The Struggles of Youth in a Time of HIV/AIDS Awareness and Prevention Programs

A discussion of the personal, interpersonal, and social challenges youth face against the backdrop of media-oriented campaign discourses in South Africa

Masters Thesis

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Dedicated to Meagan Louise McCue (1964-2007)

…for her story, her struggle, and her inspiration
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Abstract

This thesis examines the different discourses on sexuality put forth by two prominent media-oriented HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns, Soul City and Love Life, in South Africa, and the ways in which they resonate with youth as they struggle to negotiate their own sexual identities in a rapidly changing society. It uses qualitative methods to consider the struggles of the individual in the personal, interpersonal, and larger social realms and how campaigns speak to them in different ways and, in turn, how youth negotiate their own identities. Concerning personal struggles, this thesis considers individual negotiations of knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS in the face of campaigns, particularly as they work within certain frameworks of morals and values. In conjunction, it also examines personal negotiations of knowledge and awareness amidst the muted realities of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, as well as some of the conflicting discourses of campaigns. From this point, interpersonal struggles relating to the ideals and realities of love in relationships are then considered. Discussions of gender-based ideals and realities and the realities of exchange values and responsibility in relationships along side campaign responses are used to further build upon the multi-layered dynamics of interpersonal youth struggles. Building on personal and interpersonal struggles, larger social struggles involving the different ways that the intermingling of traditional and modern values has impacted sexual expression, as well as helped create and perpetuate double standards regarding gender and sexuality are considered. Finally, social struggles that the influences of popular culture puts forth are discussed in conjunction with the discourses of campaigns and their efforts to maintain their marketability to youth.
1 Introduction

The responses of public health campaigns to matters of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention have instigated unprecedented levels of public action toward taking more holistic approaches to understanding the complexities of human sexuality and behavior. They have also meant coming to the realization that sexuality cannot be reduced to behavior alone. The notion of mere behavior as the cause for the spread and perpetuation of the AIDS epidemic denudes sex and sexuality of meaning and pleasure. Rather, the focus on behavior alone fails to see how meaning and pleasure rely on context, how context is representative of culture, and how culture is structured by history. Therefore, awareness and prevention efforts depend upon understanding the determinants of HIV risk as being profoundly social in terms of how they are related to the complexities of identity formation, relationships and interactions, emotional and material needs, history, and social change.

Certainly, the web of social complexity surrounding HIV/AIDS is much more dense than even these major themes can convey and that is, in part, why the challenge of awareness and prevention programs has been so great. In South Africa, where the impacts of the epidemic have been some of the most severe in the world, awareness and prevention campaigns have perhaps faced the greatest challenge in strategizing to develop messages that speak to the complexities of the epidemic, particularly because of the country’s diversity, turbulent history, and high rates of inequality. However, despite the fact that recent attention to HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention has both increased and broadened in perspective in recent years, rates of HIV transmission have increased as well, (although it is widely believed that the rates of infection are beginning to have leveled off over the last couple of years). There is still a need to continue to widen the scope of awareness and prevention to overcome the wall of silence that veils the epidemic in South Africa and move even further beyond the promotion of basic sex education modules that promote abstinence and condoms toward broader ideas of awareness and prevention.

Two prominent media-oriented campaigns that target youth in South Africa, Soul City and Love Life, have made attempts to do so by focusing more on the larger social issues related to HIV transmission. The discourses created by their relatively progressive efforts, as well as responses to them, have helped to reveal much about the identity and struggles of young South Africans. In some senses these campaigns act as prisms in how they reflect and refract the
different social constructions of gender and sexuality that are integral to many of the struggles youth face and also to matters of awareness and prevention. This thesis will consider how the messages of campaigns resonate with the struggles youth face on various levels. In particular, it will examine struggles on the individual, interpersonal, and social levels as they relate to identity formation, understandings of HIV/AIDS, love and relationships, the roles of tradition and modernity, and the negotiation of personal ideals with everyday lived realities. In many ways, this paper is a commentary on some of the major challenges of being young, but because of this it inherently lends itself to discussions of the challenges that campaigns face as they attempt to speak to youth about matters related to HIV/AIDS and where their good intentions might be failing. Furthermore, it also helps understand the ways that the risks of HIV have come to inform discourses on youth sexuality.

Research for this thesis is based on one-time face-to-face interviews with student youth at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa, as well as with representatives from the two campaigns considered, Soul City and Love Life.\(^1\) It focuses on the specific media-oriented elements of both campaigns, as they are the most publicly prominent features of each and therefore most familiar to youth in general.\(^2\) In addition, in order to facilitate a better understanding of the struggles of youth and of their experiences with campaigns, the first part of this thesis considers the theoretical frameworks campaigns work within and the models they are based on. It then moves to provide overviews of both the Soul City and Love Life campaigns in order to convey the goals of each program, in what ways they are implemented, and how they have been developed over time. In the second part of this thesis, theoretical perspectives, discussion, and analysis of the struggles of youth and campaign resonance with them is interwoven because in many ways it is impossible to discuss each separately. The complexity of the issues brought up by youth require continual discussion of their meaning, its interaction with

\(^1\) KwaZulu-Natal is South Africa’s largest province containing twenty-one percent of the country’s total population. The province is eighty-five percent African, nine percent Asian/Indian, five percent Caucasian, and just over one percent Coloured. The area is marked by high rates of poverty, unemployment, and inequality in terms of income distribution (PROVIDE Project Background Paper 2005: 1(5) A Profile of KwaZulu-Natal Demographics, Poverty, Inequality, and Unemployment. [On-line]. Available: http://www.elsenburg.com/provide/documents/BP2005_1_5%20Demographics%20KZ.pdf

\(^2\) It also attempts to convey some of the relative diversity of the province of KwaZulu-Natal as it is home to the Zulu people and to a large proportion of South Africa’s Indian population. However, because the traditions of the Zulu are more somewhat more culturally distinct from other groups, they are given more attention in some areas, as where the Indian students interviewed are not distinguished from the other groups represented in the research.
the larger framework that theoretical perspectives provide, and further analysis about what this means within the context of awareness and prevention programs.

2 Setting the Stage

The South African AIDS crisis is currently one of the most severe epidemics in the world. Between 1990 and 2006 HIV prevalence rates increased from one percent to twenty-nine percent and by the end of 2006 it was estimated that there were nearly five and a half million people living with HIV, with nearly 1,000 deaths from AIDS occurring daily.\(^3\) In addition, the prevalence rate for youth under twenty was approximately fourteen percent and twenty-eight percent for those between the ages of twenty and twenty-four. It is estimated that over sixty percent of HIV infections occur before the age of twenty-five. Such high rates of infection have gained South African youth the reputation of being one of the highest risk groups for HIV/AIDS in the world. It is also necessary to note that in KwaZulu-Natal, where research for this project took place, it is estimated that approximately forty percent of the adult population is infected with HIV making the province the most severely effected in the country.\(^4\) These numbers are important to consider in understanding the magnitude of the epidemic and their gravity is intensified with the realization that HIV/AIDS is an almost entirely preventable disease (Leclerc-Madlala 2002: 2). This is in part why it is difficult to understand the shockingly slow response of the South African government to HIV and its failure to deal with issues at the heart of the epidemic, particularly as they concern awareness and prevention.

In 2002, South Africa’s leading party, the African National Congress (ANC), asserted in writing that “the hypothesis that HIV causes AIDS is an assumption, not a fact”, and this was not the first time they had said so. This kind of AIDS denialism came as a shock to much of the world and has certainly been seen to have tarnished the presidency of South Africa’s current leader, Thabo Mbeki. However, it is important to consider that this view has developed in part as a response South Africa’s complex history of colonialism, apartheid, and a kind of denied justice for the country. Essentially, AIDS emerged as “a kind of everlasting affliction” at a point in time when the end of apartheid was supposed to mean a better life with greater equality for all. The government’s denial of AIDS was rooted in some ways in the notion that this is not how


things were supposed to be, especially given that there were few explanations or solutions for a problem that would become so massive (Schneider and Fassin 2002: S45). In addition, the spread of AIDS in South Africa reflected the gradients of racial advantage and disadvantage under apartheid, which made the roots of the epidemic even more suspect. This, along with the more rapid spread of HIV in South Africa among heterosexuals than in other parts of the world, particularly the West, allowed for Western discourses on sexuality that that supported the idea of a distinct African sexuality that was rooted in promiscuous and immoral behavior compared with that of the West. In conjunction, issues of poverty, which were part of the legacy of apartheid, were used by the government to explain the spread of AIDS. The denial of AIDS and the use of other explanations for it served a kind of defense of African culture, working against the moralizing of the West, and as a way of saying that AIDS is a problem of economics and the social realities of the post-apartheid era rather than a problem of deviant and promiscuous African sexual behavior (2002: S46).

The fact of the matter is that the AIDS epidemic is rooted in the legacy of racial segregation, economic inequality, high levels of social violence, and the fracturing of families and communities (2002: S50). However, it is also undeniable that AIDS is related to human behavior. The challenge in thinking about awareness and prevention has been not to blame notions of some kind of distinct African sexuality for AIDS or to mark the disease with stigmas such as those of African promiscuity, but rather to recognize the complexities of the virus’ spread as it is linked to the multiplicity of social, cultural, and individual factors that influence behavior in the South African context. In conjunction, the de-stigmatization of AIDS as a problem of bad or immoral behavior and the like is entirely necessary in order to move away from the silence that has come to ensnoul the epidemic in South Africa and give hope of reducing infection rates (Epstein 2007: 142-143). These concerns are of central importance because even as the South African government moves to broaden its scope of understanding and recognition of AIDS by making anti-retro viral drugs more available, no matter how accessible they become, they will not prevent the spread of the virus. Thus, the foremost priority must be the creation of public health campaigns that can have the most favorable impact on awareness and prevention, particularly among young people for whom risk of infection is especially high (Hunter 2007:689-700).
The problem is though that, to date, HIV prevention programs available have not been successful, at least in any measurable way, in decreasing rates of HIV transmission. Instead, rates of infection have increased and forced many people to wonder how much of an influence basic awareness of HIV/AIDS and related prevention strategies have on individual and social behaviors. This curious point forces certain questions regarding how communication strategies are employed and implemented in creating and disseminating HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention messages, what social platforms (such as focusing on choice, community, individuality, fear, or risk) campaigns use to project their messages, and how much influence such campaigns can really have on the choices individuals make.

Furthermore, the turbulent history of South Africa and the social changes that have occurred since its transition from an apartheid regime to a democracy in 1994 cannot be denied as influences on the current state of the epidemic. Today, high levels of social inequality persist and dominate the social landscape. While some level of activism on the part of civil society has helped bring attention to some of these inequalities, there is still much concern about the degree to which awareness and prevention campaigns demonstrate a holistic understanding of the epidemic that recognizes the layered inequalities and vulnerabilities surrounding HIV/AIDS without exacerbating them further. Different approaches to creating HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention messages, (some of which will be discussed in section 4) reveal the extent of the challenges faced by media campaigns in communicating messages that are multi-layered and reflective of the daily lived realities surrounding such inequalities and vulnerabilities (Trabin 2006:5-10).

3 Methodology

3.1 Creating a Purpose

The severity of the AIDS epidemic in South Africa, in addition to its diverse social and cultural landscape, has turned the country into a hotbed for all types of HIV/AIDS research, from the biomedical to the psychosocial and beyond. Members of the global academic community, among others, have flocked to South Africa seemingly to feast upon the array of research

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5 Certainly, however, there are a great many challenges in evaluating interventions and campaigns, especially those focused on the community level and broader social change. Their impact on communities and society, and ultimately on HIV rates of infection may take a number of years to manifest and when they do they may not be obviously attributable to a certain source (Matthews 2005: 158).
opportunities available as a result of the epidemics multifaceted implications, such as they relate to medicine, economics, political science, and social anthropology, to name a few. It is as though virtually every academic arena has a stake in AIDS in some way in South Africa. In some senses this means that taking any sort of fresh or insightful perspective on anything related to the epidemic feels like a rather mystifying and impossible task. Having realized this very early on, and having been told it was so by an advisor as well, I understood that however I chose to focus my research, I would be merely contributing and writing within an already well established discourse on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. I chose to focus on the perspectives of youth to see what challenges and struggles they face in negotiating identity amid the social realities that frame the epidemic and the campaign messages that inform it. The reason for this choice was that it seemed that for all of the literature and research on awareness and prevention programs, very little of it took into account experiences of youth sexuality on a more holistic level and, at the same time, against the backdrop of campaign messages concerning HIV/AIDS.

Rather, research examining and evaluating HIV awareness and prevention programs has often relied on quantitative methodologies, such as those involving measuring behavioral change at the individual level regarding condom use or levels of HIV related knowledge. It also has often included biomedical surveys concerning the rates of HIV and other STDs before and after certain interventions have been made (Campbell 2003:9; Leclerc-Madlala 5). While these types of research are important, particularly in demonstrating the effectiveness of interventions and campaigns, they do little to speak to both the broader social context that campaigns and youth function within. In more recent years there has been some increase in research focusing on qualitative methods to examine the levels of community interface by campaigns, such as how well audiences relate to them and to what degree they are trusted or relied upon for imparting information about HIV/AIDS. However, there is still a strong need for more qualitative research to help give voice to the numbers generated by quantitative research and to provide a better picture of the impact of campaigns and the social and cultural contexts they function within, such as those of inequality and social marginalization.

In addition to having a qualitative framework, a key aim of this paper is to take into account the experiences of youth, including their daily realities and the ways that they interface with campaigns. This will help to better understand what campaigns have accomplished and what still needs attention in the field of awareness and prevention, particularly regarding
Designing this paper with these goals in mind, also means working to contribute to greater understandings of how awareness and prevention campaign responses to the epidemic function in the context of competing cultural discourses on sexuality generated by different forces, such as they range from peer groups to popular culture. Lastly, it also works to better understand how the AIDS epidemic in South Africa informs discourses on youth sexuality and experience, regardless of campaigns. Having stated these intentions, however, it is important to note that this paper is in no way meant to serve as an evaluation of awareness and prevention programs, nor is it designed for the purpose of drawing up any sort of formal prescription on improved strategies for how to solve issues related to youth sexual sexuality or behavior. Rather, it is meant to serve as part of a larger dialogue on youth sexuality in the face of HIV/AIDS, as well as awareness and prevention campaigns, that can create a better understanding of the complexity of the issues involved and help begin to focus in on what new questions need to be addressed.

3.2 Project Development and Methods

The development of this paper began with a literature review in order to consider previous research and theoretical perspectives on the key social elements, namely gender and sexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Research was also conducted on topics relating to the development, structures, and tactics of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns, as well as notions of behavioral change, the role of communication and media in campaigns, and the influence of popular culture. In much of the literature the focus tended to be on the vulnerability of women, with only more recent research on the role of men in HIV awareness and prevention, particularly concerning “transactional sexual relationships” or “concurrent partnerships” (which will be discussed further in section 7.3).

As I constructed the literature review I also had to choose which awareness and prevention campaigns to focus on. The three most prominent campaigns of this kind in South

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6 In a study conducted last year by the Kaiser Family Foundation generated a large amount of quantitative data on the impact of media-based prevention campaigns, youth exposure to different types of media, and the perceived media influences of youth. However, the study did little to include the voice of youth to substantiate its findings. Therefore, it serves as an example of what needs to be built upon in order to better understand the role of campaigns and the ways they resonate with youth. The Kaiser Family Foundation. (2007, March). Young South Africans, Broadcast Media, and HIV/AIDS Awareness: Results of a National Survey. Menlo Park, Ca., The Henri J. Kaiser Family Foundation.
Africa are Soul City, Love Life, and Khomanani. Each campaign has a different history, as well as a different framework and scope for tackling issues of awareness and prevention. Soul City is the longest running campaign of its kind in South Africa. Love Life is five years younger but it has certainly made a name for itself through its aggressive and controversial strategies and ambitious goals. Both are mass media campaigns, but they harness the power of the media in different ways, and Love Life has other components that go beyond the scope of the media, while Soul City does not. Khomanani is unlike the other two campaigns in that it represents the South African government’s attempt to promote awareness and prevention and it does not receive as much funding from larger private sources as the others do. It also labels itself as a media campaign but its lack of prominence in comparison with the other two makes it less known and not as well established. This is in part due to the fact that the South African government de-funded the campaign for a period of time during a recent dispute over how funds for combating the epidemic should be allocated. The campaign has only recently resumed and it is yet to really get back on its feet.

In addition to selecting the campaigns, I also had to decide how to include and access the voices of the campaigns’ audience, namely that of youth, to see how campaigns resonated with them and how their experiences correlated with the messages and philosophies of campaigns. I chose to speak with students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban because they were a population I had easy access to as a student at the University. I also knew that many of them were at an age where they were likely to have had exposure to these campaigns having essentially grown up with them. In addition, I felt that their endeavoring toward a higher level of education put them in the likely position of being part of the country’s future leadership. Thus, I thought that their more critical and reflective voices might offer a unique vantage point from which to discuss issues of sexuality and their relation to campaigns. It is important to note, however, that it is likely that students have a certain biases because of the privileged position their education affords them in society. They also represent only a small portion of South Africa’s economically and racially diverse population. Therefore, the voices in this paper should not be regarded as being generalisable to the larger population of South African youth. Although, based on the literature available it certainly seems that student experiences bear a resemblance to those outside the world of the University.
After deciding on the focus of the project and selecting which campaigns and population group to work with, I had to go through a process of ethical approval through the University of KwaZulu-Natal in order to conduct my research. During this rather lengthy process I had to refine my methodology further and inform the University of the specifics of my project. In turn, this meant working to develop questions for interviews with campaigns and students, respectively. I did not want to use specific questionnaires in an effort to keep conversations with informants, which were taped for later transcription, casual and easy. I also did not want to guide the conversation too much for fear of making it seem as though I was fishing for certain types of information and risk increasing the probability of garnering more biased responses. I developed sets of questions for the campaigns and students that were somewhat broad as well because I wanted the data and the key themes of the project to be emergent over time rather than specifically sought after in each interview.  

The key themes in interviews with campaigns included general questioning about the campaign’s views of sexuality, working within the diverse social and cultural contexts of South Africa, ideas of behavioral change, and the campaigns general organization, structure, and goals. Interviews with students included questioning about their general background and upbringing, their familiarity with and opinions toward campaigns, and their feelings, attitudes, and priorities with regard to relationships, love, and sex. Also important to note is that the students interviewed were selected using something of a snowballing technique. I was able to use a network of student connections to access students. The most challenging part was keeping the student pool diversified in terms of gender and race. I interviewed eight men and seven women who identified themselves as either black, Indian and/or colored, or white in order to attempt to reflect the diversity of the University, and certainly to some extent, that of the country as well. However, I did not choose to indicate the race of each interviewee in the in the text as I did not want to make race a focal point in the paper or inadvertently racialize the perspectives presented. I did indicate the Zulu speakers where I chose to speak about issues specifically related to them, which was important because they are a dominant group in KwaZulu-Natal. 

All participants, including the media directors interviewed at each of the campaign organizations, were provided with informed consent prior to interviewing. Interviews with the

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7 See Appendix A for research instruments used for interviews
8 It should be noted that none of the students interviewed were married or had children.
organizations lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes, and interviews with students lasted between thirty and sixty minutes. Fortunately, all of the interviews seemed to guide themselves. The questions generated before hand were of assistance but most informants were eager to speak and needed very little prompting or deeper questioning. Student interviews, in particular, were very casual and while I was nervous that some students would not want to talk about their relationship experiences and the like with a stranger, most were very open and had strong feelings and opinions in response to most questions. Some students mentioned after the interview that they appreciated its casual style and did not feel like they were being interviewed but rather merely chatting with a friend. Certainly, this was encouraging in terms of feeling that the data collected was shared as least as much on the students’ terms as it was on mine.

After the interviews were completed, I transcribed each of them and read through them multiple times to see what key themes stood out among them. As I went over the interviews, I began to realize that I had far more data that I could ever make full use of or even begin to do justice to. I also realized that the information I had from the Khomanani campaign, in particular, was really lacking in richness compared to the two other organizations. This is likely due to the fact that since the Khomanai campaign has only recently recommenced and with new leadership, it does not yet have a grounded model of practice, nor has it taken a solid platform or stance on issues of youth sexuality. In turn, and because I had an abundance of information to work with already, I decided that the campaign was too much of an outlier and to omit it from the analysis.

After settling on my analysis with information from two campaigns instead of three, I continued reading through the interviews to see what themes emerged and how they both correlated with and were accounted for in the theoretical perspectives presented in the related literature. Ultimately, I used the emergent themes in the interviews to set up a discussion and analysis that weaves together excerpts from the material and the theoretical perspectives. The voices of those interviewed are used as examples to help inform the discussion and paint a larger picture of the social scene. They also give the discussion a more humanistic character, as well as provide first hand evidence of the nature of the social environment that both youth and campaigns exist within. Yet, despite having tried to use the voices of those interviewed in a balanced way, there are inevitably certain biases that have emerged in the discussion and analysis.
First, there is a tendency to give more discussion to the Love Life campaign than that of Soul City. This is in part due to the fact that the Love Life campaign employs strategies that are much more overt and in-your-face, and thus it has been much more controversial. It has been widely criticized, as well as praised, by academics, youth, and health practitioners. Youth who were familiar with the campaign tended to discuss and critique it more frequently during interviews. Soul City, on the other hand, has softer messages that are much less blunt as they are somewhat blanketed under the storylines of the campaign’s television dramas. In addition, the second bias concerns the balancing of discussion of youth and the campaigns. The focus of this paper is meant to be primarily on youth with interwoven discussions of the campaigns. However, at times it was difficult to maintain this formatting and it may seem in some areas of the discussion that the focus is arguably on more on the campaigns. A third bias concerns the discussion of women somewhat more frequently than men in certain sections of the paper. In part, this is due to the fact that there is such a bias in previous literature toward discussing the oppression and empowerment of women, particularly relating to “transactional sex” and “concurrent partnerships”. Discussions of male involvement have become increasingly more common in recent years but are still comparatively lacking when it comes to matters of awareness and prevention.

4 Previous Studies: Theoretical Models for HIV/AIDS Awareness and Prevention

Since sex is the primary mode of HIV transmission in South Africa it is necessary for HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programs to focus on trying to understand why individuals put their health at risk and why they adopt behaviors that are protective of their health by examining the manifold micro and macro level constructs, mechanisms, and processes that are supposed to influence health behavior. Researchers at the University of Cape Town have developed a conceptual framework for examining the various types of forces that influence sexual behavior. Their framework includes three different realms of analysis that each overlap and reciprocally influence one another.

First, there is the realm of personal factors that concern an individual’s cognitions and consciousness, including self-efficacy, instincts, self-esteem, attitudes, and sense of personal vulnerability. Personal factors relate to an individual’s confidence toward performing certain acts, such as negotiating condom use. The second realm is that of proximal factors such as those
that involve interpersonal relationships and the more immediate environment of an individual. These types of factors include those related to coercive relationships such as they might involve peer pressure to be sexually active, perceived social norms, gender inequalities, the organization of an individuals living environment (such as urban or rural), and their access to things like media, condoms, and healthcare facilities. The third realm is made up of distal factors or those that are less immediate elements of an individual’s environment. Distal factors are larger cultural factors, such as traditions and norms that contribute to shared beliefs, values, and structural factors, such as the political, economic, and organizational components of society. Further examples of distal factors include poverty, racism, gender inequalities, sexual oppression, and other types of marginalization (Matthews 2005:146-147).

Various types of theories and models have been developed that strive to address the myriad of forces that are part of these three realms and what types of public health programs can be put in to place to impact sexual behavior as it is part of each. For example, some theory-driven intervention models have tended to focus more on individual behavioral change (focusing on the realm of personal factors) or community behavioral change (focusing on the ream of proximal factors), or on both individual and community change by focusing on structural and environmental factors (such as those in the distal context). It has been observed in various global contexts that HIV prevention on each of these different levels can be effective in reducing sexual risk behavior. For example, in the United States the HIV/AIDS Prevention Research Synthesis study showed that interventions helped reduce risky sexual behavior among heterosexual adults by approximately nineteen percent and by thirty-four percent among sexually active adolescents (147-151). Yet, in the case of the United States and other parts of the world many HIV prevention strategies that have been shown to be effective have focused primarily on personal and interpersonal risk factors. These strategies have not been shown to be nearly as effective in sub-Saharan African countries, including South Africa, because there has not been enough focus

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9 In 1991 the National Institutes of Health in the United States came up with a number of variables that could be considered determinants of individual behavioral change. These include but are not limited to (1) the intention to change (2) not being impeded by internal or external constraints (3) perception of having enough social pressure to change (4) has the necessary skills to perform the new behavior (5) believes that the perceived advantages outweigh the costs (6) the person perceives that the new behavior will be consistent with their self-image (7) the emotional reaction to performing the new behavior that is more positive than negative (8) the belief that they will be able to perform the new behavior under a number of different circumstances (Matthews 151).
on community change that takes account of the ways that individuals function as part of communities and larger social environments (De Guzman 2001:664-665).

Rather, in sub-Saharan Africa the focus in HIV prevention programs has been on biomedical and behavioral understandings of sexuality that understand sexual decision-making as something that is shaped by individual decisions to make conscious and rational choices. The ABC (Abstain, Be Faithful, and/or Condomize) campaign is the most well known of these types of approaches that seeks to target the individual with what seems to be at face value to be a very simple and basic bit of information about the dangers of HIV and how to prevent it. The idea behind this campaign is that disseminating this crucial knowledge about prevention to vulnerable individuals will allow them to make informed choices about their health and decrease their risk of contracting HIV. Yet, this approach, which seemed to be a sort of magic bullet in not only preventing HIV transmission, but other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as well, has not been shown to be effective. The reason for this is obvious in that the campaign fails to take into account the complexity of the forces that shape sexual behavior and sexual health, ranging from the desires of the body, unconscious emotions, and instincts to the larger cultural constructions that range from relationship inequalities to larger forms of social marginalization. In other words, it fails to take into account the various ways that sexuality is a social construction, and not merely based in the habits of individual behavior, control over one’s physical body, or the ability to use knowledge alone for purposes of behavioral change. In reality, prevention theories and models must make greater acknowledgement of the ways that individual behavior is governed by societal and cultural norms and that individual knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs do not necessarily affect behavior directly as they are mediated by the relationships of the individual on the proximal and distal levels (Campbell 2003:2-7; De Guzman 665).

Yet, one reason why individualistic biomedical and behavioral perspectives have been prioritized is that there has been a lack of understanding about the ways that social contexts impact health outcomes. There is a significant amount of quantitative information that links contextual social factors with HIV transmission rates. However, researchers have been slow to connect this quantitative data to qualitative information that explains the fundamental processes and mechanisms that allow socio-contextual factors to lead to high rates of HIV.10 Also, as

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10 Qualitative surveys have attempted to measure biomedical factors and to track changes at the individual level, such as those concerning reported condom use and STD rates before and after public health interventions. These
social psychologist Catherine Campbell explains, while the field of HIV social science research has come to include a great variety of academics from anthropologists to political scientists to economists, interventions and prevention programs have tended to favor psychologists. The discipline has been inclined to support individual-level conceptualizations of health behavior that have concentrated on social cognition approaches whereby the individual is seen as a “rational information processor whose behavior is determined by a combination of psychological factors such as individual attitudes, personal action plans, and perceived social norms.” While social cognition is important to consider and is sometimes successful almost on its own in predicting sexual behavior, it is only one component of a much larger framework for understanding the complexity of human sexuality (Campbell 2003:8-10).

In South Africa the impact of social and environmental factors on sexuality has become increasingly more apparent, particularly since the country’s transition to democracy. Clearly, focusing on impacting individualistic biomedical and behavioral perspectives alone during times of rapid social change would not be enough to challenge the spread of HIV. Thus, there is a crucial need for theory-based initiatives and prevention programs that take into account broader social and environmental factors, as well as the social processes that underpin these different factors. In more recent years, models of theory-based practice have focused on improving the collective health of communities by concentrating on reducing social vulnerability to HIV by both empowering individuals and mobilizing communities as a whole; both goals that seek to change the power balance in relationships but at different levels (8-9).

Efforts to reduce social vulnerability to HIV and create enabling environments for individuals to make informed choices about their behavior has meant concentrating on factors at both the proximal and distal realms to bring about community-level change. In the proximal context, programs have attempted to challenge and change social norms by utilizing systems such as peer education, since it is known that peer influence strongly impacts youth behavior. In conjunction, programs trying to bring about community-level change in the distal context have created interventions that work to eliminate structural and environmental barriers, such as those to condom use and STD health treatment facilities, by providing improved access to services. Further building on the lines of proximal and distal approaches, three key theoretical models

“outcome measures” are important to understanding the extent of the influence of interventions, but they do not often significantly contribute to understandings of the processes that impact biomedical and behavioral factors (Campbell 2003:9).
have emerged among South Africa’s HIV prevention campaigns (Matthews 149-151). They include community organization, social capital theory, and media advocacy:

- **Community organization:** There is no single model for community organization, but rather the idea is that it is arranged around a set of principles that include empowerment, competence in problem-solving, community participation in health, and creating a critical consciousness whereby members of a community come to reflect on their social circumstances and conditions.

- **Social capital theory:** This follows the idea that individuals are more likely to engage in positive health behavioral change if they live in communities with higher levels of social capital, including bonding and bridging social capital. In real terms, this means that individuals are more likely to take care of their health when there are increased levels of participation in local organizations, enhanced trust, help, and support among them.

- **Media advocacy:** Health promotion through mass communication has traditionally focused on public communication and social marketing that aim to impact influences on the individual and their health behavior. More recently, alternative approaches have focused more on ‘issue-framing’ strategies that work to effect community and distal-level factors in health behavior. The aim of these is to empower the public to work to change the social and political environment as it relates to health behavior.

These theoretical models have been utilized by awareness and prevention campaigns in different ways and are of particular note because they represent much of the range of strategies currently in practice. The two most prominent awareness and prevention programs in South Africa, Soul City and Love Life, offer examples of how each of these models have been put into practice. Their campaign strategies draw up on each model, placing greater emphasis on some more than others (De Guzman 666-667).

**5 Campaign Overviews**

**5.1 Soul City**

Soul City is the longest running HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaign in South Africa. Started in 1994 as a non-governmental organization, it integrates health and

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11 Bonding social capital refers to alliances among homogeneous groups that come together around a common identity in trusting and reciprocally supportive relationships. Bridging social capital refers to linking of heterogeneous groups around a common goal or purpose (Matthews 153).

12 This model for understanding South Africa’s HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns was developed by Catherine Matthews and is outlined in Chapter 9: Reducing Sexual Risk Behaviors, Section 3: HIV Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies. In S. Karim and Q. Karim (Eds.), *HIV/AIDS in South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.143-165.
development issues using television dramas and radio shows, among other forms of mass and multi media. The organization spends over seventy percent of its total budget on HIV/AIDS related work and is also committed to health promotion on other topics and illnesses related to HIV.\textsuperscript{13} Soul City’s primary target audience at its inception was disadvantaged or previously disadvantaged blacks but it has widened further to include black and colored South Africans between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five years. It has also complimented its multi-media format, which has come to be known as ‘edutainment’, in various ways over the years by designing life skills projects, engaging in government lobbing work, and creating a secondary project called “Soul Buddzy” in 2000 to target children ages eight to twelve years with community-based, media-oriented interventions that deal unflinchingly with sexual choices and other predicaments facing youth. Over its fourteen year history Soul City has become the most recognizable campaign of its kind and its reach has come to span across gender, racial, and generational divides, and now includes those in other southern African countries as well (Coulson 2001:2; Goldstein et al. 2005:465-466; Posel 2004:59).

Soul City’s dramas alone reach over seventeen million South Africans each year making it one of the most popular programs on prime-time television (Matthews 159). It has developed six series, to date, each with thirteen parts for television, and a series of forty-five minute radio shows broadcasted in nine different languages. The television and radio shows work to dramatize a number of different social problems, including sexual violence, child sexual abuse, the dangers of multiple concurrent partnerships or informal partnerships, and modes of HIV transmission (Posel 59). Booklets distributed through national newspapers and magazines also supplement the series with further information about HIV/AIDS, such as by illustrating the negative impacts of HIV related stigma and how to overcome them, and making dietary recommendations for those who are already positive (Goldstein et al. 466).

Soul City’s approach to behavioral and social change is somewhat different from other programs of its kind that focus more either on the individual or the community. Rather, Soul

\textsuperscript{13} According to Soul City’s John Molefe, the organization’s funding comes largely from international donor agencies such as DFID, Irish Aid, and PEPFAR. The European Union and the Dutch government were also mentioned as donors. The South African government has been active in funding Soul City through both the South African Department of Health and the Department of public service and Administration. It also recently finalized a deal with the Department of Social Development regarding two new programs. One program deals with orphans and vulnerable children and the other with promoting sustainable livelihoods and community development. Soul City also noted that its largest commercial donor is British Petroleum.
City has found it useful to combine a number of models to assist in the development of messages to be effective in impacting social change in broader context, such as those that relate to knowledge, attitudes, norms, and intentions to perform certain behaviors. The messages generated help demonstrate the link between individuals, their immediate community, and the greater sociopolitical environment. In the model, the individual is found at the center of a set of concentric circles that represent the community and the social and political spheres. The purpose of the concentric circles in the model represents the idea that behavioral change on both the social and individual levels is not linear and therefore, there is no one direction for change to occur. Rather, the different constructs in each circle have a recursive impact one another (Goldstein et al. 466-67). As stated by John Molefe, Soul City’s media director:

We do our program based on a social change approach rather than a behavioral change approach. This means not only looking at the individual because we understand that individuals are shaped by their communities and by the sociopolitical environment. Our model shows those as three concentric circles. In our programs we address issues on an individual level, in terms of skills, in terms of self-efficacy, in terms of knowledge, and we also look at what communities can do to shape [social] norms and change norms. Therefore, we create and we model new positive norms and create a perception of a social norm that’s positive for that behavior change. And also, we look at what communities can do to change and take action to bring about change at the sociopolitical level. We look at what legislation is making it difficult for people to actually change and how to challenge that legislation. We also identify what legislation promotes environments that are positive and try to create an awareness of that legislation and how to access it. So, at multiple levels our programs are actually doing interventions at any given time to deal with individual issues and community issues.

The concentric circles representing the community and the social and political spheres reflect the personal, proximal, and distal realms spoken about earlier. Soul City has worked to integrate these different spheres so that they promote community action that is inspired by positive role modeling in its programs.

At the individual level, Soul City works to impact individual determinants of health such as where self-confidence, self-efficacy, and independence are concerned. On an interpersonal level there is an attempt to create supportive rather than alienating environments, improve attitudes toward people living with HIV/AIDS, and promote respect for community members.

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14 See Appendix B – Soul City social and behavioral change model
Also worth considering on this particular level of change is that Soul City has observed a notable change over time in young people’s attitudes toward those living with HIV/AIDS. They believe this change was not necessarily the result of actual changes in their attitudes but more a product of their changing perceptions of others’ attitudes toward HIV. Therefore, the organization’s concern for interpersonal relationships as they concern peer attitudes and peer pressure to conform to norms has become a much more of a priority, particularly as the epidemic is especially rampant among youth. And lastly, taking a broader social view, Soul City has worked to create a more supportive social and political environment with increased support for HIV policies. While Soul City understands that its methods of positive role modeling and advocacy on each of these three different levels are not enough on their own to result in social change, they do believe that their mass media model works to both create opportunities and provide credibility for further health promotion and community advocacy (Coulson 4-7; Matthews 159).

The development of Soul City’s campaigns and programs has become quite streamlined over the course of its existence. According to the organization, they follow a pattern of first choosing the topics and the target audience they will focus on, and then working to build and strengthen partnerships with other organizations focusing on similar relevant issues. They use these connections for assistance with further research on their topic areas, as well as on the demographics and other specifics related to their target audience. This research helps inform their chosen storyline and the specific messages they integrate into it. After these steps, they conduct pre-testing of their dramas with members of their target audience and other experts. Following approval of their dramas for release, they develop supplemental material, including education packages, to be distributed within the communities they target (Coulson 8). After each series has run its course Soul City conducts a number of surveys and other studies to see how its campaigns have resonated with the public:

Because we are a mass media campaign we know we have to make it popular and therefore package it in a way that people actually can get entertained but also get information and, at the same time, understand that we need to be careful not to use drama to the point where we have unintended messages that actually undermine our purpose. So as we’ve evolved the evaluations of every project that we’ve done help inform us about what kinds of things don’t work so well and what does work (John Molefe, Soul City).

See Appendix B – List of aims of Soul City campaign messages in series 2, 3, and 4
As an example, Soul City’s fourth series has consistently been associated with positive individual and community knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors relating to prevention of HIV infection, gender attitudes, and talking about HIV with family and friends in evaluations. However, this response from Soul City’s audience also came at a time when viewers told the campaign that they wanted more reality from the dramas and warned them that the storylines being projected were “too feel good and that their realities were not as feel good as [Soul City] was portraying” (John Molefe, Soul City). The campaign took this response to heart and has since tried to model more ‘realistic’ life scenarios for its audience.

In conjunction with developing a streamlined plan for the development of its various campaign series, Soul City has also done well to develop a its brand recognition after years of carefully deciding how it wanted to be identified. The campaign believes its efforts have paid off in that it now has a high level of brand loyalty and is associated with its target causes and goals:

*One thing that has been useful for us is that because we are an independent player and we have developed a reputation and we’ve also developed a brand over time that people see as a South African brand that they have allegiance to… I mean, this institution is much bigger than the individuals who run it. The public feels that they have a say in how this (Soul City) should be run and its existence. And, this is very good for us. We have legitimacy* (John Molefe, Soul City).

In the latest surveys taken, forty-seven percent of South Africa’s national population spontaneously mentioned Soul City’s television drama as a television drama they feel has offered them useful information about HIV/AIDS, among other related topics. Respondents also associated Soul City with being trustworthy, healthy, experienced, reliable, aspirational, knowledgeable, and understanding (Coulson 8-10; Goldstein 481). The positive tone of such responses generally holds true regarding larger community and government reactions and responses to the campaign. Critical responses levied against Soul City have been relatively mild compared with other media-oriented awareness and prevention campaigns, perhaps because its messages are somewhat less overt than others as they are blanketed by the soap-opera format that frames them. Rater, the program is regarded as being highly effective at framing issues of sexuality within a discourse that is largely empowering to its audience. It is also praised for having helped advance dialogues and heightened the profile of a number of issues, such as those related to sexual health and the transmission of HIV and other STDs (Posel 59).
5.2 Love Life

The key difference between the media approaches of Soul City and Love Life is that Soul City believes mass media can be used to support a “ground swell of mass activity” that is bottom up rather than prescriptive, harkening back to their key theme of community action being inspired by positive role modeling, while Love Life is more interested in using mass media to promote the general community participation of the individual. If a school child, for example, hears of Love Life and decides they are interested in participating in one of Love Life’s sports programs, the campaign views itself as having been a success on some level because it has drawn that child in and can now work to further help the child engage directly with its positive lifestyle-oriented messages. This model prioritizes individual behavioral change and understands that change on this level will lead to larger social change, while the Soul City model offers something of an inversion. The Love Life campaign views itself as being different from other campaigns in this way and describes itself as “a deliberate departure from traditional approaches to HIV prevention, relying on a combination of commercial marketing and public health techniques to promote a new health lifestyle among twelve to seventeen year olds”, (although the campaign does attract older youth who are certainly not barred from participating) (Coulson 5-6).

The mission of Love Life, said to be the most ambitious and provocative campaign of its kind, is to combine high-powered multi-media with comprehensive youth friendly outreach and community support in order to work to reduce HIV transmission, among other STDs, and unwanted pregnancies among South African youth (Leclerc-Madlala 7). Specifically, through its outreach and support programs it hopes to elicit and sustain changes in sexual behavior and related social norms among youth in order to dramatically reduce the rate of new HIV infections (Pettifor and MacPhail 2007:4). When Love Life was launched in 1999 it promoted itself as a highly visible national strategy and was led by what has been described as a consortium of leading South African public health organizations in partnership with a coalition of more than 100 community-based organizations, the South African government, major South African media groups, and private foundations (Lesko 519-520). At its beginning, Love Life received the attention of major funding organizations, such as the Kaiser Family Foundation, UNICEF, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria that contributed to its annual spending budget, totaling up to approximately $20 million in 2003. The large scale of Love Life’s budget means that its campaigns are the most expensive
of their kind in the world, with forty percent of its funds directed at mass media strategies and sixty percent concentrated on other types of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention-oriented initiatives (Coulson 3; Epstein 127).

At its inception Love Life created a five-year strategy aimed at reducing the rate of HIV infection among fifteen to twenty year old South African youth by fifty percent over the course of five years. The campaign’s strategy consisted of three primary goals to help reduce infection rates. The first goal was to initiate a dialogue about the Love Life brand and the concepts behind it. The second goal was to guide this dialogue toward sex, specifically as it concerned adolescent sexuality, with an emphasis on improving inter-generational communication about issues of sexuality. The third goal was to make explicit the link between sexual behavior and HIV. While Love Life was unable to meet its goal of reducing infection rates among youth by fifty percent, which resulted in its loss of funding from the Global Fund, it has both maintained its original goals and developed its strategies further. Today the campaign strives to challenge the social norms that put people at higher risk for contracting HIV. It does this by using social networks as agents of change to implement and diffuse its programs. The programs offered by Love Life are geared toward providing positive lifestyle experiences that help give youth the skills and motivation they need to improve their life chances and reduce their risk of HIV infection (Pettifor and MacPhail 6).

As stated by Love Life’s media director, Refilwe Africa, “Love Life is chiefly a prevention campaign, so coming from that angle we are looking at the drivers of high-risk behavior, which is where our challenge lies. We’re also looking at your self-esteem issues, societal issues, and transactional sex…so our focus is on sexuality.” Love Life’s emphasis on sexuality is linked to issues of individual self-esteem and empowerment. The program uses a mix of more traditional sex education focused on delaying sexual activity with broader aims to cultivate individual self-worth, encouraging more open communication about sex, informed choice, and shared responsibility in sexual decision making (Lesko 524). Deborah Posel, a professor of sociology at the University of Witwatersrand, describes Love Life as “an attempt to normalize and thereby legitimize open sex talk by providing a vocabulary, which detaches sex from the seedy and the naughty.” Rather, sex is “presented as the site of rational, individual choice, and agency. The campaign represents an attempt to constitute the modern sexual subject

See Appendix C – Love Life’s structural model in the first year of the campaign.
who is knowledgeable, responsible, in control, and free to make informed choices” (58). Love Life does this through combining popular marketing techniques with public health education strategies. Essentially, it melds messages about safe sex and individual choice with the iconography of popular culture to integrate ‘safety’ into the discourses of the ‘cool’ and the ‘hip’ (Posel 57-58; Epstein 128-29).

The tools used by Love Life to execute its campaign involve combining high-powered media awareness education and youth-friendly outreach support programs for those in poor and rural communities (Coulson 3). The activities of its campaigns are broad in their scope, content, and level of engagement. They operate on various levels through the mediums of billboard media, television, radio, and printed material to bring messages that promote HIV risk reduction and positive lifestyle choices to the individual, peer groups, families, communities, and the nation. Refilwe Africa spoke about the campaigns use of media:

[When] Love Life was launched the problem of HIV/AIDS was only coming into the spotlight and South Africans were just waking up to it. There were just no intervention methods in place so we came in to challenge them to talk about it and to talk about the problems...so the way we did it was to draw attention into our campaign through media. Media plays a huge role at Love Life. In fact, for a long time people thought we were a billboard campaign purely because we used so much print to draw people into our campaign. But really, the bulk of our work is done by drawing people in for face-to-face interaction (Refilwe Africa, Love Life).

Building on its media campaign, Love Life has also created Y-Centers for youth, which operate as multi-functional lifestyle and health centers set up directly in schools and other community venues to provide interactive educational programs. Y-Centers serve as the hubs of Love Life’s community outreach and strive to offer more substantive face-to-face interactions for individuals, families, and local communities. The intention is to create a sort of neutral community space where issues related to HIV risks, such as condom use, gender norms, and multiple-concurrent partnerships, can be discussed and debated. In order to encourage involvement, the Y-Centers arrange recreational and sporting activities, motivational speakers, community interventions, and also provide peer support programs implemented by youth themselves who are trained as ‘groundBREAKERS’ and are basically peer educators. The idea behind the concept of the Y-

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17 The Y-Centers build on Love Life’s media campaigns, which are set up to attract the interest of youth and draw them in. At the Y-Centers youth have an opportunity to engage Love Life’s messages and ‘own’ them (Refilwe Africa, Love Life).
Center is that through participation with it, youth will become more inspired and motivated to take control of their lives, set goals for the future, and take better care of their reproductive health. In the words of Love Life’s media director, “young people who we target need to visualize an HIV free future because if you do that your behavior now will decide how your future translates” (Refilwe Africa).

The theoretical framework behind Love Life’s strategy is composed of a few different behavioral theories, each of which compliments the other. First, Love Life draws on diffusion theory, a model that focuses on using social networks and community leaders, such as Love Life’s ‘groundBREAKERS’ to communicate new ideas and previously unaccepted behaviors, like talking openly about sex. This theory recognizes the importance of capitalizing on existing social networks to challenge social norms and communicate new messages about HIV prevention that may take hold over time. Secondly, Love Life follows the theory of reasoned action that focuses on the idea that individual behavior is part of a certain framework made up of attitudes, subjective norms, and other social influences. Therefore, central to the theory is the notion that individuals take account of the implications of their behavior within a certain context before they make any choice to change. Love Life works to promote dialogue about issues of sexuality and to challenge social norms in order to impact the socio-contextual framework the individual functions within. Thirdly, Love Life subscribes to ecological theory, which follows the idea that behavioral change not only takes place on the individual level but also on the community and social levels. Hence, the campaign follows the belief that it is essential to organize programs at the levels where social risks manifest most, such as by changing norms and attitudes related to condom use and HIV testing (Pettifor and MacPhail 4-6).

Branding is another central component of Love Life’s strategy and has been heavily focused on since the campaign began. In its first year one of Love Life’s greatest successes was that it was able to generate a brand recognition among nearly sixty percent of South African youth, with ninety percent of them associating the brand with healthy living and positive lifestyle choices regarding sex, sexuality, and HIV/AIDS. It was able to do this in part by modeling its campaign on the recent re-launching of the Sprite brand, a popular beverage consumed largely by youth. The importance of brand recognition, as explained by Love Life, is to position the program as part of youth culture, as Sprite had done, so that youth will take note of its initial media-oriented teaser campaign and ultimately be intrigued and drawn into its community
oriented programs, such as those offered by its Y-Centers (Coulson 10; Epstein 128-30). Refilwe Africa discussed this idea further:

We interact with young people. We get them to own the message. We get them to buy into the campaign...and then we constantly have to be fresh because we’re working against a whole lot of youth...so we need to get young people to be able to locate us and still buy into what we are doing (Refilwe Africa, Love Life).

Love Life’s brand logic of trying to offer youth a sense of belonging by drawing them into Love Life and hence, into a focus on their future and a new and improved lifestyle, has been highly criticized, among other aspects of the campaign. Nevertheless, Love Life is seen by many as forming part of a national pedagogy on youth, sexuality, education, and HIV/AIDS, as well as exerting considerable influence on South Africa’s consciousness, whether or not its specific programs affect youth in the ways intended (Lesko 520; Rosenberg 2006:10-11).

6 Negotiating Individual Awareness and Knowledge of HIV/AIDS Within Campaign Discourses

6.1 Constructions of Personhood and Knowledge of HIV/AIDS

Having sketched out a framework for campaign models and discussed the goals and methods of implementation of the Soul City and Love Life campaigns, it is possible to move on to a discussion of what these campaigns mean in the personal, interpersonal, and social contexts of the youth they target. Since campaigns focus to a large extent on knowledge, and in particular, behavior based on knowledge, this section will begin by considering what both mean for youth regarding their understandings of HIV/AIDS.

Two young male students interviewed at the University of KwaZulu-Natal offered more than a few telling words about the perceptions of sexual behavior related to the spread of HIV/AIDS:

• They think if you die from it, it means you had bad behavior…they can’t accept that you weren’t bad and died from it...so they will just generalize it like you were having bad sexual behavior.

• Some people think that if you get HIV it means you were sleeping around. They go around and don’t use condoms because they don’t like them but they also don’t think anything will happen to them because they aren’t sleeping around so much.
How can these understandings of behavior be made sense of in the context of youth awareness and prevention, and particularly against the backdrop of prevention campaigns? In addition, what do they say about how knowledge relating to HIV/AIDS functions on an individual level and in society? These questions are essential to consider in examining the struggles of youth as they formulate their own identities amid the presence of HIV/AIDS, as well as the various messages of campaigns.

To begin with, the chief idea guiding HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns has been that knowledge and behavioral change are the keys to reducing incidences of transmission. However, research has shown that individuals do not necessarily apply abstract knowledge of safe sex practices and HIV/AIDS to themselves. Rather, studies claim that there is often the lack of a significant link between the amount of knowledge and the behavioral practices of individuals. This suggests that behavior is far more complex and cannot be expected to change based on exposure to general knowledge or biomedical information. Instead, it is necessary to consider how individual identity, or personhood, is constructed and the ways that knowledge of the self and of society is developed. In considering the different components of individual identity, such as attitudes, values, beliefs, social norms, peers influences, and media exposure, there is a better chance of understanding the constructs of identity and knowledge, and what might influence individuals to adopt different behaviors (Shefer and Strebel 2002:1375). Campaigns like Soul City and Love Life have, in their own ways, attempted to take a broader scope in considering knowledge, identity, and behavior. Love Life, for example, focuses not as much on general knowledge about HIV/AIDS but on knowledge of the self and hence, self-empowerment, which can be used to make better life choices and reduce personal risk. Soul City takes a different approach that focuses more on indirect behavioral change through positive role modeling and challenging social norms in its television dramas.

Regardless of their tactical differences, the messages campaigns put forth create rules of behavioral normalcy, intentionally or not, that must compete with the larger constructs of personhood. The formation of individual identity is highly complex as it is both fragmented and fluid, conscious and unconscious, and often made “in conditions not of one’s own choosing”. As Stewart Hall points out, individuals are “always in the process of becoming ‘human beings’ rather than ‘human beings’” and the way individuals become what they become is tied up the processes of identification whereby they identify themselves against the backdrop of associations
with what they like, who they wish to become, whom they socialize with, and also, who and what they identify themselves against (Epstein et al. 2004:12). Processes of identification are also informed by a number of factors, including social status, networks, and social roles that individuals are expected to follow and may determine to what extent they are able to exercise agency and different forms of social capital in their surroundings. Therefore, individual identity involves both knowledge of the self and social knowledge, which are reliant on one another and thus cannot be separated.

According to Elaine Salo of the African Gender Institute, youth simultaneously “straddle the social spaces of collective and individual alliance”. The collective space involves their social relationships, social knowledge, and compliance with social norms and values. The individual space involves the ways in which individuals choose to demonstrate their personhood, create social capital, ensure their positions in social networks, and expand their opportunities. Salo claims that it is within these social spaces that youth develop their ideas about personhood, which then inform the decisions and choices they make. Youth may find that these two intermeshing social spaces offer somewhat conflicting notions of personhood and the way it is acted out, particularly where matters of sexuality and risk perception are concerned (Salo 2006:5-6). The individual space as it involves expressions of human desire may come into conflict with moral ideas generated in the collective space. Such an example includes where promiscuity is associated with bad or deviant behavior, and hence also with HIV/AIDS.

Principled and moral actions are those that preserve the individual and therefore also preserve society, and vice versa. With an STD like HIV/AIDS, morality is something of a social defense that is constructed to preserve society from the threat of disease. Stigmatization and processes of ‘othering’ those who become infected based on immoral behavior is also a means of distancing the individual self from the threat. Therefore, when social knowledge, and consequently individual knowledge as well, about HIV/AIDS is based on moral perceptions of the disease, individuals may not perceive their own personal risk because they construct risk in moral terms that may help them project the danger on to others, rather than themselves. AIDS then becomes a matter of bad behavior of the other.18

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18 It is a bit ironic that on some level AIDS related stigmas have been brought to Africa from the West. They are grounded in Western morality that relates AIDS to “bad behavior” and AIDS prevention with condom use. However, there is a double standard where condom use is frequently associated with “prostitution” and lack of trust,
Awareness and prevention programs have long sought to challenge “bad behavior” in a variety of ways, but in doing so they have always imposed a moral code of their own on the disease. For example, where campaigns have attempted to focus on the dangers of multiple partnerships, they run the risk of reinforcing the stereotype that a particular lifestyle is responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS. In this way, they make a kind of moral judgment about what is right and what is wrong. Whether generated by awareness and prevention campaigns or not, these types of moral ideas about HIV facilitate a kind of us and them game that promotes denial because they project the notion that HIV is the product of a certain lifestyle. Therefore, youth can easily say, “that’s not my life”, “that’s not who I am”, and thus, “it won’t happen to me”. In turn, such a position may easily allow for the legitimization of other unsafe sexual practices.

Moral knowledge surrounding the spread of HIV is overlain with a complex and wide range of emotionally loaded constructions about what the disease means, as well as how ideas of gender, sexuality, health, and illness fit into it (Shefer and Strebel 1387). It is within this idea that Susan Sontag has famously written in her book, *Illness as Metaphor*, that moral knowledge about HIV is about making sense of that which is not fully understood (Epstein 2007:148). It is as though certain kinds of psychological understandings of HIV allow individuals and societies some level of control over that which they really do not have any control. However, in turn, the consequence of moralizing about HIV and developing knowledge of it in this way is that the resulting understandings and awareness of it often undermine the realities of the disease.

### 6.2 The Impact of Knowledge-based Behavioral Interventions on Individual Awareness

*You can talk now and again to people and tell them to stay away from sex but they won’t do that. They need to use a condom…Oh, but that’s a problem too because they don’t want to use it. Even if we tell them to use a condom they might seem like they are listening but when they go home and have sex they won’t use it* (Male student).

This student’s comment reveals that he is familiar with the ABCs of prevention, or at least the part that encourages abstinence and the use of condoms. However, it also implies that knowledge of prevention is one thing, while implementation is another. In addition, it hints at the ways that campaigns speak to matters of prevention and how they tend to carry a kind of

and lack of condom use and HIV transmission is associated with having done something wrong or behaved immorally in some way (Epstein 147).
moralizing that youth understand, which is probably in part why they “seem like they are listening” and they know what they should do. The moment in the bedroom though is obviously another story where it is as though knowledge takes a backseat with regard to behavior. What does this say about the role of knowledge in HIV prevention? And, what does it mean for the types of knowledge campaigns disseminate and how youth respond to them?

As previously stated, throughout the course of the AIDS epidemic the focus of many awareness and prevention programs has been on individual behavioral-based interventions that seek to increase the knowledge of individuals about the virus by informing them of the risks involved in unprotected sexual behavior and offering methods of reducing their risk of exposure to it. The ABC campaign is one such example of an attempt to mediate individuals’ risk of contracting HIV by offering them three seemingly straightforward choices of preventative methods. More recently campaigns have started to advocate other types of knowledge-based behavioral interventions, such as by promoting individual self-awareness, along side basic knowledge of HIV prevention campaigns like ABC. The Love Life campaign has made it its foremost goal to promote individual self-knowledge, alternatively redefined as self-esteem, self-empowerment, and standing up for oneself in order to improve individuals’ ability to make better choices regarding their sexual relationships to reduce their risk of contracting HIV and the future of their lives in general (Lesko 531). As stated by Refilwe Africa of Love Life:

We are an HIV prevention campaign that knows that young people who are inspired, who are ambitious, who are driven, are less likely to take risks […] the ABCs were being punted but at that time [when Love Life started] young people were not being challenged to be responsible. It was that compassionate approach, you know, like, ‘you’re HIV positive, what can we do for you?’ where as we were thinking about how to stop new infections.

The idea of improving an individuals knowledge of themselves by encouraging them to focus inward on personal issues of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-regard is certainly not a negative one. However, in light of HIV awareness and prevention campaigns, there is the potential for undesired impacts on individuals regarding their perceptions of both the virus and themselves as they coexist in the social world when the focus is placed on personal knowledge, awareness and individual choices regarding behavior. Campaigns that focus on these particular elements without focusing on the realities of the experiences of people with AIDS and the social
underpinnings of transmission of the virus risk creating a moral conundrum whereby contracting HIV/AIDS becomes primarily a matter of personal responsibility and choice.

Inherent in the ABC campaign are a set of moral ideas about risk and these ideas are prioritized in the order in which they are spelled out in a one way dialogue between those who disseminate campaign messages and those who receive them. The concept of the campaign is direct and explicit as it tells people that they should refrain from having sex but, if they cannot, they should have one or few partners and use condoms. The ABC campaign presents simplified options for the regulation sexual behavior and HIV risk reduction. It assumes that these are viable options for the individual and that the individual’s assessment of their risk and utilization of the ABCs are based in rational choice. The campaign developed by Love Life promoting self-development and knowledge of the self builds on the foundations of the ABC campaign. It literally tells the individual that they must take control of their life and develop themselves in order to make informed, responsible, and rational choices, such as those outlined in the ABC campaign. However, rather than discussing sex in terms of risk management options, Love Life discusses sex as if it were a site of rational individual choice and agency where knowledge, responsibility, and self-control lead to informed decision making and empowerment. In the campaign, sexual regulation is internalized and “self-discipline through the rational regulation of desire” is merged with a sort of moral reflexivity on behavior that is supposed to lead to wiser choices on the part of the individual (Posel 59 and 62).

Furthermore, the issue with making safe sex a matter of personal agency and formulating a sort of “discourse of options” as campaigns like Love Life strive to do is that the notion of options assumes that the individual is fully accountable for their choices and actions. If this is the case, then where safe sex and HIV transmission are caught up in this discourse of options they quickly become matters of individual choice as well. This means that ideas of the ‘normal’ self become coupled with the right to choose, empowerment, and health, while the contrary, the ‘damaged’ self, is built up as powerless and hence, diseased. Love Life’s campaign thus carries the unintended message that individuals who become infected did not love their lives or the lives of others enough to protect themselves and that they acted irresponsibly, lacking proper knowledge and self-control. This inadvertent blaming of the victim for their infection may work to further promote the stigmatization of HIV as it places a heavy weight on the idea that since the virus is sexually transmitted those who contract it somehow acted immorally, such as by
expressing their sexuality in some unrestrained, excessive, or careless way (Posel 61-62). In turn, ‘othering’ of the virus is also facilitated along with stigmatization because in this discourse HIV has become a problem of the individual and it is something that they have “chosen”. Therefore, while youth can say HIV is not a “choice” they are going to make, it offers them a platform looking at those who do contract it as dissimilar ‘others’ who did “choose” it and thus, are perhaps undeserving of much compassion or sympathy. In addition, it also promotes the denial of the individual’s risk of infection.

Essentially, in using behavior and certain types of knowledge to explain the HIV epidemic, as is done in both the ABC and Love Life campaigns, individuals are unintentionally and indirectly told that their ‘bad’ behavior and lack of knowledge is the problem with HIV/AIDS and the reason for its existence and perpetuation. This discourse reinforces individual awareness of HIV/AIDS and knowledge of it as being morally grounded in personal choice (Johnny and Mitchell 2006:757-758; Epstein 148). However, it fails in three critical ways. First, it does not clearly convey to individuals why they themselves are at risk and why they need follow the campaign messages. Second, it does not acknowledge the ways in which sexual behavior may often precede sexual knowledge in decision-making, and that HIV is not simply a matter of personal choice. And, lastly, it does not work to promote individual knowledge and awareness of the realities of the epidemic, as well as the de-stigmatization of it (Jones 1997:405).

6.3 Reality Check: Awareness Amidst a Muted Reality of HIV/AIDS

If more people could talk openly about being positive then there might not be so much silence around HIV/AIDS. Prevention and awareness campaigns all say the same things…abstain, etc. I want to hear more people saying other things, something that is more practical for our reality (Female student).

The silence related to the realities of HIV/AIDS in South Africa is probably one of the greatest barriers to real awareness and prevention. This student’s comment suggests that regardless of the strong presence of HIV/AIDS campaigns, the realities of the epidemic remain hidden and are not helped by messages of abstinence and the like. In addition, it suggests that perhaps these messages are also negated by the lack of reality and practical substance behind them. What does this lack of reality mean for the way youth interact with campaign messages, and especially, for their coping with the presence of HIV and understandings of it?
Love Life and other awareness and prevention programs of its kind face a tremendous challenge in that while they attempt to focus on the positive aspects of individual development, as well as community development, they have much to do to break down the stigmas of HIV transmission and convey the realities of the epidemic, which have been largely neglected by campaigns in general. Students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal were quick to point out the need for campaigns to do more to bring to light the realities of HIV/AIDS in order to improve awareness and prevention efforts:

- Many people think they know just because they hear ‘HIV/AIDS’ all the time but when it comes down to practice, they don’t really know how to protect themselves and they don’t really know the realities of AIDS. It’s like it’s not even real to us (Female student).
- I’ve never been in a discussion where a person has come and talked about what it’s like to be positive and what they’ve gone through. I think that would be more effective in conveying the realities of AIDS (Male student).
- On campus we see the testing sites but they don’t really tell us about HIV/AIDS. I mean, we need more options for talking about HIV (Female student).

If campaigns fail to relay the stories of people AIDS, lack of understanding about the realities of HIV/AIDS may make it easier to use what knowledge individuals have about the virus and its transmission as a means of denial or ‘othering’. HIV/AIDS can easily become a problem of the black other, the poor other, or the promiscuous other when individuals hear about the virus but do not feel or see that it has any impact on their lives:

- I think it’s a human thing to think we cannot be touched by some things. We believe it’s out there but we don’t think it will actually touch us until it does. That’s probably why a lot of people get it. It’s that idea that it’s not going to happen to me, especially something like a virus that we can’t see everyday…I mean, you walk around and you don’t know who has it and who doesn’t (Male student).

Therefore, even while individuals may be intellectually convinced that HIV is “an equal opportunity employer” and can potentially become anyone’s problem, it still is not their “choice”, as Love Life presents it as being and, at the same, time it is not visible to them as a threat, which makes it easy to deny it as such. In conjunction, youth perceptions of risk regarding HIV are weighed against other factors, such as sensation seeking, physical propensity, and the potential for certain social benefits, such as greater peer acceptance. The lack of a visible threat from HIV may easily tip the scales in favor of taking risks, particularly when such benefits, especially as they involve more immediate gratification than consequence, are present.
In addition to weighing the risks it is important to consider that even though individuals may know how to prevent HIV and have the self-confidence and self-esteem necessary for positive sexual decision-making, this knowledge may not serve as the armour it is intended to be against infection, particularly when ‘othering’ of the epidemic offers a simpler solution that is easily morally grounded. The views of student’s exemplified this notion:

- *Lots of adverts have black women in them but it’s like everyone gets AIDS so why don’t they show that or tell us that. And, there’s such a large group that falls away because they think AIDS is only for those people, for the black people or the poor people, or those dirty people* (Female student).

- *People think that just because they know about HIV they aren’t at risk. It’s like they think that they are immune and that it’s just for those ‘other’ people* (Male student).

- *I think people are afraid of what others will say so they don’t get tested and then if they are positive then they don’t have to deal with it, which is no fun anyway* (Male student).

Instead, individuals may emotionally distance themselves believing they are ‘safe’ from infection because they are of a different race, class, or economic background. They also have knowledge of HIV/AIDS, which serves as a kind of armor, even while not always putting it into practice and thus placing themselves at risk (Levine and Ross 13).

The potential ‘othering’ of HIV/AIDS and making it a problem not of the individual but of “those others” “out there” in society, points to the gap between knowledge and practice and the reality that sexual behavior can certainly not be reduced to a linear model of knowledge that leads to the right choices being made in the heat of the moment:

- *You question what’s right and wrong with sex…and then there comes this point where you actually get the first hand experience and you have to remember what it is you’ve been told your entire life that you could so easily forget in the moment…sixteen years of education could so easily be disregarded in five to ten minutes of pleasure* (Male student).

As researches have pointed out, “sexual behavior is often impulsive rather than rational, and health messages relating to safety may be dismissed in the context of a passionate encounter when competing goals offset well-informed intentions, such as to use a condom”. This point speaks to the reality that regardless of self-worth, empowerment, and knowledge about HIV/AIDS, an individual may still become infected (Johnny and Mitchell 757-758).

Yet, even when campaigns move beyond the scope of building upon individual knowledge of the self and prevention methods to attempt to convey some of the realities of the
epidemic, the pervading culture of silence in South African makes it all the more challenging for campaigns to have the desired effect. While Soul City has created television programs that are certainly framed within a similar discourse to that of Love Life, such as they concern empowerment and “rights-speak”, it has also tried to present stories in its dramas that demonstrate the reach of HIV/AIDS to different members of society, the rich, the poor, white, black, educated, and non-educated. They have also sought out feedback from their viewing audience on a regular basis to see if what they are portraying is in fact resonating with viewers (Posel 59). John Molefe commented on some of the types of feedback the campaign has received:

People have said, ‘Hey, I’ve got my own identity and reality’ so our material has to be as real as it can be for them to identify with. We’ve had people say that we were too ‘feel good’ and that their realities were not always as ‘feel good’ as we were portraying (Soul City).

However, the impact of their efforts has been somewhat constrained by the fact that they are only one campaign working among many that dares to incorporate realistic depictions of HIV into its messages. Their challenge is that in using the medium of television to portray the realities of the epidemic, they keep it confined to something of an alternate reality that is easy to distance oneself from. As stated by one student:

• I guess if you want to learn from it you can but I think people still watch it and see it as just a TV show. It’s like it’s their life, not mine so maybe they have a hard time to apply those lessons to their own lives (Female student).

Limiting knowledge of the realities of HIV/AIDS to the confines of television dramas and, at the same time, giving preference to forms of knowledge about the epidemic related to its social realities and who it affects is a way that campaigns exercise their choice to privilege certain types of knowledge over others. They also privilege certain attitudes toward HIV/AIDS over others because they face the continual challenge of maintaining marketable messages that are appealing to youth:

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19 The following statement by John Molefe, Soul City’s media director, demonstrates some of the ways that campaigns have tried to address the potential for racial ‘othering’ and face the risk of facilitating denialism in their programs among based on race: “The government was saying that our focus and emphasis on the portrayal of black people’s stories might be perpetuating misconceptions that are out there…such as stereotyping HIV/AIDS as being a black person’s disease. Fortunately when they raised that we had already showed some episodes with whites and others dealing with HIV so that helped and since then we have tried to show more. I mean, we want people to see Soul City as a reflection of their lives…their reality.”
You know, TV dramas really change the reality of things...they have their own reality. We have been accused of not being real enough...it’s easy to sensationalize things in the media, you know...so we would get people saying that we were not hard core enough...so we decided to go to more hard drama but with a positive and entertaining twist because people don’t want to see depressing issues all the time. At the same time, we don’t want to trivialize the realities that people are experiencing (John Molefe, Soul City).

There is great concern over matters such as being too depressing, not being hopeful enough, trivializing the realities that people face, and alienating viewers. The challenge for viewers is to decide what to take from Soul City’s programs and how to negotiate that knowledge within their everyday lived realities as they concern the presence of HIV/AIDS, or not.

6.4 Individual Awareness Against the Backdrop of Conflicting Campaign Discourses

We know about Love Life because of their billboards and ridiculous adverts. They are sick things, stupid things. It’s nothing that’s real...nothing that pertains to AIDS related things. They need to tell people the straight up truth rather than all this stuff about loving yourself. It’s all so confusing. I just don’t get it (Female student).

The frustration of this student toward the Love Life campaign reveals that on some level the campaign is not having its desired effect or impact. Rather, her comment clearly states that the messages of the campaign have become confusing, and thus frustrating and alienating. What does it say though about the efforts of campaigns to disseminate their messages and the level of sensitivity they need to have in order to understand what kinds of inadvertent impacts their messages may have on youth who receive them? What does this comment also say about campaign’s perceptions of youth struggles in how they address them?

Individuals face a challenge in negotiating their awareness of HIV/AIDS amidst the varying and sometimes confusing or contradictory messages of campaigns. As campaigns have worked to develop their messages of awareness and prevention based on the different theoretical frameworks for impacting behavioral change and knowledge of HIV/AIDS, their messages have become increasingly abundant and varied. Perhaps the latest struggle of campaigns is to avoid over-saturating the media environment with so many varied and fragmented discourses about
HIV/AIDS that they risk alienating youth who then choose to turn a deaf ear to the matter altogether believing that they have heard it all before.\textsuperscript{20}

- \textit{I feel like I know about HIV…I mean, I really know about it…I feel like I’m turning right, I’m turning left and there’s always something about HIV, but you know, we don’t really know about it…we just think we do because we are tired of hearing about it. I am so irritated with how much stuff is out there about AIDS. I hear it all the time!} (Female student).

- \textit{I feel like, how many times do we have to be told by these people [campaigns]? I mean the intensity of the awareness is actually scary now. I’m not even sure people pay attention any more} (Male student).

The sentiments of these students are reflective of the messages of campaigns that emphasize the individual’s responsibility to make positive choices. The problem is that individuals who feel that they are burnt out on campaign messages may ultimately become more difficult to reach, making the efforts of campaigns to disseminate messages containing new information, knowledge, or perspectives on the epidemic potentially futile.

A strategy that has been employed in the past to draw attention to matters of awareness is shock therapy, which focuses on the threat of HIV/AIDS and evokes fear more than anything else. Images of death, in particular, have been used to ‘scare’ people into believing in the threat that HIV poses. However, multiple studies have shown that shock tactics are not ultimately effective in reaching individuals and influencing behavioral change, and many campaigns have abandoned them altogether. Certainly, in the campaigns put forth by Soul City and Love Life the direct threat of death from HIV/AIDS is not even close to being a central theme, although it has been portrayed in Soul City’s television dramas. Arguably though, the threat of HIV has to some extent been repackaged and sold not with the skull and cross bones as in the past, but with messages that are really only slight less forward than the direct threat of death. One recent radio campaign by Love Life contained the slogan, “The more partners you have the greater the chance that HIV will get you! Face it, HIV loves sleeping around!” The message conveys HIV as something of a hunter that seeks out those who engage in deviant behavior. In addition, it takes a highly moralist position as it reinforces the stereotype that HIV is for the deviant other who has

\textsuperscript{20} Soul City has not received as much criticism as Love Life for its varied messages or for over-saturating the media market. This is likely because its programs focus on a broad ranger of social issues. In addition, messages regarding self-empowerment, safe sex, and the risk of HIV/AIDS are mixed together within a larger soap opera format so that they are more subtle and not nearly as overt as some of the more obvious statements projected on Love Life billboards.
multiple partners, seemingly excluding the various other factors that place individuals as risk. Another slogan, “HIV Loves Skin on Skin”, which is designed to promote condom use, plays upon the campaign’s name, Love Life, and relays the threat of HIV in posing two diametrically opposed questions: Whose love is stronger – the love you have for yourself or the love that HIV has for you? Such questioning may not only seem confusing to individuals, (and Love Life has claimed that at times they create messages that are deliberately obtuse in order to make people come back to the same media and discuss its vague meaning), but also unwarranted and ultimately alienating (Refilwe Africa). They may also be working to further stigmatize and “other” HIV/AIDS where they promotes the notion that those who contract AIDS are those who “sleep around”.

Coupled with the running of radio and billboard advertisements of this kind in the Love Life campaign are messages that encourage the individual to focus on the future, while planning for it in the present:

*In our campaign, “Love to Be” we are trying to get young people to think about their future. Don’t just think about now. If you actually have a plan for the future you can start working on it now. A lot of people think, ‘Oh, I’ll worry about it when I’m older and then live for in the meantime” but in the meantime decides your future literally. So we are trying to seize upon the idea that there are many opportunities out there that young people are not looking at (Refilwe Africa, Media Director, Love Life).*

While it is typically true that many youth tend to think that the future is something they can worry about later, while living for the ‘now’, messages about the future, like those in Love Life’s “2010, Love to Be There” campaign set up a somewhat conflicting discourse along side messages about the threat of HIV. Essentially, individuals are simultaneously being told to focus on the future while visualizing the vague threat of HIV/AIDS. These messages may not resonate strongly with youth who are living through difficult times and struggling to survive day in and day out. And, with others, their lack of clarity and opposition to one another may also frustrate youth who then decide to tune the campaign out because it is not something they feel they can relate to. In addition, Life’s focus on the future may be difficult for youth to identify with in general as it fails to take into account the complexities of their behavior, such as they concern sexual behavior as a function of human desire, the need for more immediate emotional attachments than thinking about the future can offer, and the larger social constructs and confines that youth exist within.
7 Struggles Between Ideals and Realities in Love, Relationships and Responsibility in the Face of Campaign Messages

7.1 Love Economics in a Time of HIV/AIDS Campaigns

About love...sometimes I don’t know if she wants to hear it but I tell her. I just feel that I have to. There’s a lot of people out there who are not so lucky to have people who can say it. I mean people who can say it and mean it because some guys can just say, ‘I love you’ to a girl [...] because they want to sleep with her [...] but to really mean what they are saying or to show it is another story (Male student).

Love tends to be a complicated topic and this student’s comment certainly reveals something of that. This student speaks of the way that love for him is expressed in genuine emotional terms because he means what he is saying when he says “I love you”, as opposed to his peers who may be using the words in a kind of play for social or personal gain. Regardless of the intended meaning or use of the words, there is a reciprocity that comes with them. What does love mean for youth, both as an ideal and as a practical matter in everyday lived reality? And, in turn, what does this mean for the ways that youth ‘do’ love or reciprocate love?

For many youth, sex concerns a multitude of factors that extend far beyond health, illness, and the risk of dying from HIV/AIDS. These factors include love, affection, desire, money, self-identity, expressing maturity, adulthood, and economic stability and prosperity (Haram 2005:69). Therefore, regardless of the risk of HIV, among other STDs, and unwanted pregnancy, for many youth sex is something of a social tool that can be used to satisfy certain perceived needs and wants in life. These needs and wants are expressed through relationships and extend from certain types of emotional fulfillment to purely practical matters of seeking out long-term social and economic security. They may also include the use of relationships to satisfy short-term needs such as companionship or economic support. Moreover, perceptions of individual needs and wants are largely dictated by social and cultural constructs, such as economic and political stability and gender norms, revealing much about the malleability of desire. In the context of South African youth, patterns and forms of partnering reflect what sexual safety and sexual risk have come to mean outside of notions of health in a rapidly

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21 Sex serves various functions for the individual and society. As understood from a cultural perspective, functions of sex can include: sex as procreation, sex as pleasure, sex as family property, sex as cleansing and healing, sex as control or oppression (Ntseane and Preece 2005:354-356).
changing society. This meaning is bound up in discourses of love and romance that have evolved both on the levels of individual idealism and in reality (Dowsett 2003:21-25).

Before discussing the different discourses on love and romance and how they manifest in the relationships of South African youth, it is important to consider just what love is, at least from a sociological perspective. In different countries, cultures, and societies the world over there is something of an economics to love. To take a utilitarian perspective, love is always associated with some kind of exchange value. Although, from a Western perspective while many people might speak of love in idyllic terms of pure selflessness and compassion, in a practical sense, there is a currency to love that involves the values of emotional exchange, social capital exchange, as well as the exchange of physical commodities. The economy of love, its values, and forms of reciprocity are in many ways culturally constructed and structured. As sociologist, Anne Swidler, describes, cultural constructions of love are “influential in organizing how people think about their life commitments, assessments of particular relationships, and in the aspirations they bring to relationships”. She continues about the internalization of these constructions saying, “culture may affect action…because individuals hold systematic, unified, consistent world views and apply them directly to action.” Moreover, “it is just as likely, and indeed more common, for culture to influence action from the ‘outside in’ because culture shapes what action can mean” (2001:137 and 178-179). Therefore, even while individuals may have certain ideals of love, which are to some extent culturally constructed, the way that love plays out in the every-day realities of relationships may differ to some degree depending on cultural context.

Discourses of love among youth in South Africa reveal certain idealistic views, as well as others that demonstrate more about the practical daily reciprocity of love. Students described what love in relationships meant to them in the following ways:

- *Love is about being able to trust her and commit to a relationship with her* (Male student).

- *I think love is a feeling of safety and appreciation for the person you are with* (Female student).

- *African women can show their love by cleaning your room and stuff. I don’t expect them to do it but I like that when they show their love in that way. In most cases a man returns his love by giving a woman money. So, when you get your salary then you must give part of it straight to your wife* (Male student).
• *If you love somebody you will know because that person is dependent on you not only for money but, for other things, emotional things...like they are emotionally dependent on you* (Female student).

The language of love, as it is conveyed to some extent in words such as safety, commitment, and trust, is concerned with the formation of an authentic experience of love. The authenticity of love is equated with these words or feelings but is probably actually less about the actual feelings and more about the acts that signify them to an individual. If individuals believe they are in an authentic loving relationship associated with feelings of trust and safety, then they may also perceive that they are at less risk of contracting HIV. According to sociologists Reddy and Dunne, “the discourse of love is clearly contradictory to the discourse of safe sex because risk is often assessed in terms of love for, and trust in a partner.” Therefore, demanding condom use, for example, would run contrary to feelings of love and trust and the process might even be equated with suspicion for the partner and run the risk of compromising the relationship and the “goal of perfect love”. In this way, notions of trust and safety as part of the ideal construct of love in a relationship can help mitigate against condom use and reinforce the ‘it won’t happen to me’ mentality (2007:164).

The construction of love as being linked to feelings of safety and trust has replaced communication on health and actual matters of safe practice in the sexual encounter (Dilger 54-55). As a case in point, one student indicated that:

• *Among my friends we all know that you can’t trust your boyfriend all the time but you still get some of them who do those stupid things and think, ‘oh he’s my boyfriend, he wouldn’t do that to me’...I mean, how do they know? I think people know they need to use condoms and be safe. I mean, we’ve been told over and over but when you are with your boyfriend you trust him and you think it’s okay. Maybe even the girls who know that they are not the only one he is with...they still think he would never hurt them* (Female student).

The desire to love and be loved is a chief priority for many individuals and may greatly determine to what extent they are willing to assert or compromise agency in a relationship, particularly where sexual safety is concerned (Khan 2007:12-13). This student’s comment illustrates this point, as well as the idea that love is about caring for the other person and is not merely about focusing on the individual self. This thinking about relationships is exemplified in the proverb, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which is a Xhosa expression common to all African
languages meaning that a person is a person through persons. This proverb points to the importance of defining oneself through relationships with others and differs from Western notions of the self as being “inside a person”, such as in the mind. On the contrary, the understanding in African thought is that the self is “outside the person” and exists through relationships with the social environment (Shutte 1993: 46-47). This perspective, that an individual needs other people in order to be fulfilled, hints at why campaign models that place primary importance on loving the individual self might fail where the values of youth concerning relationships do not prioritize the self in the same way.

Essentially, where campaigns like Love Life promote a focus on the individual self, they come into conflict with the values of relationships and the understanding that acting toward another person involves considerations of more than the individual self. Regardless, Love Life is persistent with its messages that encourage youth to love themselves first, before becoming involved in sexual relationships:

*We need people to chart values that they care about and live those. For example, what is love about? It’s about confidence, being healthy, and about you embracing them and creating them for yourself (Refilwe Africa, Love Life).*

Love Life’s definition of love as being about confidence, health, empowerment, and knowing oneself may not resonate well with youth who are still very much in the throws of identity formation and who are looking for emotional connections and affirmation of themselves in relationships. In addition, for youth who are looking to express perceived notions of maturity, such as being able express material wealth and economic stability, and preserving personal integrity, being part of a relationship can serve the practical function of helping to secure these things (Haram 69). In other words, long-term concerns about health, confidence, and the future may be overshadowed by concerns about immediate matters of personal and social integrity, as well as interaction.

As previously stated, loving and being loved is to a large extent about reciprocity and exchange. The exchange value of love can take many forms as it is culturally or socially constructed in many ways, and is also often gendered. Most commonly, for the youth of South Africa, it might mean the exchange of care, emotional support, kisses, bodily fluids, love letters, money, gifts, sexual pleasure, or assistance with school. The idea of reciprocity and exchange means accounting for both material and immaterial factors involved, their layered effects, and in
what ways each is used to give meaning to relationships, as well as individuals. For many youth, discourses of love and romance involve the notion that sex is a normative function of love, as well as desire. Therefore, the idea of sex as a means of obtaining confirmation or the possibility of love, or something like it, is part of the inherent nature of reciprocity and exchange in relationships, as well as part of the sexual economics of survival for many people. In this sense, it is important to consider that reciprocity and exchange are often unequal and imbalanced in terms of gender, leading to various forms of disempowerment among women and men (Oxlund 2007:23; Rosenthal and Gifford 1998:34).

7.2 Gender-based Ideals and Realities and Campaign Responses

*I wish I were a man even with all the pressure to brag about your sex life. Oh, they all just make up stories anyway. That’s easy to do and besides, the pressure of being a woman far exceeds the pressure of being a man* (Female student).

This student presented a picture of how she perceives the pressure on men and women, respectively. She wishes to be a man because it seems to her that the social expectations of men are easier to live up to than those for women. Yet, what does her comment reveal about types of social norms men and women face? Do men really have it easier than women? And, how to women and men deal with the pressures of social norms?

In South Africa, gender inequality in relationships and sexual decision-making, plays a significant role in the ways that reciprocity and exchange manifest in relationships. Gender-based power imbalances have translated into different sexual standards for men and women, as well as created gendered tensions between ideas and exercises of love, control, submission, and self-respect. Both women and men face different types of pressures based on gender norms and what is at stake for each in terms of gender expression. These differences manifest in the hierarchies of gender and sexuality that privilege certain forms of sexual activity and interests, and marginalize others. Geeta Rao Gupta, a sociologist at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), has written that the central components of sexual activity and interests are rooted in gender power differences. She refers to them as “the Ps of sexuality – practice, partners, pleasure, pressure, pain, and procreation” and says that, “the power underlying any sexual interaction determines how all the other Ps of sexuality are expressed and experienced”. In other words, power works as a determinant of whose pleasure is given priority (2000:2). Thus,
the inequalities of power involved in relationships regarding sexual decision-making and negotiation, as well as the different sexual standards regarding the sexual practices of men and women, have powerful implications for preventative efforts to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS as they impact high-risk behavior (Dowsett 24; Reddy and Dunne 167-169). Campaigns have had to take these types of inequalities into account when designing their programs. Soul City, for example, has worked to influence considerations of these types of inequalities by challenging gender roles for women and men:

You’ll find that issues of gender and the double standards are really part of how men and women are socialized in terms of relationships and what they get via cultural practices or traditional activities that give them a particular understanding about their roles as men and women, and specifically in relationships and in society...also as what the media advocates or even subtly advocates because it’s what perpetuates the role that men and women play. So we really have to be careful about what we advocate and try to show men and women differently (John Molefe).

To challenge the status quo, Soul City has used positive modeling of women and men in positions that help advance their gender roles and challenge their current boundaries. To some extent this has resulted in a kind of gendering of campaigns, particularly since women are frequently seen to be the more ‘disempowered’ of the sexes. In order to understand how, it is necessary to first consider the respective positions of women and men in South African society.

Women are often portrayed by social scientists as being more vulnerable, more at risk, and more disadvantaged than their male counterparts. While there is much truth to this as women are in fact at higher risk of contracting HIV, it is also true that men face a large amount of social pressure in relationships that puts them at a disadvantage and at high risk as well. Men are often expected to be more knowledgeable and experienced with sex, which puts them at risk because they may not be willing to admit what they do not know in order to save face. In addition, men are known to be more likely than women to behave in ways that place themselves and their partners at risk of HIV infection (Varga 2001:176-177). Both of these factors are part of the socialization of men, which puts pressure on them to live up to expected social norms by proving their manhood. This may also mean acquiring certain commodity goods in order to demonstrate their social status and their ability to attract multiple partners, as well as also actually having many partners in order to prove their masculinity and thus, secure their social status (Rao Gupta 4; Oxlund 190). Soul City’s John Molefe gave an example of proving male
dominance even under the threat of HIV/AIDS using an idiom from Malawi that he felt was also applicable to an extent in South Africa:

\[\text{There is this idiom that talked about the man being a bull. So, if you think of a connotation of a bull it's always with many cows. The connotation of the wounded bull is like a bull that has been through many battles and sexually transmitted infection is like a sign of being a real man.}\]

In this context, the threat of HIV/AIDS takes something of backseat to when it comes to prominence of male gender norms and the need to both prove and measure masculinity with others. Male students said that they face a high degree of peer pressure to discuss their sexual conquests and exploits publicly:

- \text{It's totally glorified to be promiscuous. Guys put such a high regard on sex. It's become something that they go out and party just to do. Most guys crack jokes about it. They don't take it seriously. Like, we were at that HIV thing [HIV testing booth] up at school the other day and the guys are all laughing and joking with one another like, "You, go check your status"...but they aren't serious. They can't take it seriously. It's just a joke to them. You can't even bring up something like HIV with them or you'll just get bashed (Male student).}

Student perspectives seem to indicate that the peer pressure men face based on socialized views of sex may be the most significant factor leading to the importance of their having many relationships. There is a high price on sex, socially speaking, that puts pressure on men prove themselves and demonstrate their masculinity, or at least talk about it in ways that make it seem like they are living up to the expected social norms. However, in talking about sex as a subject of self-inflation and bragging, it takes on a kind of fabricated and idealized reality that helps designate it as a site of male promotion. Therefore, even while some male students pointed out their desire to form trusting, committed, and communicative relationships, (which will be discussed further on), as opposed to demonstrating their masculinity by engaging in sexual relationships, certain social norms pressure them to act differently. Male students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal pointed out some of the perceived social expectations and roles of men saying:

- \text{Men are often pushed into this sort of rough and tough role...hammer and tooth...we'll kill the tiger for you kind of thing. If the man plays the part of the sensitive guy, he gets kind of beat down by his friends but really, those are the guys who tend to make better partners (Male student).}
• **A man is more afraid to get in touch with his emotions and show them...it's all this programming...like, "Hey, I've got to be this macho man"...men are kind of, well, especially in my town, we're taught to be tough...like boys don't cry. We're all kind of desensitized (Male student).**

The social rules of behavioral normalcy dictate that men should hide their feelings and emotions, particularly in their relationships, and that they should not expose their sensitivity. Interestingly, while male students obviously have a fine tuned understanding of these rules, their interest in discussing them and addressing the stereotypes inherent within them indicates that these rules and stereotypical male ideals do not necessarily fit with students’ ideal visions of themselves. Rather, perhaps there are two sides to the coin here. Men may feel the push and the pull to demonstrate their compliance with male rules of behavioral normalcy, but also be self-reflexive in considering how at times these rules and ideals run counter to their personal ideals of how they want to express themselves and what they value in relationships.

Women are also often influenced by gender norms and ideals to behave in ways that are antithetical to their personal ideals regarding relationships. Women face different types of social pressures than men in that a “good woman” is often expected to be more passive and ignorant in sexual relationships, as opposed to taking a more dominant role, (this is discussed further in section 3.3). At the same time, woman also face peer pressure to conform to certain social norms that place a high value on having boyfriends and obtaining material commodities that often accompany relationships (Rao Gupta 2000:3-4):

• **Some girls think it’s so important to have a boyfriend and they cling to him. It’s like without him they are nothing. Among my girlfriends, they expect so much from guys...they expect gifts and if he doesn’t call them five times a day, eish, look out! (Female student).**

• **I think for a lot of girls it’s really important to get gifts and things from their boyfriend [...] I think girls think that when they have those things at school it means they are important or something (Female student).**

There is a level of social competition among women to fit certain norms where social status is not tied up in the sex that relationships provide, as it is for men, but in the material wealth that they can offer. Essentially, women can set the groundwork for social integration and for even gaining a kind of competitive advantage within peer groups by having relationships that allow them access to a more consumer-driven lifestyle (Khan 15-17). In addition, while women may have certain material ‘wants’ based on the allure that a more consumer-driven lifestyle offers,
these ‘wants’ are often transformed into social ‘needs’. Women may decide that within their relationships sex not only supports the reciprocity of emotional and physical exchange, but also material exchange. Hence, in some cases, where relationships have become unhealthy or risky on an emotional or physical level, women may be less likely to leave them if they feel they ‘need’ the relationship for its material value (Rao Gupta 3-4).

Interestingly, when asked what they valued most in relationships, gender norms and social expectations aside, both men and women at the University indicated similar values, particularly those of trust, commitment, respect, and communication. Both genders spoke about these values in the first person, rather than the way they spoke about social norms and expectations in the third person indicating that these values are perhaps of greater core importance to them, while the norms and expectations they discussed are based on projections and perceptions that are more external and distant:

- *I believe trust is the backbone of a relationship. If we can’t trust each other, where’s the relationship going? Also, I think commitment is really important. I really support it* (Male student).

- *I think commitment is the most important thing. You’ve got to be committed to whatever we do. Then trust is really important because if you don’t have trust then you are wasting your time. We also have to communicate to even have trust, I think* (Male student).

- *I really need someone who respects me and understands me…someone who I can talk to. So, communication is very important to me. I also have to be able to trust him. We can’t have a good relationship without trust* (Female student).

- *Communication is the most important thing for us to understand each other and then trust is the next most important thing because I don’t want to worry about what he’s doing when I’m not there* (Female student).

The similarity in the ideals that men and women hold for their relationships indicates that they are more alike than the stereotypes and gender norms for each seem to dictate. Ultimately, however, while these values may be of central importance to both genders, socially speaking, they are often masked or hidden by larger social constructs and pressures to live up to certain social standards.

Campaigns have responded to the differences in gender norms and expectations for women and men with gendered campaign responses that have tended to target each gender differently. In particular, they have tended to pay more attention to women due to the fact that
issues of their subordination and disempowerment are seemingly more overt and in direr need of attention. As an example, the Love Life campaign has taken a stance to promote the idea of individual responsibility in its campaigns and thus, has said that it supports the role of each gender in sexual responsibility. However, its actual campaign messages have certainly tended to focus more on women than men by directly addressing them with messages of responsibility, while playing upon their ideal notions of love:

- *If you are a teenage girl – HIV wants you. By the time you turn 21 chances are 1 in 4 it will have you – HIV, Face it!*
- *Do you want to have a baby? First make sure you and your partner know your status. It's the real test of love! Face it!*
- *Your boyfriend may make you feel safe but everyone he's slept with is sleeping with you – HIV loves sleeping around!*

These examples of radio slogans from the Love Life campaign certainly play upon the hard-fast realities of HIV, but they do so by placing the threat and the responsibility for it directly on women, while placing men in a kind of secondary position without any accountability for learning their HIV status or sleeping around. The realization needs to be made that the onus for change does not rest on one gender or the other, and that the social issues that surround HIV/AIDS cannot be understood as specifically female or male problems.

The Soul City campaign has received much criticism in the past for its more dominant focus on women. It has responded by working to acknowledge the responsibilities of men more, realizing that if men were more empowered and more aware of their position as potential agents of social change, the impact would also be positive for women. According to John Molefe at Soul City:

> I think previously we used to focus a lot on the empowerment of women without intending to actually say that men are the problem, but then evaluations showed that we have lots of men watching the program...and actually they are part of the problem...but we need to use the program to look at men as part of the solution...we don’t want men to just reject the program outright because they don’t have the skills to deal or because they feel vulnerable.

Soul City’s decision to work to include men more in its campaigns follows from the idea that in order to be more effective there needs to be a commitment to not only to addressing the subordination of women, but also men, as well as particular forms of masculinity and femininity
in different gender roles and in sexual relationships (Redman 1996:167). Yet, the question that follows is what it means to engage men as part of the solution. Certainly, it is understandable that campaign approaches be gendered and address women and men differently as part of the solution because the social norms and expectations for each gender are different. However, to balance them and move away from placing greater responsibility on one gender or the other is a great challenge, especially as campaigns themselves are prone to certain gender biases that may be difficult to fully grasp. In conjunction, once campaigns start to work to acknowledge certain biases in their campaigns and attempt to undo them, they also risk creating new ones in their place.

7.3 The Realities of Exchange Values and Responsibility in Relationships

Where I’m from people can’t go buying their girls things because they can’t afford to but here at varsity people come from other families. Maybe material things are the things that control some of their relationships. Like, maybe that guy has to take the girl out once a week and buy her a gift every month or whatever...it’s just what’s expected (Male student).

This student’s remark about the power of material things to control certain aspects of relationships helps reveal something more about the nature of reciprocity in relationships. The use of material goods to help support relationships demonstrates that relationships help support different needs, be they those of trust, commitment, appreciation, or those of monetary support and the like. Yet, what does this comment also say about the roles people assume in relationships with regard to different types of exchange and where expectations of responsibility fall?

Since South Africa’s transition to democracy the strength of the economy has resulted the influx of many new goods and services and the promotion of a new and better commodity-based lifestyle. Yet, for many people that life is still out of reach, either by a little or a lot. Hence, the capital value of sex is that it can be used either for subsistence purposes or for consumptive purposes, such as to be able to ‘consume’ the desired lifestyle and social status that comes with it. For many youth, the exchange value in relationships of this kind represents access to the socially valuable material commodities and consumer-driven life-style that sexual relationships can offer, adding both social and symbolic capital dimensions to such relationships (Bourdieu 1998:47). This type of economic dimension to sexuality and hence, the constructs of love that it are tied up within it, means that relationships are viewed as resources that can be drawn upon for
material and social advantage and, have come to take the place of other social institutions that have fallen short of offering people alternative opportunities to capture the ‘good life’ (Leclerc-Madlala 10). At the University both women and men spoke about their understandings of the exchange values of sexual relationships as they involved material goods:

- Some women are monogamous but on campus there are girls that are dating married men...so then you get different perspectives. Girls who are like going out with a guy on campus are like, ‘Ya, I really love this guy.’ And, at the same time they are going out with a married guy who is, you know, sustaining them, paying them, and giving them pocket money (Female student).

- For women who have not been to university before they face new financial issues and challenges and sometimes they engage in sexual behavior like to get money for sex (Male student).

Student discussions of these relationships hint at the idea that greater social challenges and pressures have some role in governing and shaping relationships, such as by helping to create and secure status or helping to sustain individual needs that perhaps cannot be met otherwise. It is also evident from students’ comments that where meeting material needs is seen as a priority, meeting emotional needs, among others, may become secondary. This is not, however, to imply that promiscuity or something akin to prostitution are features of these types of exchange relationships. Rather, they are not as the material exchanges involved are not seen as ‘payment’ for sex but as signs of commitment, appreciation and affection (Epstein 55-67). In addition, while these types of relationships have been labeled in a number of ways, such as transactional sex, concurrent partnerships, or informal partnerships, individuals do not have a great number of partners. In fact, many have relatively few partners but they are frequently concurrent, which is what places the individual at greater risk over time for contracting HIV/AIDS and other STDs (Epstein 55-67).

It is also important to keep in mind that the variation of labels for these relationships has been due to limited understanding about their social significance and highly significant role in the spread of HIV/AIDS. It was only a short time ago that these types of relationships were even recognized as being one of the major drivers of the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, up

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22 Further embellishing upon this point, Epstein says in her book, The Invisible Cure, that “AIDS is common in Africa not because African people have so many sexual partners, but because they are more likely than people in other regions to have a small number of concurrent long-term partners. This places them, along with their partner or partners, within a vast network of ongoing sexual relationships that is highly conducive to the spread of HIV” (2007: 144).
until 2006 no public health campaign in southern Africa had worked to convey the dangers of multiple partnerships and long-term concurrent partnerships even though these sexual systems put all sexually active people at risk, including those with few sexual partners. (144-145). The reality is that such relationships are rooted in a long-standing historical context relating to old values and cultural significances, and have developed further into their current form in response to larger social changes, including changes in youth values based in part on the economic disparities in South Africa and the recent influences of globalization and capitalism. Refilwe Africa of Love Life stated her campaign’s understanding of the role of these types of relationships in the lives’ of youth, saying:

*I mean, obviously feelings and attractions are two totally different things but this day in age choices are very limited. You can’t just go with the flow but you literally have to look at the situation and hold back. When it comes to multiple partnerships, that’s where we have a problem and when it comes to transactional sex relations. I mean multiple partnerships have literally come up at the biggest driver [of the epidemic].*

This stance is a bit ironic given Love Life’s focus on choices, options, and self-empowerment and the fact that the individual is in many ways attempting to access what limited choices and options they perceive they have in order to empower themselves in the necessary ways through such relationships. It is the values of youth culture, as well as culture at large, that support the need for exchange relationships in order to make social and symbolic capital gains.

It is necessary to consider that the relationships youth engage in, as they involve multiple partnerships or not, incorporate a certain level of social strategizing in order to negotiate the needs of the self with what the social world, and the relationship opportunities included within it, has to offer. The difficulty for some youth may be that in developing strategies for negotiating relationships and individual needs, there is a sort of compromise that takes place between the realization of personal ideals about love and relationships and relationships in practice (Khan 7; Dowsett 25-26). For example, as one student stated:

- *Sex is a very quick fix. I think people who can’t get the relationship they desire go for the quick fix (Male student).*

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23 According to Epstein, the topic of concurrency was utterly absent from school-based AIDS education, media and billboard campaigns, national government strategies and policies related to HIV/AIDS, and international public health plans until as recently as 2006 (144-145).
While this may be a more extreme example of compromising ideals in practice, it does demonstrate that the social realm for negotiating relationship opportunities can feel very limited or frustrating to youth who may then choose to settle for satisfying the very human urges of lust and desire. Other strategies might include feeling resigned to feelings of disappointment and discouragement about romantic ideals of love and relationships not being met. One female student said:

- *I don’t really believe in love. It’s really superficial and it’s so overdone and overrated in our culture...I mean, if a woman is honest about her emotions and shows them, like says how she feels, then a guy might think she is too clingy and run off* (Female student).

To some extent her sentiments toward love seem to have developed out of feeling the imbalance between social gender norms for women and men regarding the display of their emotions and their levels of emotional involvement within relationships. In addition, there is a kind of fear of being emotionally rejected that makes it easier to just give up on the ideals of love altogether rather than face the possibility of actual rejection. Interestingly, Love Life’s Refilwe Africa also indicated a similar attitude toward love:

*With love, it’s such a deep word but it’s so over used. Like in the soaps they are always saying ‘I love you, I love you, I love you but I cheated on you’ so it becomes so miscommunicated and distorted. What does it mean anymore?*

Her comment reveals that the notion of love itself has developed into something of a strategy within relationships and that perhaps it has become something of a scapegoat in dealing with the realities of the challenges of commitment and communication that youth relationships bring. Having been used in this way, however, a kind of rift of confusion has developed between its ideal meanings and real demonstrations of it that has led to disenchantment with the concept.

Ideas and manifestations of commitment and responsibility demonstrate other ways that youth strategize in relationships. In some cases youth may use their status as being young as a kind of justification for taking a more non-committal approach to relationships. As one male student stated:

- *I think it’s like people don’t want to commit themselves and they think, ‘I’m still young so I can go out and do whatever’. They think later on they can be with one person but right now they just need to enjoy themselves. They just tell the girl they are with that she is the only one but then they go around and I think the girls do that too* (Male student).
In telling their partner that they are the only one they are with, youth demonstrate that they are clearly aware of the ideal of commitment and what it may mean to the person they are with. However, in choosing to maneuver around it, they demonstrate that they have other priorities, many of which are bound up within other ideals of youth culture. The issue of responsibility comes into play where youth think, “right now I just need to enjoy myself”, and the implication follows that, “I’ll worry about the rest later”. This is the type of attitude that a campaign like Love Life tries to sway by telling youth that they have a responsibility to focus on the bigger picture, the future, and their long-term goals. Refilwe Africa embellished on this idea saying:

*Say to yourself, okay, I’m going to finish my schooling and then I’m going to have a relationship with someone who thinks like me, who has got the same lifestyle, who has got the same values. You can tailor make it.*

What seems to go unrecognized here is that many youth, particularly those at the University level, likely do have this type of mindset when it comes to their future. Yet, they also have more immediate emotional and physical needs that they are trying to meet. Therefore, the challenge is in deciding how to negotiate more immediate needs with those of the long term, and which to give priority to.

In addition, concerning issues of responsibility, there seems to be some confusion over where responsibility for sex lies. Among students there was a tendency to pin responsibility on one gender more than the other:

- *It’s more up to the woman because men don’t really care about it. They can sleep with a woman and say it’s up to the woman to worry about getting pregnant. It depends on the type of guy though…but some men are like, ‘I’ll give you satisfaction but it’s up to you to sort out the rest’…like contraception and condoms* (Female student).

- *It seems like the guy is the one who is supposed to wear or use the condom so the responsibility is really on him to be safe. Women should be more worried but I think the pressure is more on guys to have safe sex* (Female student).

Although these examples of comments from two female students are inconsistent in terms of which gender they understand as having greater responsibility, they do each reflect certain biases rather than considering that perhaps both women and men could be equally responsible, each in their respective ways. The question is, what do these notions of responsibility as resting with either the woman or the man derive from, and also, what purpose do they serve. Certainly, gender norms and expectations are easily wrapped up in both of these constructs of
responsibility. It is also likely that they represent a kind of strategy of their own in negotiating relationships. Promoting a kind of ‘othering’ that places greater liability for sex on one gender over the other is a sort of insular strategy that helps shield the self from the potential consequences of sex, regardless of whether the onus is placed on the self or the other.

8 Negotiating the Self In A Time of Social Change and Campaign Discourses

8.1 The Impact of Social Change: Tradition and Modernity

Where I’m from things have changed. All the men go to Gauteng to work. They think that is the only option because that’s the only way we can earn money. This has changed relationships for us. I mean, we still have polygamy. My father has four wives…but things are changing, you know. I won’t have so many wives myself (Zulu male student).

Social change is a key feature of the South African landscape and this student’s comment certainly hints at what some of the changes have meant where tradition and modernity are concerned as it mentions the importance of earning money to survive, migration, and changes in partnering. What more does this comment say about the intermingling of tradition and modernity and the impact of social change on how the self is negotiated in a time of HIV/AIDS?

South Africa’s transition to democracy in 1994 has no doubt been transformative, yet regardless of the fact that the country is in many ways a new nation, it still has its old problems of racism, unemployment, inequality, marginalization, social exclusion, and poverty, with new wealth being highly concentrated among the few. In many ways, these problems have also been exacerbated by the influences of an increasingly globalized world on South Africa’s transitioning society and they have contributed to the current shaping of gender and sexuality in the country (Posel 53). As an example, the gendered inequalities discussed previously that work to fuel relationships of exchange, commonly referred to as transactional sex, are linked to larger economic and social inequalities that are the product of the country’s historical past, including its recent past. According to sociologist, Mark Hunter, the economic processes that promote transactional relationships are not rooted in a traditional African system of sexuality but in the

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24 As explained previously, several different titles have been given to these types of relationships. While the terms transactional sex and “multiple partnering” may not be the most fair or apt title as they imply notions of prostitution and promiscuity, they are used in the discussion because that is how they have been labeled in the related academic literature. In all fairness though, it is perhaps best to be aware of the biases these labels hold and to consider that they may be better described as exchange relationships.
past influences of Christianity, colonialism, urbanization, and migration that have reshaped sexual practices in South Africa (2002:105).

In particular, the influences of colonization and Christianity have had great significance in altering the sexual order and forms of partnering. Before these influences a clear structure for learning about and expressing sexuality was in place. Yet, the arrival of Christian missionaries who wanted to “civilize” the African “other” meant attempting to crush the sexual system and replace it with a new kind of “moral” order. Christianity did not, however, stamp out African sexual practices, but rather became interwoven with them and this led to the formation of gendered double standards in sexual practices (some of which will be discussed further in section 8.2). Among these double standards were those that supported Christian values of monogamy and those that supported African values of having multiple partners. It has been argued by Hunter that the value of having multiple partnerships, primarily for men, was exacerbated not only by cultural attempts to preserve the sexual order and gender roles and expectations, but also by other factors related to gendered material inequalities, urbanization, and migration, among others (Hunter 2004:131-133; 2002:116).

Building upon this notion, the current role of sexual practices that involve transactional sex or multiple partnerships developed in many ways to make up for weak bureaucratic and social welfare systems that have done little to affect persisting inequalities. In addition, the exchange system frequently employed in sexual relationships involving transactional sex and multiple partnerships has arguably served as extension of the kinship system as it helps “provide a social security system for women and a source of power and self-esteem for men” where they would otherwise be lost (Epstein 152 and 76). In the development of these types of relationships as they have been adapted to meet certain social needs, they have also come to be understood as being quite “modern” ventures. One student discussed the ways that she understood the choice of her peers to engage in multiple partnerships as something that was rooted in the need for security, as well as access to certain more “modern” icons, like a cell phone:

- *I think some of the girls on campus who have a boyfriend at school and a boyfriend at home keep those relationships because they give them security or something [...] they can get gifts and things from one guy and the other gives them, you know, something more [...] it’s also like they think they need those things that their boyfriend gives them [...] they see the things that other people have on TV and stuff and they want them too...like a phone or something (Female student).*
It is a reliance on multiple partnerships and transactional relationships for opportunities to access “modern” goods that helps distinguish traditional relationships of this sort from those that have developed since the arrival and influence of Christian missionaries, among other colonizers. Relationships now have the potential to go beyond offering mere social security and can allow individuals to engage a more indulgent lifestyle and be part of the modernization and “liberalization” of their culture, such as it involves media promoted conspicuous consumption and higher standards of living and higher costs of living (Leclerc-Madlala 15).

Discussions of multiple partnering and transactional sex in the context of modernity beg the question of what is modern? Modernity as a broad concept is marked by significant departures from traditional cultural styles, methods, values, or ways of doing or being. It is best understood as something that is local in that the traditional context it develops out of is also always local. In other words, it must be seen and understood through the lens of the local traditions it develops from, which are specific to place and time. For example, in the Zulu culture in South Africa changes in partnering have impacted the traditional practice of *isoka*. Traditionally speaking, *isoka* has been about demonstrations of masculine strength through multiple partnerships. As John Moefe described:

> It’s about men thinking that it’s bravado to actually have many relationships and, unfortunately, research shows that from the cultural aspect, traditionally men who have had many relationships or partners are respected by other men (Soul City).

Typically, the social institution of polygamy has supported this cultural value. However, *isoka* has been influenced by larger social changes involving unemployment, migration for work, and the structure of apartheid, to name a few, that have led to what Hunter refers to as the “unmaking” or “fracturing” of *isoka*. While the traditional values of *isoka* that relate to the importance of having multiple partners have not changed, the expression of those values has been forced to change with the times. In some ways this means that traditional values and modern forms of *isoka* manifest in the types of relationships discussed previously, namely those of transactional sex and multiple concurrent partnerships (Hunter 123-125). Again, John Molefe described the ways that traditional values take on modern forms:

> With the issue of polygamy...with young people growing up seeing that they might not practice it in the same way later on but they learn the values inherent in the system of it...that to have many partners is good and that it makes you more of a man. So those are the kinds of things that we actually have to change.
We have to focus on what these behaviors have developed out of (Soul City).

In addition, *ilobolo*, or the traditional practice of bride wealth payments before marriage, has become increasingly strained by changes in socio-economics, including the emergence of a more cash based society and the emerging importance of money in general. Today, gifts for multiple girlfriends have increasingly replaced the practice of *ilobolo* for the many men who can no longer afford to pay because of the larger social emphasis on cash and money. Students discussed changes relating to the importance of money and what consequences it had had for them and their relationships:

- *I think everything is money now days. People used to survive by being more active in farming and things and they couldn’t spend so much, but now you have to touch your pocket for everything you do…I don’t even know if I could ever afford to marry. It’s that way for many of the people from my area* (Zulu male student).

- *The issue of civilization has made material things more important. I mean, before we didn’t go out and do all this courting. We just paid the lobolo to show our love and then got married, but now money plays such an important role in every part of our lives…and we must travel more to work and we don’t have so much money* (Zulu male student).

The change in the value of money has also led to an increase in class-consciousness that links the modern notion of consumption not only with goods, but also with sex (2002:108-110). Therefore, in considering what is modern, it is important to see that it is strongly related to contemporary responses to change and how such responses impact local traditions so that they are made ‘modern’. In addition to this discourse on modernity, there is also the notion that modern life as it is linked to rapid social change and progress has come at a cost in some ways. The cost is a kind of cultural chaos and even a loss of values rooted in tradition and of which HIV/AIDS is sometimes understood on the local level to be a byproduct.

In considering how awareness and prevention campaigns deal with issues of tradition and modernity it is important to consider their influences and the models that they have developed out of. The influence of Western morality and Western models of practice regarding sexuality, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS programs, has been heavy in previously colonized sub-Saharan Africa in general, and this is no less true in the case of South Africa. Even though the days of formal colonial rule, and apartheid rule in the case of South Africa, have come to an end, there is arguably a sort of neo-colonialism occurring where the rapid pace of globalization and the influences of capitalism have allowed many Western ideals, morals, and values to maintain
their grip on culture. Regarding HIV/AIDS this has been the case to the extent that many programs and campaigns are based on models borrowed from the West, and obviously based on Western (perceptions of) culture. This can be problematic where the role of the individual, the family, and the community vary across cultures.

If campaigns focus on individual responsibility in areas where the family and the community are more central to health and well-being, the campaign might be promoting behaviors that are seemingly unattainable or impractical given cultural norms (Johnny and Mitchell 757). For example, regarding the model that Love Life uses, Refilwe Africa stated that the organization prioritizes the individual and added, “we’re looking at the individual factors and then at the individual level we get young people to literally look into themselves…this is our main goal.” Certainly this type of prioritizing is reflective of Love Life’s Western roots. In addition, Western models of behavioral change that are highly focused on the individual may fail to understand the functions or role of transactional sex because it is not something that can be well understood without accounting for the larger constructs that necessitate it. Rather, the Western take may be to enact a sort of moral judgment of it because in the Western view it is easily equated with prostitution and promiscuity. However, in South African culture this is certainly not the case as the exchange of money or goods after sex is not considered as payment but as a sign of commitment and appreciation (Oxlund 22).

Essentially, Africa needs and African strategy for HIV that understands traditional values and “modern” practices, and that can work within the cultural constructs that promote the behaviors involved in transactional sex. The awareness and prevention models used by Soul City and Love Life are not strictly Western, nor have they been developed only within an African context. Rather, they are each in their respective ways a mix of both. They are grounded in Western models but have each been adapted in different ways to meet the perceived needs of the populations they serve. However, their messages resonate differently with different groups and they are certainly not always in touch with the populations they serve, especially considering the diversity of South Africa such as it relates to language, cultural ideals, and values. The male Zulu students interviewed exemplified this point when they spoke of the lack of resonance they felt campaigns like Soul City and Love Life had with their cultural values:

• **I think programs like Love Life and Soul City don’t have much impact especially in Zulu culture because the thing is that in Zulu culture they don’t really like this kind of education that they offer. Many Zulu’s don’t appreciate it and they don’t even know much**
English. Most programs use English so it doesn’t feel like they are even targeting us. We are more likely to ignore their messages if they can’t even take the time to put them in our language. Even looking at TV we don’t really get the real ideas behind some of their advertisements.

• It’s too hard to integrate into many cultural views and lifestyle practices. For Zulu’s we need to remove these views about polygamy and having many partners.

• In reality you have to integrate these programs with our norms and values and this becomes complicated...women are taught to abstain but for a Zulu man to abstain is eish, not going to happen in our culture. You know, when I was growing up there was a man who taught us how to propose a woman.

These student’s comments reveal some of the ways that campaigns fail to take account of the cultural context, as well as the values, of their audience. In particular, the issue of abstinence or delaying sex, as one student mentioned, is important to consider in the Zulu context. In pre-colonial times adolescent sexuality was acknowledged and embraced through the practice of ukusoma, or non-penetrative sex on the thighs. This aspect of the sexual order helped to prevent illicit pregnancies and was central to the control of sexuality. Christianity, however, held contrary views of sexual expression that taught that the body is God’s temple that should not be tampered with. While ukusoma is still practiced it has come to be seen as something that is “old fashioned” and it is still not considered to be in line with religious teachings about abstinence (Hunter 106; Buthelezi 2006:5). This is unfortunate because the value of sexual expression, as indicated by the student who mentioned abstinence as not being an option, is still strong, but acculturation has helped limit the practice of safe methods like ukusoma and left few alternatives in its wake.

Speaking to the depth of traditions and the changes in partnering that have made relationships ‘modern’ is obviously a tremendously difficult task for any type of awareness and prevention campaign. It is important to consider that perhaps in some ways the lack of campaign resonance described by Zulu students is due to the different ways that campaigns themselves have struggled to interpret and understand social change and the impact of “modernity” for South Africa’s different cultural groups and communities. After all, campaigns are in many ways products of the social change that South Africa has seen since the end of apartheid, or at least they have been designed in part to respond to social change as it relates to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. As media campaigns that target the general population of youth, the stances they take
on interpreting relations of gender, sexuality, and other aspects of culture are not tailored to take into account the various local contexts of these matters and the different traditional norms and values that practices have developed out of, as well as the different ways that they are made “modern”.

8.2 Double Standards: The Clash of “Modern” Discourses with Traditional Norms

Really, in an ideal world, men and women should have equal partnerships. Clearly though, they aren’t equal. I don’t really know why they tell us we are equal when it’s obvious aren’t and we never have been (Male student).

Social change and its impact on tradition and the formation of “modern” discourses has inevitably resulted in the formation of certain double standards relating to sex, sexuality, and gender. This student’s comment about gender equality hints at the ways that lived everyday practices in relationships between women and men are inconsistent with “modern” ideals of gender equality. How have these inconsistencies come about and how have campaigns either responded to them or worked to encourage them?

As previously discussed, the end of apartheid in 1994 helped to usher in new discourses on sexuality related to freedom and liberalization. More liberal policies about representations and public discussions of sex came as part of the South Africa’s new political agenda. In turn, sexuality became more publicly prominent in books, magazines, films, television, and radio than it had been before, and with this change, it also became coupled with discourses of the country’s new found freedom. As Deborah Posel states, “sex [became] a sphere…in which new found freedoms [were] vigorously asserted” and “asserting sexualized freedom as a statement of rupture between apartheid and post-apartheid generations” was a “celebration of liberalization from the manifold prohibitions of the past”. However, the threat of HIV/AIDS and responses to it through awareness and prevention campaigns and the like meant that messages of sex as freedom ran concurrently with messages of sex as death, thereby creating a sort of double standard (Posel 53-56 and 62).

Messages of sex as freedom to a large extent have won out though over messages of sex as death. Essentially, notions of sex as freedom are a better fit with the larger discourses of modernity and social change in the country, particularly as they relate to consumption, style, and the potential for upward mobility (Oxlund 10). However, going after the symbols a modern life
that signify the social capital associated with a successful life has meant meeting with other double standards. In the case of women, modern discourses on gender, which have to some extent been borrowed or imposed by the West, say that women and men are now equal. This may be true on an idealistic level, but in practice gender equality is far from being a reality as there are double standards associated with both women’s success and sexuality. As one female student described:

- We’re supposed to have this whole equality thing going on but it’s not happening at all. Who is promoting the equality thing? It’s on the TV and in the media. They all say that we are equal but for the most part it’s all about women being over-powered in one way or another. If you are a woman and you are successful then you are shown as being really ugly or something. You can’t be beautiful and successful. The thing is, it’s okay for a man to sleep with a lot of people but if a woman does it she’s a slut. I don’t know when people are going to get it that a man can also be a slut.

Youth feeling caught between different gender-based social norms and standards in the sense that they cannot be everything society wants them to be without getting caught in a sort of values trap is in many ways indicative and symptomatic of the changes taking place in South Africa’s social landscape. The struggles between “modern” values and traditional norms, as well as social realities, are evident. For example, they also manifest in the types of relationships women choose to engage in, such as those of multiple partnerships or transactional sex. John Molefe of Soul City stated his understanding of the situation:

The research around the empowerment of women has shown that it has had these sort of unintended consequences. Women are now equal to men, especially women with access to resources, but many women have ended up trying to deal with [things] by sorting them out on their own terms...like through transactional sex and that sort of thing.

In many cases, young women use their desirability, one resource they are not without, as a tool to attract men who can give them not necessarily what they need but what they want, which is a chance to be modern, with access to the things associated with a modern and successful life. In this way, women are responding to discourses of gender equality and modernity by working to level the playing with men, and to give themselves a chance (Leclerc-Madlala 2004: 2 and 9-10).

Interestingly, however, women were not the only ones to bring up issues of gender related double standards. One male student pointed out how he always felt pressure to be the commanding power in his relationships and that he did not want to take on that role, but rather one that fulfilled the ideal of equality he could have with his partner:
• *I think that it’s the mentality we are brought up with that the man has got to be dominant. I mean, slowly things are changing though. It’s like they say though, we are all equal so we should all give an equal effort. In a relationship I want someone who can always bring something to it and don’t let me be the one all the time.*

This student’s comment harkens back to some of the ideals that students expressed regarding relationships and the discord of those ideals with the gendered social norms concerning their relationships roles in the sense that social realities and individual ideals are at odds. In this case, however, double standards exist where the genders are told on a larger social scale that they are now equal but society does not allow for a lived realization of such equality. Rather, on the contrary, it is seemingly discouraged in everyday practice. However, the desire for more gender equitable relationships expressed by this student, as well as the frustration exhibited in the previous student’s comment, indicate that the propensity for change is present. Nevertheless, the complexity of the values traps that help preserve current inequalities is not a simple dichotomy and is likely not easy for campaigns to work within. Rather, as John Molefe hints at, the complexities of tradition and modernity have become intermeshed and resulted in various different double standards relating to gender:

> You’ll find that issues of gender and double standards are really part of how men and women are socialized in terms of relationships and what they get via cultural practices or traditional activities that give them a particular understanding about their roles as men and women. Also, what the media advocates or even subtly advocates is important because it’s what perpetuates the roles that people play.

Certainly, double standards related to gender are also tied in with those of sex and expressions of sexuality, as previously discussed. They cannot be disentangled from the web of conflicting values related to tradition and modernity, which also includes the changing political landscape, peer influences, religion, and, of course, the media. The difficulty youth face is that they are socialized in different ways and depending on the types of social and cultural influences they face, they may find themselves struggling to define themselves based on the various pushes and pulls of the different values they come up against in their daily lives.

### 8.3 The Rise of Popular Culture and Its Influences on Youth

*Sometimes we don’t really notice the impact of the media on us but the young people see this and are exposed to it all the time. They have stuff on their cell phones and they can download anything they want. People get really crazy ideas and end up engaging in sex with the wrong ideas and priorities (Male student).*
This student’s comment is telling in what it says about the seemingly hidden agenda of the media and its influences on youth. It also points to the high levels of access to media that youth have. Therefore, it is important to consider what this has meant for youth sexuality and to consider how campaigns have responded to the challenges of popular culture and its discourses.

The rise of popular culture since South Africa’s transition to democracy is part of the impact of globalization. The influx of media in the country with fewer controls has meant that on a daily basis South Africans are exposed to magazines, billboards, radio, and television media that advertise certain lifestyle constructs to them. In many ways, these constructs fashion South African’s perceptions of “modern life”. Fashion magazines present commodities that are symbolic of sophistication and glamorous soap opera style television dramas portray images of material wealth, fortune, and success that support the country’s capitalist economy and trends toward conspicuous consumption. Essentially, the mainstream media and popular culture work to sell a lifestyle that is tied up with South Africa’s recent freedoms by presenting a discourse that is rooted in the right to choose and opportunities to obtain the life being sold, which awareness and prevention campaigns have played upon and adopted. However, the lifestyle being sold by popular culture often holds greater allure than that of campaigns as it presents more immediate pleasures and gains, which may be more attractive than the long-term and unseen gains of those focused on the future and a healthy lifestyle (Leclerc-Madlala 11-12 and 15; Jones 405).

In addition, the mass media in popular culture can be highly seductive in its use of sexual images that are frequently linked to the types of lifestyles being sold. They often convey the notion that sex is a means or is a part of acquiring the lifestyle shown and being part of “modern” consumer culture. Students at the University described their perceptions of media culture:

- I think it’s hard for people when we have HIV/AIDS around because the media kind of promotes sex and it’s so ideal there, you know? But, you have to remind yourself that the TV is not reality. Kids don’t realize that. They want that life. Grown up people know better but sometimes they don’t act better (Female student).

- It’s so cool anymore to be a gangster, to get paid and get laid and that’s the most important thing. We really need to start thinking more about what’s going into people’s minds (Male student).
In many ways, sex is linked to power in the sense that it is used by the media to sell certain lifestyle values that, according to Posel, “[eroticize] possession and accumulation as icons of sexual prowess and libido”, thereby also linking sex to power for those seeking to acquire such icons and signifiers of wealth (56 and Hunter 2002: 118). In conjunction, it is as though the media promotes the use of sexuality and the power inherent within it to gain the very lifestyle it tries to sell. Even while youth may realize where the messages and tactics of the media fall short in the values they present, they remain attractive to them and, even if unbelievable, they become part of the construction of the individuals’ social space, and to some extent they impact the shape of social norms.

The challenge for awareness and prevention campaigns is to create messages that can compete with the messages of materiality and hyper sexuality inherent in much of popular culture. The question is, should campaigns work to challenge these messages head-on by running counter to them or should they work within them and run parallel to them to get their messages across and impact change from within the structure currently in place. The Love Life campaign has worked to brand itself in ways that make it as hip and cool as the brand names many youth are familiar with, such as Nike and Coca-Cola. In fact, as previously discussed, the campaign based its own branding on the re-launching of the Sprite campaign in an effort to keep it “fresh” and make it something that youth would want to “buy into” as much as they would a can of soda or the like. Refilwe Africa of Love Life says that the campaign is about getting the message to youth that, “even when your friends are all branded with Nike and everything else, it’s about standing up for yourself…it’s like you are saying, ‘I’ve got my own plan and I’m sticking to my plan’”. However, she was quick to say that Love Life’s campaign was “not a formula” and “will never be a formula”, which seems somewhat contradictory given that the campaign’s approach is to compete with the messages of popular culture by branding itself in a way that is as formulaic as those it works against in order to make its messages equally as appealing, if not more so.

Soul City’s strategy has been to use a mass media format to work along side the messages of popular culture, while challenging them at the same time. It uses a soap opera television format that is similar to many of the regular daytime television dramas whose messages it works to compete against. In many ways it’s strategy is as formulaic as that of Love Life in that both campaigns work to fuse messages of safe sex with the iconography of popular culture so that
safety, among other forms of empowerment, becomes cool (Posel 57-58). However, Soul City’s messages are more developed in the ways that they work to challenge the prevailing norms regarding sexuality and gender. They work to acknowledge different issues of sexuality as they are impacted by media biases and consider their impact on women and men. In the opinion of Soul City’s John Molefe:

Issues of sexuality are not isolated to any context and the media environment perpetuates the same kind of biases that actually inform and shape the perceptions of boys and girls and how they understand sexuality...like successful girls or successful boys have these kinds of traits...they are looking in this way and they are associated with these types of things or have access to those resources...the media can dictate this to an extent...and that kind of perception actually drives young girls to try to emulate these representations.

Soul City strives to challenge norms of who is successful, what they should look like, and how they should act. Certainly, this means taking different approaches to women and men.

To begin with, the portrayal of women in popular culture as having “hyper-sexual” femininity has been linked to the contemporary feminist agenda in that, as described previously, it seeks to place women on a more equal playing field with men. Basically, the media promotes women’s use of their sexuality to access forms of material wealth that it also strives to sell them. (Hunter 115-118). In some senses, women on television programs and the like appear to use their sexuality to get what they desire, but in other ways women are also seen as being passive, such as in print advertisements. While the later may seem to represent women’s disempowerment, the fact of the matter is that these ads convey only one part of women’s power, their sexuality, rather than portraying them in other ‘empowered’ positions. Female students at the University gave examples of their impressions of women in popular culture saying:

• Women are more passive in popular culture. They just look pretty and stand there but don’t do much.

• Most adverts portray women as being stupid...women are being careless or blonde or just pretty but there’s nothing of substance.

• Women are always shown in this sexy way. I mean, it looks so nice and then you think, ya, I’d like to look like her but at the same time, it’s not realistic.

Female students impressions of representations of their gender in popular culture indicate that women are often portrayed in very limited ways that do little to promote female agency and power outside of sex. Representations of women in this way along with messages of gender
equality discussed in the last section work to perpetuate double standards as well. The impact of messages of equality along side those that promote the use of female agency in highly sexualized forms seems to send the message that sexuality is a woman’s only means of attaining a level of power equal to that of her male counterpart.

As a counter to the discourses of popular culture concerning the portrayal of women, campaigns like Soul City have worked to challenge the social norms they put forth. John Molefe of Soul City stated that:

*Women should not be used as objects of sex and we also don’t want to only put models on TV. We want to show real women in real situations and show that this can be good realistic drama without undermining our messages. For example, we showed a female professional who falls in love with a male nurse, and we show women in positions of power, such as being doctors, lawyers, etc. Normalizing women in these types of roles will change the perceptions of the social norms.*

In many ways there is a sense that there is a momentum to change the norms Soul City focuses on. Male students at the University understood their portrayal in popular culture as being highly sexualized as well. One male student spoke of the way that men are portrayed in a sort of dominant predatorial position where they are set up to take advantage of women:

- Men are always portrayed as what matter [in the media] but women are shown to be these pieces of meat and it’s like it’s only a matter of time before the men get to them. Guys are also portrayed [on TV and in the movies] as being really selfish and individualistic. Their goal when they go into a club is to see which and with how many girls they can score…forget about who those women are or their feelings or them as a community. Men need to be taught to see women as human beings and to respect them not only as potential partners but as women and people…as a community, as mothers, and as friends.

This student’s comment reveals that way that representations of men in popular culture help formulate social norms that dictate that they too are to go after a sort of macho or dominant status. This status translates into power, rather seen as a kind of social capital, which is associated with an ability to command multiple sexual partners at a whim and thus exercise true sexual freedom (Posel 56). Interestingly, the understanding of representations of women and men in this context are similar to those discussed earlier (in section 7.2) regarding the types of gendered social norms that individuals are expected to live up to by their peer groups. As was the case with social norms and individual ideals being different for women and men regarding relationships, the same seems to be true in the case of popular culture norms and individual
ideas. However, the student’s understanding seems to demonstrate that individuals are not passive dupes of media messages but that they are active in constructing their own interpretations and understandings, which are largely based on personal values (Batchelor and Raymond 2004:217).

If this is true, then where there is a base of common values between awareness and prevention campaigns and those they target, there is hope that campaigns can compete with the messages of popular culture to impact and shape culture to promote ‘alternative’ trends that might have more positive impacts on expressions of sexuality and desire. John Molefe of Soul city summed this point up well:

_We are able to actually show a difference and challenge popular culture, and then we are able to show and acknowledge that other realities actually exist, and then also understand that people have in them an ability to wish for difference but you find that they don’t think society thinks that way. So our processes are acknowledging and listening to what people are actually doing on the ground and showing that it is a challenge to actually be different. Culture is not static…it is shaped by people and therefore you can be part of the change (Soul City)._ 

These hopeful words present a kind of guiding light for campaigns. The realization on the part of youth and campaigns that other realities are possible, that culture is not static, and that people do wish for change, serves as both the hope and the drive for campaigns in their efforts to impact both individual and larger social change relating to HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

9 Conclusion

The experiences of students in their daily lives, in relationships, and against the backdrop of large scale social changes that include both the AIDS epidemic and responses to it reveal much about the intricacies of the self and self negotiation in various contexts. This paper has attempted to demonstrate some of the struggles of South African youth and the ways that HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns resonate with them based on their lived experiences. In turn, it has also tried to convey some of the challenges campaigns face in responding to the social struggles of youth, their target audience, and the different ways that these responses work to inform discourses related to various understandings of the epidemic and awareness of it.

In many ways this discussion has shown that the ideals of youth are quite different from their daily lived realities and the social norms that they face, particularly as they understand love
in relationships. Youth have developed different coping strategies to deal with social pressures
to live up to expectations from peers, as well as other ideals of success and “modernity” from
society at large. Yet, on top of social pressures, they must also develop social strategies to meet
needs related to their own emotional fulfillment in relationships, as well as those that help protect
them from the threat of AIDS on more of an emotional level. This has been done in some ways
through various forms of “othering” that have been demonstrated in the way students are led to
understand AIDS as a moral problem or as a problem of the black other or the poor other. In
addition, different understandings of responsibility and the roles assumed in relationships
demonstrate a kind of “othering” whereby placing greater liability on one gender over the other
helps shield the individual from the potential consequences of sex, such as HIV. Essentially,
youth negotiate their understandings of HIV/AIDS, their relationships, and their interactions with
the larger social world in a kind of process of self-preservation. At times this means privileging
certain forms of knowledge and behavior over others. These processes of preservation help
empower individuals to secure and maintain their identity, while coping with the often chaotic
social world they live in, which is facing rapid change and also dealing with the challenges of the
HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Such a landscape has clearly provided much for HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention
campaigns to deal with as well. The complexities of the epidemic become ever more evident
when examining the struggles of youth, as does the importance of acknowledging the realities of
these struggles. This has certainly been exemplified by the length of time it has taken for
campaigns, among other public health and educational programs, to acknowledge and focus on
the role of concurrent partnerships, transactional sex, and other such types of relationships,
which have emerged as one of the epidemic’s biggest drivers. To the outside observer it must
seem somewhat strange that it took until 2006 for campaigns to really begin focusing on such
forms of partnering, which have long been a common feature of African relationships and are
certainly also a distinguishing feature of heterosexual transmission of the epidemic in Africa
compared with other parts of the world. However, this point reveals something more of the
complexities and challenges that have been presented by HIV/AIDS. Clearly, the epidemic has
challenged the world to not only consider issues of sexuality and behavior in new ways, but it
has also demanded seemingly unprecedented levels of social, cultural, and historical
introspection in order to for us to even begin to understand its spread.
Another point that exemplifies the challenges of HIV/AIDS prevention is the difficulty we have had in understanding the complexities of our behavior and ourselves. Efforts to move beyond thinking about HIV prevention as being determined merely by awareness and knowledge of the epidemic, or even awareness and knowledge of ourselves, and cut-and-dry methods like ABC have prevented campaigns from really taking into account the fact that the spread of HIV is much more complex than any kind of knowledge, and certainly cannot be reduced to it alone. Rather, campaigns are really only beginning to recognize that decisions people make about sex are usually related more to matters of feeling and less to calculations based on any kind of knowledge. As a case in point, Helen Epstein reminds us that, “sexual behavior is determined less by [...] discount rates that young people apply to future benefits, [such as those supported by Love Life] than by emotional attachments” (136).

Certainly, both of the campaigns discussed in this paper have a strong sense of the scale of the issues they are attempting to take on, as well as the complexity of the epidemic as it relates to behavior, social change, history, and so forth. Hindsight has shown them that this makes it extremely difficult for them not only to measure their success, but also to see what impact they are having on the communities they serve. Interestingly, both campaigns said that they do not expect to see any noticeable change in the near future but rather, that they had come to see their programs as likely having a kind of generational domino effect. In other words, the idea goes that any impact they have on the youth of today will hopefully, in turn, impact the youth of tomorrow, and so on. As Refilwe Africa of Love Life stated, “we can prevent new infections by a process of elimination and then you will end up with a whole new generation of people that actually don’t want this thing and they don’t have it”. This way of thinking about awareness and prevention is hopeful and also understands the monumentality of the task at hand. In conjunction, the perspectives offered by youth as they stated how their ideals differed from that which was expected of them socially and their daily lived realities indicates that campaigns are working with a population that is open to change, and maybe even hungry for it in many ways. This means that campaigns have a kind of niche for their messages and, if they keep themselves in tune with the struggles of youth, their ideals, and their realities, they can speak to the trends of social change, including the realities of the AIDS epidemic, and thus continue to help build on the idea of an HIV free future.
10 References


Consulted Sources and Recommended Further Reading


Appendices

Appendix A
Research Instruments Used for Interviews

Individual Interviews – Research Instrument

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
   How old are you?
   How long have you been a student here?
   What are you studying?
   Where are you from?
   Did you grow up in the same place your whole life?
   Did you live with both of your parents while you were growing up?
   How many brothers and sisters do you have?
   How would you categorize your family’s economic status? (upper income/middle income/lower income)
   Are you married and/or do you have any children?

2. Have you heard of HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programs like Love Life, Soul City, or Khomani? How
   have you heard of them? Have you had any interaction with these programs…through their outreach programs, print
   advertisements/campaigns, and/or on television?

3. What do you think of these programs/campaigns in general? Do you think they have much influence on
   individuals thinking or behavior? Are they necessary? Why? / Do you feel like these programs/campaigns have
   impacted you in any way? Why?

4. What qualities do you value in a partner? What makes a good partner?

5. How would you prioritize the following and why?
   - intimacy
   - trust
   - communication
   - commitment
   - monogamy

6. How would you define love? What is the difference between the love you might have for friends and family and
   the love you have with a partner? What do you think the differences are between how different types of love are
   demonstrated?

7. Do you think there are gender-specific differences between the way men and women show their love or think of
   love? What are these differences?

8. Do you think there is a link between love and sex? What do you think sex might bring to a relationship?

9. What does the idea of sexual freedom mean to you?

10. What do you think of when you hear the term ‘risky sexual behavior’? Is risky sexual behavior something that
    you are concerned about?


12. What do you think will help reduce a person’s risk of contracting HIV?
13. Do you feel like you’ve received a lot of information about HIV/AIDS? Where have you learned the most about HIV/AIDS? (television, at school, friends/peers, family, adverts, outreach programs)

14. What do you think about the ways sex (women and men) is portrayed in popular culture…such as in movies, on television, or in magazines?

15. What do you think about the ways sex is portrayed in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns? Do you think sex is portrayed differently in popular culture than it is in HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns? Or, do these go together?

16. What information would you like from HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns? (Or, what information do you think HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention campaigns should be offering people?)

Campaign Interviews – Research Instrument

Sexuality General
1. I’m interested in understanding how programs like (organization/campaign) interpret ideas of sexuality (such as how men and women, ideas of romance and love, sex, and communication are represented in campaigns). Could you tell me a little bit about the primary ways (organization/campaign) addresses matters of sexuality/conceptualizes sexuality in its campaigns/programs? What does (organization/campaign) focus on most in addressing matters of sexuality?

2. How does (organization/campaign) acknowledge the various types of relationships, ideas of love, and romance that exist? In particular, how does (organization/campaign) acknowledge relationships that involve or are based on transactional sex, money, etc.?

South African Context
3. How do you think that notions of sexuality/expressions of sexuality have evolved or changed since South Africa transitioned to democracy? And, how have representations of sexuality by (organization/campaign) evolved or changed over time?

4. How does (organization/campaign) work to create messages that acknowledge differences of race, class, socio-economics, and urban/rural that exist in South Africa?

5. How does (organization/campaign) choose to target different sectors of the population…prioritize certain sectors of the population in a generalized epidemic?

6. How do the messages of (organization/campaign) acknowledge the messages on sex and sexuality put forth by popular culture…such as in music, on television, in magazines, etc.?

7. How do the messages of (organization/campaign) acknowledge or respond to more “traditional” ideas of sexuality? (eg. Zulu ‘isoka’)

Behavioral Change
8. What model or models of behavioral change do you think (campaign/organization) follows most closely? Do you think the strategies of (campaign/organization) prioritize individual behavioral change or social behavioral change?

9. What level of effectiveness do you think the (campaign/organization) has had on impacting behavioral change…such as in terms of getting people to practice safer sex and know their status?

General Organization
10. What do you think the major strengths and weaknesses of (organization/campaign) have been?

11. How would you say that the goals of the (organization/campaign) have changed over time?
How have the tactics/strategies used to achieve these goals have changed or developed over time? What has triggered these changes?

12. Has (organization/campaign) come under criticism? Do you feel that this criticism was warranted? Has it been helpful or productive for (organization/campaign)? What has (organization/campaign) done to respond to this criticism?

How does Love Life respond to criticism of its messages as being disjointed, vague, too general, and not acknowledging gender differences? (Love Life only)

Individual Questions
13. Would you mind telling me a little bit about yourself?
How old are you?
Where are you from originally?
What is your affiliation with (organization/campaign)?
How long have you been affiliated with (organization/campaign)?
Have you worked with campaigns/organizations of a similar nature before and in what capacity?

Appendix B
Soul City – Social and behavioral change model used in the development and evaluation of Series 4

List of aims of Soul City campaign messages for program series 2, 3, and 4

-Anyone can get HIV/AIDS

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- There are ways of living positively with AIDS
- Condoms prevent the spread of HIV and other STDs
- STDs should be treated
- People with AIDS have rights
- People with AIDS are not blameworthy
- People with AIDS like other people have hopes, fears, and needs
- Discrimination results from ignorance and is unfair
- HIV is not casually contagious
- People with HIV/AIDS are human beings and should not be shunned
- AIDS is spread mainly through unprotected sex
- Youth are at high risk
- Sticking to one partner is safe if you both come into the relationship as HIV negative and remain faithful
- You cannot tell by looking if a person is HIV positive
- Males and females are equal and have the right to make their own choices about sex
- Love is not equal to sex and is not about material goods
- Young girls can be their own ticket to a better life and should avoid becoming dependent on men
- Men can control their sexual urges and this will not have negative physical or psychological effects
- If your boyfriend forces you to have sex, it is rape, even if you had said you love him or accepted gifts
- You can be your own person
- You can resist negative peer pressure

Appendix C

Love Life’s structural model in the first year of the campaign

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