarcity, young women and young men come to regard their sexuality as a livelihood asset, albeit for rather different reasons and in rather different ways. To secure basic well-being (more the

case with women) and/or to advance economically (more the case with men), some young people engage in multiple sexual relations, or desert those deemed unsatisfactory. While such strategies may temporarily disguise income poverty, they also seem to perpetuate a vicious spiral of gender antagonism wherein young people frequently despair that those of the “opposite sex” are “not serious”.

The case of “bumster-toubab” relationships illustrates that economic resource transfers do not necessarily flow in a male-to-female direction. The gendered dynamics of sexual exchange are highly contingent not only on the pecuniary insecurities and motives of gift seekers but also on the relative economic and social gaps between gift seekers and their potential donors in particular times and places. The availability of relatively rich, romantically inclined foreign female tourists, unconstrained at least in the initial stages of courtship by local gendered religious sexual mores,⁽⁵⁶⁾ encourages young Gambian men to instrumentalize their sexuality in a manner parallel to their female peers, even if other motivations also feature, as evidenced by some young men seeking *toubab* girlfriends in the hope of reciprocated emotional commitment. The fact that sanctions against premarital sex among men are less than among women, and that men are in a stronger position to establish their own businesses are also critical factors in distinguishing male and female approaches to relations with the opposite sex, even if it is clear that many young persons pursue intimate partnerships mainly or partially for material gain. This can overshadow affective dimensions and frequently entails the concealing of truths – about depth of feeling, infidelity, conjugal status and so on – from close ones. Notwithstanding Thomas and Cole’s⁽⁵⁷⁾ caution that polarizations between “love” (supposedly signifying altruism and inducing care and consideration for others) and money (motivated primarily by self-interest and associated with weaker sentimental attachment) are frequently overdrawn as well as often deeply “entangled in practice”, one discernible outcome in the Gambian context appears to be a lack of mutual trust in heterosexual couples. This raises questions not only about the social ramifications of economic inequality at national and international levels but also about the premises on which achieving advances towards gender egalitarianism in Gambian society as whole might be founded.

56. Interestingly, a number of European women who end up marrying their Gambian suitors convert to Islam as a means of enhancing the social respect of their partners.

57. See reference 1, Thomas and Cole (2009), page 23.

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