The rise and normalization of blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa: A post-colonial feminist analysis

By

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa (SA), young urban black women are currently posting images of luxury items such as shoes, clothes and overseas trips on social media. These women claim that their luxury items and goods are gifts from their "blessers" or wealthy men in exchange for sex and companionship. This blessee/blesser exchange has led to the rise of the "blesser culture" on social media and highlights the prevalence of transactional sex for upward mobility and status amongst young urban black women in SA. This study provides a post-colonial feminist evaluation of young urban black women's perceptions as well as motivations for engaging in these relationships. This dissertation argues that, although global research on the nature of sexualities and transactional sex (TS) located within health science and social anthropology has grown enormously, when examining sexualities in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) research frameworks within these fields oversimplify the nature of African sexualities by focusing on HIV/AIDS transmission, vulnerability and risk.

In addition, research in this field homogenizes gender inequalities by creating a profile of a poor woman, usually racialized as "black", located within an abusive environment and deprived of information and education. On the other hand, "black" men are viewed as heterosexual, promiscuous and insensitive to their and other's health. These images have created a limited understanding of sexualities in Africa because the conceptualizations of gender and sexualities often employ a static framework where conservative norms, understandings and practices of heterosexualities frame women as subordinate to men who perpetrate violence. In addition, discussions on sexualities and TS in Africa are dominated by Western gender discourses that shape and construct meanings and definitions relating to sexuality in ways that do not reflect African realities and narrow how sexuality is theorized and applied in many communities in SSA.

This dissertation's analysis challenges these static and Western biases of Eurocentric models of studying African women by contextualizing the nature of sexuality and transactional sex in South Africa. This research captures the core and complexity of transactional sexual relationships and demonstrates that young women seek blessers based on relative deprivation, to access a high-status lifestyle and upward social mobility and from a position of agency and power. Therefore, young women view blesser relationships as a mutually beneficial exchange that allows them to give sex to access the commodities of modernity. These accounts challenge dominant Western understandings of TS which frame women as powerless victims of men and illustrate the need to rethink our theoretical frameworks for transactional sex. Secondly, this research recommends expanding the scope of this study and analyse the experiences of men who are blessers in order to provide a holistic understanding of the nature of transactional sex in SA. Lastly, by researching the subjective narratives of women and men engaging in transactional sex in different regions of SA it will allow for both

intervention and scholarship to move beyond narratives of young women as victims and older men as perpetrators while restoring African voices in the global arena.

OPSOMMING

Op sosiale media in Suid Afrika (SA) word talle foto's van luukse items soos skoene , klere en buitelandse reise op sosiale media gedeel. Diė fotos word deur jong stedelike swart vroue geplaas. Hierdie vroue beweer dat hul luukse items en goedere geskenke is van hul "blesser" of welaf mans in ruil vir seks en kameraadskap. Die "blessee/blesser" verskynsel het gelei tot die opkoms van die "blesser kultuur" op sosiale media. Die kultuur beklemtoon transaksionele seks vir opwaartse mobiliteit en status onder jong stedelike swart vroue in SA. Hierdie studie bied 'n post-koloniale feministiese analise van jong stedelike swart vroue se persepsies en motiverings om by hierdie verhoudings betrokke te raak. Alhoewel wêreldwye navorsing oor die aard van seksualiteite en transaksionele seks (TS) in gesondheidswetenskap en sosiale antropologie geweldig uitgebrei het, is die ondersoek van seksualtiteite in Afrika, en spesifiek sub-Sahara Afrika (SSA) beperk. Hierdie tesis redeneer dat navorsing wat tot dusver uitgevoer is die aard van seksualiteite in Afrika vereenvoudig deur slegs te fokus op die oordrag van MIV/vigs kwesbaarheid en risiko.

Navorsing in hierdie gebied vereenvoudig geslagsongelykhede deur 'n beeld te skep van swart arm vroue wat vasgevang is in 'n omgewing van mishandeling wat hulle ontneem van inligting en opvoeding. Aan die ander kant word die ' blesser' mans gesien as heteroseksueel, losbandig en onverantwoordelik in hul benadering to hul eie ander se gesondheid. Hierdie benaderings bied 'n beperkte beeld van seksualiteite in Afrika omdat die konseptualisering van geslag en seksualiteite dikwels op 'n op statiese verwysingsraamwerk toegepas word. Diė raamwerk is gegrond op konserwatiewe norme, begrippe en praktyke wat vroue uitbeeld as ondergeskik aan gewelddadige mans. Voorts word narratiewe   oor seksualiteit en TS in Afrika oorheers deur Westerse geslagsdiskoerse wat betekenisse en definisies met betrekking tot seksualiteit beinvloed en oorheers. Diė diskoerse is beperk en weerspieël nie hoe seksualiteit in baie gemeenskappe in SSA uitgeoefen word nie.

Die navorsing en analise wat hierdie tesis bied, daag die Westerse vooroordeel van Eurosentriese modelle uit. Dit word gedoen deur die aard van seksualiteit en transaksionele seks in Suid-Afrika te ondersoek met 'n proefgroep van vroue. Die kern en kompleksiteit van seksuele verhoudings word bevraagteken in hierdie tesis en wys dat jong vroue 'blessers' soek as gevolg van deprivasie, asook met die oog op toegang tot hoë status en opwaartse sosiale mobiliteit. Dit word gedoen uit 'n posisie van mag en agentskap. Daarom sien jong vroue die "blesser" verhoudings as voordelige vir albei partye omrede die verhoudings hulle toelaat om seks te gee in ruil vir toegang tot bronne van rykdom. Dominante westerse sieninge oor transaksionele seks is gegrond op die idee dat vroue maglose slagoffers is van mans. Die bewyse in hierdie tesis daag dominante westerse sieninge van transaksionele seks uit aangesien dit wys dat daar 'n hersiening van hierdie idees moet wees.. Verder

bied die tesis voorstelle vir die uitbreiding van die navorsing deur die ervarings van "blessers" te ondersoek. Die alteratiewe voorstelle sal kennis in die terrein uitbrei omrede dit 'n gebalanseerde begrip van 'blessee/blesser' verskynsel in kan SA bied.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS..Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CGE..Commission of Gender Equality

EIGE.. European Institute for Gender Equality

eNCA .... eNews Channel Africa

FGM .... Female Genital Mutilation

GBV ....Gender Based Violence

GEAR .... Growth, Employment and Redistribution

HIV ....Human Immunodeficiency Virus

MTV ....Music Television

SA.. South Africa

SABC..South African Broadcasting Corporation

SAPs... Structural Adjustment Programs

SSA ....sub- Saharan Africa

TS.. Transactional Sex

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

From 2015, young urban black South African women[1] who have access to basic needs such as education, shelter and food took to social media posting pictures of expensive clothes, shoes, and overseas trips while tagging the pictures (#blessed)[2]. These young women state that they attract "blessers" to attain material gifts, money and a modern lifestyle. In addition, young urban women "blessees" claim that their "blessings" are from wealthy older men or "blessers" in exchange for sex and companionship. This blessee/blesser exchange constitutes the involvement of educated and ambitious young women who navigate their sexuality for financial gain and older men who are usually married and are financing the lifestyles of sometimes multiple young women at the same time. Consequently, this type of sexual exchange has led to the rise of the "blesser culture" on social media and highlights the prevalence of transactional sex (TS) for upward mobility and status[3] amongst young urban black women in South Africa (SA). In addition, the blessee/blesser phenomenon reveals different reasons for young black women's involvement in transactional sexual exchange beyond the longstanding transactional "sex for survival"[4] discourses.

Transactional sex which involves the exchange of sex for money or gifts has become normalized in urban, rural and semi-urban sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Recent studies on transactional sexual relationships for material gain argue that this form of sexual exchange is on the rise because young women view it as an easy way to achieve social goals, gain material goods, affirm their self-worth and assert their agency (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008:17). Historically, transactional relationships find their roots in African norms that require a man to give material gifts and for a woman to be compensated for sex. For example, in many sub-Saharan cultures, the exchange of gifts in sexual relationships is normalized because demonstrating romantic love is often attached to giving gifts (Ranganathan et al, 2017:2). According to Leclerc-Madlala (2008), a key writer on TS, the current rise and normalization of transactional sexual relationships for material gain is based on a system of dependency that is perpetuated by two intertwined and established African norms. The first dictates that men must

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[1] This research's participants are in the age group of 20-30 years old. This is because a study by Mampane (2018:1-2) on "blesser and blessee" relationships in South Africa reveals that young black women between the age of 20 to 34 are prone to engage in sex for money exchange relationships with older partners.

[2] For examples of social media posts on the "blessee/ blesser phenomenon" see **Appendix A**.

[3] The term "transactional sex for upward mobility and status" is used interchangeably with "transactional sex for material gain" and "transactional sex for consumption".

[4] The term "transactional sex for survival" is used interchangeably with "transactional sex for basic needs".

redistribute wealth to illustrate love, commitment, and appreciation through material gifts, while the second states that women should receive financial gifts after providing sex as confirmation of their value, love and commitment (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008:23).

Today, these two culturally inscribed assumptions of sexual interactions between women and men have become instrumental in defining norms and values associated with sexuality and contemporary sexual relationships, evident in the way young women are now actively seeking transactional sexual relationships for material gain. This is such that, in southern Africa, for black women "to do sex for free" is viewed as an act of low dignity and self-respect[5] (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008:23). Leclerc-Madlala (2003) and Ranganathan et al (2017) add that the spread of neoliberal globalization has also expanded people's expectations and aspirations evident in how African women are now forming new wants, desires and needs that reflect modernity, equality in sexual relations and relationships that mirror globalized standards of luxury. Therefore, age-mixing relationships between young women and older men for material gain are increasingly normalized and perceived as being economically beneficial.

Consequently, recent studies on sex for money exchange relationships in SA conducted in semi-urban as well as urban areas now challenge longstanding notions that transactional sexual exchanges are primarily based on "poverty-induced economic survival strategies" (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003:216). Scholars such as Siberschmidt & Rasch (2001), Leclerc-Madlala (2003), Dunkle et al (2004), Stoebenau et al (2016) and Ranganathan et al (2017) have studied the prevalence of "transactional sexual exchanges for consumption" and the various motivations for seeking out these relationships, such as desire for status, asserting agency, obtaining modernity and aspirational lifestyles. These scholars identify these factors as central to why women engage in TS. This emerging literature on TS suggests that, rather than engaging in sexual exchange for subsistence, young urban women are now seeking and maintaining transactional relationships for consumption purposes. However, despite these new developments, dominant literature on transactional sexual relationships remains concentrated in social anthropology and health science, and often employs a Western neoliberal understanding of TS. Accordingly, women's sexual transactions continue to be analysed within the "sex for survival paradigm" and in the contexts of poverty, risks of HIV/AIDS and high levels of violence.

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[5] For examples of studies on the concept of "sex for free" see, Wamoyi et al (2010b): Transactional sex amongst young people in rural northern Tanzania: an ethnography of young women's motivations and negotiation. And Leclerc-Madlala (2009): Cultural scripts for multiple and concurrent partnerships in southern Africa: why HIV prevention needs anthropology.

This approach to TS stems from the 1990s, where biomedical discourses on HIV/AIDS prevention in sub-Saharan Africa labelled sex workers as a reservoir for infection (Simonsen et al, 1990). Consequently, prevention efforts focused on HIV/AIDS awareness and were formulated based on gender stereotypes rooted in Western mainstream notions of male domination and female subordination. Furthermore, by focusing on HIV/AIDS risk factors, it implies that women are the major carriers of the virus and thus contaminators (Arnfred, 2004:25). This view of black women's sexualities disregards recent studies on transactional sex which show that young urban women are well informed about HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008). In addition, this understanding of transactional sex is problematic because it places the weight of responsibility and managing the spread of HIV/AIDS on young women and neglects the role of men in transactional sex, thereby posing no challenge to masculinities and leaving patriarchy[6] undisturbed (Arnfred, 2004:10).

Moreover, the allocation of transactional sexual relationships in "survival sex" discourses frames black women as poor and results in the portrayal of young black women as victims who are dependent on an "other" who will provide, ultimately disregarding their agency. Furthermore, it entrenches the production of Eurocentric knowledge that constructs negative images of sexualities in Africa and results in the Global South becoming dependent on the West to focus attention on their plight rather than speaking for themselves (Nnaemeka, 2005). Consequently, black women are represented as being the same by excluding the intersectionalities of class, race and sexual oppression (Mohanty, 1984). This understanding of African women's sexualities highlights the need to provide insight into the agency, reality and material complexity of black women engaging in TS in order to restore their voices in the global arena.

Therefore, this study argues that a post-colonial feminist analysis of transactional sexual relationships can achieve this. This is because post-colonial feminism endeavours to restore the historical and modern voices of the "subaltern", "the dominated" and "oppressed" by radically rethinking history and the production of knowledge that has been governed by the West (McEwan, 2001:95). This is particularly important due to the current rise in and normalization of the "blessee/blesser" phenomenon in South Africa which suggests that young urban black women hold different perceptions regarding TS as well as different reasons for seeking TS. The following section will present the research problem and rationale of this study.

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[6] The idea of patriarchy stands to be a universalizing concept that limits distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in various cultural contexts. However, feminism seeks to be fundamentally related to the fight against colonial and racial subjugation. It is, therefore, crucial to reject the colonizing epistemological strategy that would subordinate various configurations of domination under the rubric of a transcultural notion of patriarchy (Butler, 1993:46).

1.2. Research Problem and Rationale

In South Africa, the current rise and normalization of TS occurs in the context of the present legal situation that includes the criminalization and prohibition of sex work. This approach comprises legislation which bans sex work and actions related to it, such that sex work is regarded as a criminal offence (Commission of Gender Equality (CGE), 2013). In addition, the current legal system in SA is mirrored by societal perceptions where issues surrounding sex work are treated from a moral perspective and informed by religious opinions which regard sex work as "sin" and sex workers as "fallen" or "sinful" women. Based on this understanding, in many South African communities sex work, identified as "wearing short skirts", "walking the streets" and "selling sexual services", is not tolerated because it is viewed as Western and un-African (Wojcicki, 2002b:273-274). Furthermore, this attitude to sex work stems from colonial Western Christian assumptions regarding sexuality that restructured the cultural, socio-economic and political representations of African everyday life (Arnfred, 2004:14).

Yet, in the same African communities transactional sexual relationships are not regarded as a form of sex work. Wojcicki (2002a) reveals that in transactional sex Judeo-Christian beliefs related to sex are absent, making it feasible for women to engage in transactional sex without stigmatization from the community. Therefore, in many South African communities there is a widespread denial of the existence of commercial sex because neither the police nor the public believes that commercial sex work occurs within their communities. Hunter (2010a) provides a similar argument stating that, although transactional sex has several similarities with "prostitution",[7] young women who engage in TS are not regarded as sex workers because neither party involved in transactional sex view the exchange as sex work. Therefore, participants in TS may view their partners as "boyfriends" and "girlfriends" as opposed to sex workers who identify their partners as "clients".

This understanding of transactional sex has led to the rise and normalization of this form of sexual exchange, particularly amongst young black women in urban areas. For Leclerc-Madlala (2003), young women in SA actively exploit their sexuality to acquire items that reflect a high-status lifestyle and to satisfy "wants" as opposed to meeting "needs". Young urban women view the pressure to acquire luxury goods that reflect a modern lifestyle, normally understood as "wants", as being the same as meeting basic needs. This conceptualization of "needs" and "wants" creates a continuum,

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[7] A feminist understanding of prostitution reveals that "prostitution" is forced sex work because women have no agency and power in the act. Secondly, prostitution is degrading and women are victims (CGE, 2013:2). In addition, the term "prostitution" carries undertones of immorality and criminality instead of business and expertise (McMillan et al, 2018:1518). Therefore, this study will only use the term "prostitution" when referring to scholarly work on transactional sex that often conflates sex work with prostitution.

whereby sexual exchange for subsistence, identified as "needs" and sexual exchange for consumption, known as "wants", are both expressed as "needs".

Leclerc-Madlala (2003) describes this continuum using the concept of "urban survival" whereby women seeking luxury items use the terminology of survival sex and situate their attempts to attain luxury goods within the context of sex for survival. Stoebenau et al (2016) extend this argument stating that the emergence of two new paradigms "sex for upward mobility and status" and "sex and material expressions of love" challenges the "survival sex" paradigm. Dominant literature on transactional sexual relationships often analyses the three paradigms separately. This is problematic because reviewing these paradigms individually results in an incomplete view of transactional sex in southern Africa and has led to the dominance of literature on survival sex. According to Stoebenau et al (2016), women's engagement in TS is shaped by overlapping factors between the three paradigms of transactional sex. Therefore, in order to capture the complexity and nature of sex for money exchange relationships and the driving forces for its practice, Stoebenau et al (2016) introduce a conceptual framework using all three paradigms of transactional sex by representing the three paradigms as a continuum of deprivation (absolute or relative), agency and instrumentality[8], and highlight that motivations for engaging in transactional sex are not mutually exclusive.

The purpose of this study is to utilize Stoebenau et al's (2016) conceptual framework and add to the growing literature on transactional sex by providing a post-colonial feminist analysis of the interplay between the three paradigms of transactional sex from the perspective of young urban black women. Furthermore, this study contributes a feminist restructuring of knowledge by arguing that a post-colonial feminist analysis of the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa will give voice and agency to young urban black women, and ascertain their perceptions of TS and sex work as well as motivations for pursuing this form of sexual exchange. This study also focuses on whether young urban black women view their engagement in transactional sexual exchanges as being different from conventional sex work. Additionally, this research investigates if there is a continuum of deprivation (absolute or relative), agency and instrumentality in the blessee/blesser phenomenon in order to understand the rise and normalization of transactional sex amongst young urban black women in SA from young black women's perspectives.

1.3. Research Questions and Research Objectives

From a post-colonial feminist perspective, the study's central research question is formulated as follows: *What are the perceptions of young urban black women involved in blessee/blesser*

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[8] **Section 1.4.3** provides the conceptualizations and definitions of "deprivation" (absolute or relative), "agency" and "instrumentality" according to Stoebenau et al's (2016) conceptual framework.

relationships in South Africa? The following sub-research questions have been designed to assist in answering the central research question. Firstly, in order to understand young urban black women's perceptions regarding transactional sex, the first supportive research question is formulated as follows: *Do young urban black women in South Africa view the "blessee/blesser" phenomenon as being different from conventional sex work?* The second supportive research question is structured as follows: *Is there a continuum of deprivation (absolute or relative), agency and instrumentality within the" blessee/blesser phenomenon" in South Africa?* In addition, the core objective of this study is to ascertain the opinions of young urban black women who engage in transactional sex. The second objective is to investigate what is causing the rise and normalization of transactional sexual relationships amongst these women. This study's third goal is to collect and assess findings on young women's views and motivations for engaging in transactional sex in SA. The final objective is to formulate recommendations for further study based on the information gathered.

1.4. Conceptualizations and Definitions

1.4.1 Sex Work/Prostitution

In recent years, research on transactional sex has expanded causing a shift in knowledge surrounding the act. However, despite these new findings transactional sex is still occasionally combined with "sex work" or "prostitution" (Stoebenau et al, 2016:187). Strictly speaking, prostitution and sex work are not the same concept. Prostitution is regarded as the gendered nature of the female condition under patriarchy, where male dominance is exerted through the medium of sexuality. This position stems from scholarly work by radical feminists such as Millet (1975), Barry (1979, 1995), Pateman (1983), MacKinnon (1987, 1990) and Dworkin (1987) who regard prostitution as violence against women, violence not only in the act of prostituting but also in the idea of "buying sex" which is related to the system of heterosexuality and male power, and signifies "the absolute embodiment of patriarchal male privilege" (Kesler, 2002:19). Radical feminism also regards prostitution as the ultimate reduction of women to sexual objects that can be sold and bought, thus creating the basis of female subjugation (Jeffries, 1997:2).

On the other hand, sex work depicts agency and therefore permits women's decision-making power within capitalist systems (CGE, 2013). This view emerged from liberal feminism as well as from postmodern theories that consider choice, women's power, the contradictions and complexities present in analysing sex work and the structuring roles of class, race, money and culture (Scoular, 2004:354). Furthermore, liberals and postmodernists critique radical feminism's approach to sex work as entrenching images of sex workers as sexual subordinates while sustaining views in the sex industry of dominant men and submissive women, instead of altering these views (Shrage, 1994:134). Moreover, liberals and postmodernists argue that, although sexuality and gender play a crucial role

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in determining roles in sex work, sex work should not be constrained to either sexuality or gender because doing so reduces women's characters to a single trait, while ignoring the roles of class, race, money and culture (Zatz, 1997:279).

Lastly, contemporary scholars such as Kapur (2001) have also challenged radical feminists' understanding of sex work by rejecting the monolithic, victimized and linear framing of third world women as a "repressed subjects" or "injured bodies". In addition, post-colonial feminists such as Mohanty (1984) seek to dismantle the framing of black women as financially and politically reliant on men, and framing "prostitution" as the only form of work for black women. For these scholars, rejecting the universal groupings of black women introduces new ways of understanding sex work which emphasise that sex work is not always forced, harmful, lacking consent from the sex worker and fails to bring gratification to both client and sex worker (Overall, 1992:717).

1.4.2 Paradigms of Transactional Sex

Transactional sexual relationships are complex, ambiguous and highly contested. Consequently, there is a tendency within social science to portray the categories of "prostitution", "sex work" and "transactional sex" as having self-evident meanings (Ranganathan et al, 2017:2). This oversight has resulted in the conflation of transactional sexual relationships with "sex work" or "prostitution" and has led to conflicting meanings of the term "transactional sex". While this study acknowledges that the majority of sexual exchanges in SSA have a financial aspect, it also recognizes that defining these exchanges as the categories of "prostitution" or "sex work" without contextualizing the behaviour behind the act limits a comprehension of the phenomenon beyond the label (Standing, 1992:447). Therefore, this study defines transactional sex as:

> A sexual relationship or act(s), outside of marriage or sex work, structured by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material benefit or status. While driven primarily by instrumental intentions, transactional relationships may also include emotional intimacy (Stoebenau et al, 2016).

This definition offers a more accurate description of non-marital, non-commercial exchange relationships in Africa. Additionally, this definition of transactional sex forms the basis for the ideal-type paradigms which articulate the causes of young women's engagement in transactional sex: "sex for basic needs", "sex for improved social status" as well as "sex and material expressions of love". In the first paradigm, *transactional sex for basic needs*, women are framed as powerless victims in TS and require interventions to protect them from exploitation (Rangathan et al, 2018:2). In the second paradigm, *transactional sex for upward mobility and status,* women are regarded as sexual agents who seek out transactional sex to secure a high-status lifestyle. In this paradigm, young women are viewed as having agency in their decisions to enter sexual relationships for material gain (Silberschmidt & Rasch, 2001). Lastly, the third paradigm, *sex and material expressions of love,* links

love and materiality and the idea that a man is the breadwinner in the relationship. In this paradigm, the idea of gift exchange is identified as being central in romantic relationships where money and love are inextricably linked (Stoebenau et al, 2016:186).

1.4.3 Deprivation, Agency, and Instrumentality

Women's engagement in TS are shaped by overlapping factors between the paradigms of transactional sex (Stoebenau et al, 2016). Therefore, transactional sex and the varying reasons for its practice can be denoted using a continuum of deprivation (absolute or relative), agency[9] and instrumentality. In the case of *deprivation,* which stems from women's gender inequality, the decision to seek out TS can be motivated by absolute deprivation/poverty or relative deprivation/economic inequality. In the *agency* continuum, the degree of power a woman has determines her role as either "victim" or "agent". Furthermore, in this continuum, a woman's agency can change with time and in different relationships from extremes of powerful agent to vulnerable victim. However, it is essential to note that even in a situation of absolute deprivation women can still possess "thin agency" in areas such as "partner selection", "first timing of sex" and "termination of relationship". Lastly, in the *instrumentality* continuum, which addresses the degree to which a relationship is driven by money or love, a woman's instrumentality can vary over time and from one relationship to another depending on whether the choice for engaging in transactional sex has links to emotional intimacy. However, the defining factor in this continuum is not that it is characterized by exchange, but rather that it is motivated by the exchange.

1.4.4 Blessee and Blesser

In South Africa, the term "blessee" refers to a young woman who receives financial support and gifts from a "blesser" and reciprocates with sex and companionship, whereas a "blesser" is a wealthy older man (often married) who provides financial support and gifts to a younger woman and receives sex and friendship in return (Urban Dictionary, 2016).

1.4.5 Hegemonic Masculinity & Emphasized Femininity

Hegemonic masculinity categorizes the way in which gender power functions in various stages of society and offers an outline for conceptualizing how gender disparities are constructed and replicated over time. From this perspective, "hegemonic masculinity" is described as the formation of gender

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[9] Analysing women's agency is important when reassessing the representation of women beyond a Western portrayal of submissive and vulnerable victims limited by patriarchal structures. For the purposes of this study "agency" is viewed as a person's capacity to enact deliberate choices to reach a specific end. However, while agency is enacted by the individual, it is also structured by the person's socially shaped internality and limited in the expression by economic and social conditions (Ranganathan et al, 2017:3).

practice that includes the currently established answer to the issue of the legitimacy of patriarchy that safeguards the dominant position of men and results in the subjugation of women (Connell, 1987:183-187). Furthermore, although hegemonic masculinities are context-specific, there are six main characteristics prevalent in many versions of hegemonic masculinities, namely: physical strength, economic breadwinner or provider, heterosexuality, sexual prowess, "uncontainable" sexual desire as well as sexual risk-taking (Connell, 2005; Lindeggar & Maxwell, 2007; Mankayi, 2008 and Dworkin et al, 2012).

In addition, hegemonic masculinity is viewed as the best and most suitable in many societies and groups and puts pressure on men to achieve this form of masculinity (Messerschmidt, 1993:82). Moreover, beyond societal and men's internalized pressure to achieve hegemonic masculinity which further entrenches it as the standard for "manhood", hegemonic masculinity problematizes anyone who is not able to achieve it. However, despite hegemonic masculinity being considered as the norm in many societies, it is relatively unachievable and few men, if any, can attain it (Nagel, 1988). On the other hand, "emphasized femininity" is viewed as the subordinate "other" to hegemonic masculinity. It is performed particularly to men and is focused around an internalized subservience and subjugation in relation to dominant masculinities (Connell, 1987:183-187).

1.4.6 Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Intimate Partner Violence

Gender-based violence described as violence against an individual based on their gender is of great concern in most countries in the world (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2013). While research on GBV links it to sexual violence or violence against women, GBV includes a variety of actions such as intimate partner violence which is the most common female-gendered victimization to occur in any society. Furthermore, although men can also experience GBV, it is mostly committed by men against women, with black women being at the highest risk of GBV and intimate partner violence (Jewkes et al, 2009). In South Africa, violence has always been an intrinsic part of society such that the country is listed amongst the most dangerous and violent countries in the world. In addition, the country is profoundly a patriarchal and gender unequal society with high levels of violence against women (Moffett, 2006; Peacock, 2012). South Africa's history of violence can be linked to colonial rule, the negotiations involving African traditional cultures, the apartheid regime and the struggle for the country's freedom (Wojcicki, 2002a:283).

According to Peacock (2012), GBV against women is one of the greatest legacies of apartheid. Firstly, during apartheid (1940s-1990s) South Africa was a "militarized society" which influenced the construction of masculinities and citizenship (Conway, 2004:26). This violent militarization of society by the state led to years of volatile low-intensity conflicts between the apartheid regime and different sectors of society including armed resistance groups. Furthermore, this environment

influenced the construction of masculinities and citizenship and created the foundation for post-apartheid South Africa (Conway, 2004:26). Today, the use of violence continues to be accepted and normalized in communities and is often seen as a marker of masculinity. Therefore, factors such as gender inequality, the disempowerment of black men, high levels of income inequality and patriarchal norms continue to sustain the country's culture of violence. (Wojcicki, 2002a:270). Lastly, because the post-apartheid government fails to provide harsh sentences for violence against women, this sustains a society that links masculinity to violence.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is a system of structures that aid in understanding, explaining and transforming the world by providing a systematic way of assessing social issues in order to produce recommendations for change (Conelly et al, 2002:53). Post-colonial feminism(s)[10] is one such framework and critical theory that seeks to explain how the world should work and can be improved (Mishra, 2013:130). The core aim of post-colonial feminism is to make visible the various socio-economic, political and cultural experiences of postcolonial subjects (Young, 2001:1-11). It examines how women are represented in colonial and postcolonial contexts while challenging long-standing assumptions about Third World women in both literature and society.

Therefore, it seeks to contribute the production of knowledge within feminism, that is inclusive, representative and accommodates voices of Third World subjects (Tickner, 2011:607-628). By challenging the continued dominance by the West in contemporary practices and discourses that often dismisses local thought, culture and practices (Acharya & Buzan, 2019:243). Consequently, post-colonial feminism critiques Western feminism(s) depiction of African women as one-dimensional, homogeneously powerless, poor and vulnerable. Regarding gender and sexuality, post-colonial feminism critiques Western feminism's dominance in feminist theory. According to post-colonial feminists, Western feminism fails to adequately represent the experiences of black women because its arguments on women's oppressions focus on the private sphere and heterosexuality.

Therefore, women's subjugation as well as the inequality in gender relations are presented as being a result of the partitioning of society into two separate biological sexes (male and female) as well as the sexual division of labour represented by the patriarchal and global domination of women's sexual and procreative activities by men (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005:265). Based on this understanding, Western feminists challenge patriarchy's regulation of women's sexualities, the constitution of sexual

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[10] Post-colonial feminism is not a monolithic and unified project; there is no unified post-colonial hypothesis in the same way as there is no synthesized Western feminist theory but rather there are diverse theories that provide different and various articulations within feminism(s).

difference and women's limited power over their own bodies in matters of procreation and sexual pleasure (MacKinnon, 1987). According to post-colonial feminists, although these contributions are valuable within global politics, Western feminism's analysis of sexualities limits gender disparities to women's sexualities and biology and the ways in which they have been legitimated by patriarchy. In doing so, it disregards the experiences of black women and leads to a representation of all women's bodies as objects of men's pleasure and whose drive has been subdued or sanctioned (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005:265).

This results in a narrow focus on one aspect of Third World women's sexualities and disregards other critical issues regarding African women's sexualities. For Mohanty (1984:337) this assumption that all women face the same oppression constructs a view of African women as being repressed based on their gender. Moreover, Western feminism dominates feminist theory and continuously aims to entrench itself as the sole and legitimate feminism. Western feminism's assessment of gender and sexuality in SSA results in a portrayal of African women as sexual victims of African men who are framed as inherently savage and violent (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005). Therefore, post-colonial feminism challenges this representation of women by advocating the systematic transcribing of black women's collective and individual histories to remove African women from the shadows of discussions about their own lives and sexuality[11] (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005:268).

Furthermore, post-colonial feminists argue that when analysing African women's sexualities under patriarchy there is a need to explore the different contexts of women's subjective lives influenced by social, economic, cultural and political circumstances while acknowledging the intersectionalities of class, race, as well as gender (Mohanty, 1984). Therefore, the purpose of post-colonial feminism is to create "autonomous, geographically, historically and culturally grounded feminist theory" (Mohanty, 1984:51). Consequently, this study identifies post-colonial feminism as an adequate theory to analyse TS in sub-Saharan Africa which continues to be analysed from a Western neoliberal perspective that places women's involvement in transactional sex in the context of high risk of HIV/AIDS contraction (Arnfred, 2004:25; Machera, 2004:179; Tamale, 2011:32).

This understanding of transactional sex further entrenches the perception that African women are powerless and vulnerable victims, while disregarding young women's knowledge about HIV/AIDS awareness and avoidance (Wamoyi et al, 2010a:14). Therefore, it reinforces the production of a Eurocentric knowledge that misrepresents the nature of African women's sexualities while neglecting

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[11] It is crucial to acknowledge that "African women do talk amongst themselves about their bodies and sexuality and have been able to create bonds that empower them". Documenting these discussions about African women's sexualities can radically restructure the production of knowledge that is dominated by Western feminism (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005:268).

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the voices of young urban black women who actively use their sexuality to seek transactional relationships for material gain. Therefore, employing a post-colonial feminist analysis on the rise and normalization of the blessee/blesser phenomenon amongst young urban black women in SA, this study adds to knowledge production by giving a voice to young urban black women so that they can share their perspectives and lived experiences.

1.6 Limitations and Delimitations

Due to time constraints, the perspectives of men who are blessers on transactional sex were not included. An additional limitation this study pertains to its geographic focus on northern Johannesburg, South Africa. This boundary means that data generated for this research is restricted to the perceptions and knowledge of women from northern Johannesburg. Therefore, since black women are not a monolithic group with shared lived experiences, generalizations cannot be made to all transactional incidents.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study adds to prevailing literature in the following ways. Firstly, recent literature on transactional sex has introduced two additional paradigms "sex for upward mobility and status" and "sex and material expressions of love". Yet, there is a tendency by scholars to stress one paradigm at the expense of the others. This has led to narrow understandings of TS and has created difficulties in defining this form of sexual exchange. Additionally, only a few studies on transactional sex investigate the interplay between the three paradigms as most literature on transactional sex focuses on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. Therefore, conducting this study is significant because it expands literature on TS by focusing on the interplay between the three paradigms of transactional sex. In doing so, this study captures the complexity and nuance of TS, including the diverse perceptions and reasons for young urban black women's involvement in this form of exchange.

Secondly, since theories of transactional sex are concentrated in social anthropology and health science, this study is significant because no literature exists that uses a post-colonial feminist lens to analyse TS in South Africa. Furthermore, this research is important because it contributes to scholarly work by non-Western feminist thinkers through its attempt to deconstruct the image of black women as a monolithic group with the same concerns and wants irrespective of ethnicity, class and racial location. Lastly, a post-colonial feminist analysis of the "blessee/blesser phenomenon is crucial because it contributes to dismantling the homogenization of black women's oppression which results in labels such as "exploited", "powerless" and "victims" of socio-economic systems" (Mohanty, 1984:333-337).

1.8 Outline of the Research Thesis

Chapter 1, *Introduction,* gives the reader a brief summary of this research that contextualizes the study's research focus, research problems, and the importance of this study. Chapter 2, *Literature Review*, provides a detailed post-colonial feminist evaluation of literature on transactional sex by analysing scholarly work on a variety of themes that address this study's first supportive question and objective. In addition, Chapter 2 demonstrates the significance of post-colonial feminism in understanding young urban women's motivations and perceptions for seeking TS. Chapter 3, *Research Methodology*, focuses on the research methods used in this research. This chapter maps out the research strategy, data collection techniques as well as challenges and limitations faced in this study.

In Chapter 4, *Data Description and Analysis*, data collected from the in-depth interviews is presented and organised according to Stoebeanu et al's (2016) framework for conceptualizing transactional sex. In addition, new themes generated in this study are introduced and, where needed, extracts from interviews are used. Chapter 4 also provides an in-depth analysis of both primary and secondary data collected to address this study's core research question and sub-research questions. Chapter 5, *Conclusion*, summarizes this research by drawing out this study's main findings and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Global research on the nature of sexualities located within health science and social anthropology has grown enormously. However, when examining sexualities in Africa and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) research frameworks within these fields oversimplify the nature of African sexualities by focusing on HIV/AIDS transmission, vulnerability and risk. In addition, while knowledge-building on sexualities within social anthropology is sensitive to the politics of sex and gender dynamics within SSA. Research within this field homogenizes gender inequalities by creating a profile of a poor woman, usually racialized as "black", located within an abusive environment and deprived of information and education. On the other hand, the "black" man is viewed as heterosexual, promiscuous and insensitive to his and others' health. These images have created a limited understanding of sexuality in Africa such that conceptualizing gender and sexualities often employs a static framework where conservative norms, understandings and practices of heterosexualities frame women as subordinate to men who perpetrate violence, which ultimately narrows how sexuality is theorized and applied in many communities in SSA.

Therefore, the goal of this chapter is to expand this study's theoretical framework based on post-colonial feminism and review existing literature on African sexualities, transactional sex (TS) in SSA and the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa. Firstly, this chapter will contextualize post-colonial feminism to highlight alternative methods for investigating sexuality and TS in Africa. Thereafter, an appraisal of the history of TS will be provided by reviewing existing literature located within social anthropology and health science. This section also analyses men and transactional sex, to establish African men's role in transactional sexual relationships beyond a Eurocentric understanding. Furthermore, this chapter explores the different paradigms of TS, and explores the nature of the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa. The final section, will provide a summary of the literature surveyed.

2.2. An Introduction to Post-colonial Feminism(s)

Post-colonial feminism problematizes Western dominance in feminist theory and aims to highlight the various social, political and cultural contexts of Third World women. According to Mohanty (1984), post-colonial feminism arose as a result the need to explore and express an appraisal of "Western feminist" scholarship on developing countries[1] that occurs through the discursive

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[1] The categories of "Third World" and "Western" feminist are not constrained spatially or by geographically fixed groups. Instead, they speak to political and methodologies used. Therefore, a woman from the geographical Third World can be

colonization of African women's lives and struggle. Amos & Parmar (1984:3-4) add that Western feminism attempts to assert itself as the only recognized feminism by disregarding the experiences of black women, and when it does include black women, they are examined from a racist perspective and as victims or as politically immature women who fail to engage in the struggles identified for them by white women. Agathangelou & Turcotte (2010:49) support this argument, adding that Western feminism fortifies the margins of theory in the way it entrenches "First Worldism" and "whiteness" as a structure of privilege within feminist frameworks.

Furthermore, post-colonial feminists argue that Western feminist writings on developing countries should be deliberated by looking at the universal domination of Western scholarship that is the making, dissemination and absorption of knowledge and concepts (Mohanty, 1984:336). In doing so, it becomes evident that Western feminists' categorizations of self and "other" are normalized and viewed as universally valid within feminist frameworks. Yet, Western feminism is incapable of speaking to the experiences of black women in meaningful ways and has resulted in the alienation and marginalization of many black women from global politics (Amos & Parmar, 1984:5). According to Hirschmann (1999:20), white middle class heterosexual women use their own knowledge to represent all women globally which has ignored the experiences and requests of Third World women, women in heteronormative sexual orientations and "poor" women. Consequently, this has increased barriers for developing new theories between the Global North and Global South and has created a disconnect that prevents solidarity and alliances amongst all feminist scholars (Cudd, 2005:176).

Scholars of the Global South now focus on disrupting this dominance by Western feminism by expanding the methodological and theoretical terrains of global politics (Chowdry & Nair, 2000:54). Post-colonial feminists advocate for the systematic documentation of black women's combined and individual histories in order to rediscover black women's place in politics while acknowledging the boundaries of their sisterhood with white feminists. Therefore, post-colonial feminism endeavours to restore historical and modern voices of African women by radically restructuring the production of knowledge that is dominated by Western hegemonic theories (McEwan, 2001:95). In addition, post-colonial feminists reject the contributions of key Western feminist scholars who, despite offering valuable input, share the commonality of defining women as victims of many forms of oppression. For Mohanty (1984:337), Western feminists assume that all women use the same gender across classes and culture.

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a Western feminist in orientation, in the same way a European feminist can use a Third World feminist analytical lens (Mohanty, 2003:502).

Therefore, Western feminism characterizes all women as a singular group on the assumption of their mutual oppression and then binds women together based on the sociological "sameness" of this oppression. Parpart (1995:225) adds that this assumption has produced the image of a standard Third World woman who lives a repressed life centred on her gender. Dube (1999:214) also problematizes this conception and demonstrates that Third World women do not face the same degree of oppression. On the contrary, Third World women can be oppressors of other women or even men based on privileges beyond gender such as location, nationality, class and race. Mirza (2009:3) adds that factors such as sexuality, class and racism amongst other structures of oppression also determine the view and marginalization of women. In addition, post-colonial feminism critiques Western feminists' monolithic representation of women in the Third World because it perpetuates the idea of African women as sexually constrained, uneducated, deprived, ignorant, culturally-bound and domestic.

This representation is then juxtaposed to Western women who are viewed as well-informed, modern and in charge of their bodies and sexualities (Mohanty, 1984:337; Parpart, 1995:225). This misrepresentation further portrays the image of Third World women as needing rescuing by their "liberated white sisters" (Acharya & Buzan, 2019:238). Therefore, post-colonial feminism considers Western feminism as a type of neo-colonialism because it produces structural dominance that overpowers the heterogeneity of the subjects it studies. For post-colonial feminism it is essential to focus on the interconnectedness of class, gender, ethnicity, race, nationality and regionality and the ways in which knowledge construction plays a role in influencing politics and the development of imperial and colonial projects (Agathangelou & Turcotte, 2010:39). According to post-colonial feminists, this can be achieved by restructuring the production of knowledge in ways that allow African women to engage with global politics in meaningful ways (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005:272).

However, the goal of a post-colonial feminist critique is not to do away with Western feminism but to create unity amongst Third World and Western feminists (Mohanty, 2003:502). Moreover, its critique of Western feminism seeks to illustrate the need for a flexible feminist agenda that is mindful of the geopolitics in which various feminisms develop, struggle, engage and envision probable cohesion praxis to achieve a decolonialized feminism that is not bound to race or capitalist agendas (Agathangelou & Turcotte, 2010:39). Lastly, it is important to note that, despite consenting with the ideologies of feminists, some African scholars refuse to be identified as feminists or are undecided on whether to refuse or support the term (Mekgwe, 2006:15). For example, scholars such as Ongundipe-Leslie (1987) have proposed the adoption of Alice Walker's term "womanism" that denotes a feminist of colour or black feminist to represent women in African. According to Ongundipe-Leslie (1994), "womanism" values and favours women's culture, occasionally loves men intimately and/or non-sexually and is dedicated to the preserving of both women and men. For

Ongundipe-Leslie (1994), "womanism" is a better term as it tackles the dividing character of feminism by acknowledging men as allies instead of enemies. With this background, the subsequent section will contextualize African sexualities necessary for ascertaining the nature of transactional sex in South Africa.

2.3 Re-Thinking Sexualities in Africa

2.3.1 Contexts of Gender and Sexuality [2]

The difference between "sex" and "gender" has been given substantial attention amongst feminists such that the association between sexuality and gender is theorized in various ways. This has produced disputed understandings of the meanings of both classifications and their relationships (Richardson, 2007:467). However, the most complex analysis of the distinction between "sex" and "gender" has been presented by Judith Butler (1990) who argues that gender comes before sex and sex is produced through our understanding of gender. Therefore, the view of gender as performative is understood as a fixed classification that stems from a repeated performance of heterosexual standards. This understanding of gender has added to a shifting emphasis on perceiving sexuality and gender as static, consistent and unchanging to looking at these classifications as situated, multifaceted and temporary (Pereira, 2014:13).

In Africa, the concept of gender and sexuality is under explored because both categories are yet to be expressed in a manner that is appropriate and suitable for the Third World and women's lives (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005:260). According to Oyewùmí (2005:11), this is because gender constructs in feminist theory continue to be rooted in the West where views on gender are socially composed and disparities between male and female are regarded as being situated in social behaviours, and not biological traits founded on the notion that biological and social formations can be detached and implemented universally[3]. When analysing African gender and sexualities a Western feminist approach is often

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[2] An individual's "sex" alludes to their genetic build while "gender" deals with expected social behaviour within a society, acceptable responsibilities and roles assigned to women and men as well as the ways in which men and women socialize (Barker et al, 2011:14). Therefore, gender is a societal construct of how we should act, meaning that it is indoctrinated and reaffirmed by one's environment. Moreover, while gender and sex can coincide, one's gender can be determined by components such as class, geography, religion and race. Hence, an individual's gender is developed, it is fluid and it is a performance that can be shaped and reshaped in different contexts and life stages (Butler, 1990).

[3] This understanding of sexuality is taken from a Freudian conception of sexuality as fundamentally biological, such that the gendered disposition of sexuality is removed from view through the appeal to biology. This Western naturalist approach stems from the mid-nineteenth to the twentieth century where the correlation between sexuality and gender was based on a biological and universal order focusing on binaries such as men/women and feminine/masculine (Richardson, 2007).

adopted which focuses on sexual asymmetry (male vs female), the separation of labour and the total control of women's reproductive capacities and sexual pleasure (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005:265).

According to Amadiume (1987), this analysis of gender inequality creates an image of women's sexuality as being governed by an unequal sexual division of labour that controls women's reproductive behaviours. Furthermore, it represents women's bodies as a pleasure-based entity that has been sanctioned and repressed. For Syed & Ali (2011:357), Western representations of African sexualities are indifferent to race, gender, class, ethnicity and sexual oppression and have resulted in a narrow focus on sex and sexual equality. Nfah-Abbenyi (2005:265) concurs with this position stating that Western feminists argue that women are governed by patriarchal and universal male control of their sexual and reproductive activities and advocate for a need to challenge patriarchy's regulation of women's bodies by focusing on women's lack of control in matters of procreation and sexual pleasure.

Yet, this conceptualization of gender in which the privileged man is measured against the subordinate woman does not reflect the realities of Africans. Post-colonial feminist scholars argue that when the concept of gender is applied to Africa it fails to fit within "African realities" because it is based on Western concepts and terminologies (Steady, 2005: 317). Furthermore, Western understandings of "gender" confuses other distinctions based on sexuality, religion, ethnicity, class and race, and does not acknowledge the position of women in different systems of domination. Furthermore, Western gender discourses focus on relations of power, confined to male and female power relations (Steady, 2005:318). For Pereira (2014:33), there is a need to change this view of African women by enhancing the importance of women's sexuality and promoting fundamental sexual rights without supposing the worldwide dominance of women's sexualities.

Therefore, when analysing African women's sexualities there is a need to explore the different contexts of women's subjective lives influenced by social, economic, cultural and political circumstances while acknowledging the intersectionalities of class, race, and gender (Mohanty, 1984). In addition, there is a need to understand how gender and sexuality is lived and understood by diverse categories of men and women as well as the need to recognize the changing meaning of sexuality as well as the relationship between sexuality and the social, economic and political arena (Pereira, 2014:33). This is important because sexuality and gender are interconnected socially and culturally. Gender offers the analytical lens that allows knowledge on sexuality to be logically understood. Consequently, factors such as age, ethnicity, race, culture and locality affect the sexuality of women and men, meaning sexuality is extremely entrenched in the meaning and understandings of gender structures (Tamale, 2011:11).

Additionally, there is a need to demonstrate the complexities of gender in non-Western contexts by developing post-colonial theories that do not reflect European tendencies in order to break the cycle of dependency on Western feminist theories. According to Richardson (2007:464-465), this can be achieved by developing theories on the link between sexuality and gender which address how gender's connection to sexuality is not fixed or unidirectional but is dynamic, multifaceted, fluid and volatile. Therefore, a theoretical framework that examines African women's sexualities within their contexts allows for a more intricate exploration of the historical and social connection between gender and sexuality and the gendered and sexualized specificity of this interconnectedness. In doing so, it provides an understanding of gender and sexual diversity and avoids past tendencies of adapting Western frameworks into non-Western understandings of sexuality and gender (Pereira, 2014:17).

2.3.2 The Nature of Gender and Sexuality in SSA

Western gender discourses have dominated discussions on sexualities by shaping and constructing meanings and definitions relating to sexuality in ways that do not reflect African realities (Tamale, 2011:18). The politics of sex and sexualities[4] in SSA have been analysed under the gaze of traditional notions of heterosexuality, without questioning the nature of heterosexuality itself. For Pereira (2014:4), this is because heterosexual understandings of sexuality have been constructed in the interests of male sexualities which then govern how sexuality should be felt, expressed and experienced. Therefore, concepts of African women's sexuality are developed from a Eurocentric perspective using globalization and neoliberal paradigms.

Furthermore, in SSA the study of sexuality continues to be underdeveloped despite it being central to the development and socio-economic challenges within the region (Undie & Benaya, 2006:119). This marginalization of African sexualities highlights the need to challenge Eurocentric models of studying African women by contextualizing the nature of sexuality in Africa and sub- Saharan Africa beyond Western bias. This can be achieved by analysing historical and social contexts in order to deepen our knowledge of African gender and sexuality (Steady, 2005:314). This is because our understanding of gender and sexuality can be enhanced when we acknowledge that they stem from social and historical contexts (Richardson, 2007:460).

Historically, there has been a wide range of stereotypical mythologies concerning the nature of sexualities in developing countries. According to Leclerc-Madlala (2004:5), the investigation of

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[4] This study describes sexualities as referring to the way(s) in which human sexual energy merges with the psychological, political, cultural and social life and as being part of social, cultural and political systems in which information, significance and possibilities are formulated, controlled and contested as this understanding of sexuality highlights the multiple and contextual meanings of sexuality (Pereira, 2014:2).

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African sexualities finds its roots in the Victorian age where unflattering portraits of sexuality in the developing world were constructed as exotic and uncivilized. Western texts further represented African sexualities as backward by depicting African women as insatiable, barbaric and savage (Commons, 1993:4). Christianity also contributed to the negative construction of African sexualities. According to Tamale (2011:24), Christianity underlined the immorality and sin linked to African women's bodies and introduced Western moralistic notions of sex and inscribed them on African women's bodies. In addition, Christian doctrines such as "the need for male control of female sexuality" and the division between sexuality (sex for pleasure) and fertility (sex for procreation) created the foundation of sexuality in Africa and has since been used to theorize African sexualities (Arnfred, 2004:14).

According to Guy (1987:32), it is this separation of fertility and sexuality within Christianity that suppressed pre-colonial and pre-Christian non-reproductive sexual activities of African women and this separation is vital in understanding the current nature of sexuality in Southern Africa. Hunter (2003:6) adds that Christianity led to a moral code for male and female sexual behaviour that stipulates that men can maintain several sexual relationships with women who are not their partners or spouses and link this behaviour to masculinity in positive ways. On the other hand, women were gradually not allowed to have many sexual relationships and increasingly sexual pleasure for women was defined as non-existent (Arnfred, 2004:17). Today, post-colonial European imaginations have "othered" African sexualities by contrasting them to Western sexualities which are viewed as modern, civilized and rational (Arnfred, 2004:7).

Scholars such as Geshekter (1995), Mama (1996), Jolly (2003), Osha (2004) and Elliston (2005) concur with this assertion and add that the beginning of awareness on sexuality in Africa was created within colonial thought and legacies. Therefore, the conceptual framing of sexuality in SSA portrayed black women's sexuality as threatening, excessive and carrying deadly diseases (Anfred, 2004:67). In addition, men were depicted as sexually irresponsible promiscuous beings with no interest in their partner's health (Undie & Benaya, 2006:120). According to Vaughan (1991) & Musisi (2002), this positivist approach towards men and women's bodies and their procreative activities is rooted in Western enlightenment doctrines that were imported to Africa through public health research in the colonial era. This research's emphasis on pregnancy avoidance, disease and controlling sexual excesses was given precedence over issues of sexual eroticism, desire and wellness. Therefore, by the late 1960s and 1970s, research from the West focusing on African sexualities portrayed images of over-sexed, promiscuous and uneducated Africans (Tamale, 2011:25).

The rise of HIV infections in Africa added to the medicalization of African sexualities to reduce the increase of HIV infections. This led to HIV/AIDS literature built on stereotypical notions of African

people, culture and norms. According to Patton (1997), "African AIDS" is attached to formations of "African sexuality" that stem from Eurocentric colonial imaginations of Africans as primitive and therefore different from the West. This approach to African sexualities has been reinforced by Western scholars such as Caldwell et al (1989) who portray stereotypical images of African sexualities and construct images of Africans and Africa as being fully consumed by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Oinas & Jungar, 2004:97). Today, this view of African sexualities continues to be fuelled by HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention literature that focuses on behavioural change campaigns. Furthermore, development discourses on Africa have dealt with sexuality by disregarding it or reducing it to the study of infection and violence (Jolly, 2003:5). This understanding of African sexuality is often donor and programme driven resulting in a conceptualization of sexuality limited to HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness located within the health field (Undie & Benaya, 2006:124).

Most Western literature on African sexualities also focuses on gender disparities as a crucial factor in the rise of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. This focus has resulted in limiting a richer conceptualization of sexuality and how it is theorized and interpreted in different African communities (Undie & Benaya, 2006:120). According to Dixon-Mueller (1993:270), Watkins (1993), Ampofo (2004) and Poulin (2005), although quantitative research generated from biomedical journals has offered valid portrayals of sexuality in SSA, it has also adopted a restricted framework for analysing sexuality as a social construct because the medicalization of disease distorts the complex nature of sexuality in SSA (Undie & Benaya, 2006:125). On the other hand, sexualities in SSA are often linked with violence in the form of female genital mutilation[5]. According to Nfah-Abbeny (2005:268), Western feminists' focus on this issue has resulted in African women's sexuality being synonymous with Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Western circles.

Hence, by focusing solely on women's failure to experience sexual pleasure due to this practice. Western scholars overlook the multifaceted nature and practice of female circumcision. For Nnaemeka (2005) and Kaler (2009:178) this destructive approach to this cultural practice perpetuates ideas about barbarity and women's victimhood. Mohanty (1984:337) adds that the focus on FGM stems from viewing African women as a coherent group that is also weak, oppressed and sexually harassed. This understanding of FGM is then justified by giving examples of helpless groups of women to justify the overall idea that women in African are powerless. This perspective ignores African studies that illustrate how female circumcision has been defended by African women in certain societies as enhancing female sexual pleasure and feelings of empowerment (Kaler, 2009:178). Therefore, these Western portrayals of African sexualities demonstrate the need for

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[5] For an example of Western feminism's conceptualization of African women's sexuality linked to FGM see Hosken, F. 1981. Female Genital Mutilation and Human Rights. *Feminist Issues*, 1:3-24.

studies on African sexualities that positively affirm women while transitioning beyond Western images of African women as victims of sexual oppression.

2.3.3 The Narratives of African Sexualities

In recent times, traditional structures of gender relations are gradually disputed and accepted beliefs about the relationship between family and sexuality are becoming outdated or have been reformulated in different communities worldwide (Pereira, 2014:39). In addition, globalization has changed the socio-economic and cultural spheres of society and this has impacted sexuality in several interrelated ways. Consequently, there is need to recognize how sexual desire and sexual power are experienced and rationalized by different groups of men and women while considering the shifting conceptions of sexuality and the relationship between sexualities and the social, economic and political arena (Undie & Benaya 2006:139; Pereira, 2014:9). In Africa, sexualities continue to be regulated by colonial and cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, which highlights the need to value female sexuality while encouraging women's freedom for sexual expression without assuming the global subordination of women's sexualities.

For Bhana (2013:549), African women's sexualities are continuously viewed as suffering and passive which has led to assumptions of a docile and homogenous African femininity. Similarly, Poulin (2005) argues that studies on sexuality in Africa still focus on how women and girls engage in sex for money relationships based on survival rather than sex for pleasure or to establish intimacy. The dominance of this theme in literature has moulded contemporary views of sexuality amongst young people in sub-Saharan Africa by linking the economic dependency of young people to health consequences and high-risk behaviour. Kaufman & Stavrou (2002) add that evidence suggests that gift giving impacts on the sexual choices and compromises women's agency when compared to men. These types of relationships are not unique to Africa but are prevalent in many societies around the world. Yet research on sexuality in Africa continues to disregard the normality of these relationships and the likelihood that gift-giving is not always accompanied by sex.

On the contrary, in most African societies women are taught that men are breadwinners; therefore, perceptions regarding a devoted and caring boyfriend are partially determined by material support. However, literature on African sexual exchanges fails to acknowledge this reality or to conceptualize the sexuality of African women as a historically evolving phenomenon. As a result, this has reduced African women to one dimensional representations (Oyewùmí, 2001:3). It is, therefore, important to acknowledge how issues of modernity, sexual intimacy and romance have been shaped by globalization in political, economic and cultural ways (Undie & Benaya, 2006:139). Firstly, economic changes in Africa resulted in the commodification of sex work and cultural changes dispersed ideas about behaviour and identity such that new ways of understanding now compete with traditional ones

(Gatter, 2000:563). Secondly, because the political realm regulates what forms are available for sexual expression, it has created divergent ways of imagining sex, gender and identities (Pereira, 2014:40).

Politically the norm in Africa has become one that addresses HIV/AIDS as an issue uniquely associated with individual sexual practices by focusing on "promiscuity" and "low condom use" as dictated by the West (Undie & Benaya, 2006:139). Hence, dominant studies on sexuality conducted in Africa are often based on Western experiences, whereby Africa is viewed as an outlet for demonstrating Western modes of knowledge (Oyewùmí, 2005:xii). Consequently, literature on African sexualities is often Western donor-driven and located in health science with a focus on sexual conduct modification as the remedy to the HIV epidemic. In addition, this has created the dominant one-dimensional Western construction of African women as victims and has led to a Western appropriation of African women's "problems" which undermines their agency (Nnaemeka, 2005:52). This highlights the need to address the long-established issue of Western dominance when interpreting African realities. Therefore, the next section will contextualize the history of TS in Africa located within the field of social anthropology and health science. This section will illustrate how existing literature on TS which focuses on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention simplifies the multifaceted nature of sexuality in SSA and ignores the post-colonial contexts in which TS occurs (Undie & Benaya, 2006:125).

2.4 Contextualizing the History of Transactional Sex

2.4.1 A Eurocentric vs African Perspective

Since the 18th century Western ethnographers documented all elements of African sexualities as "prostitution" and excluded African people's definitions of their own sexual behaviour (Zembe et al, 2013:2). Furthermore, early constructs of exchange relationships between African women and men in anthropology and health science focusing on the HIV/AIDS pandemic described transactional relationships as "prostitution". This understanding of African sexual exchanges was based on Eurocentric views that argued that male to female material exchange was coercive and exploited poor women with limited opportunities (Wamoyi et al, 2010b:6). This viewpoint also stemmed from Western concepts of money as being taboo in intimate relationships based on the argument that money "corrupts and destroys the purity of love"[6] (Groes-Green, 2013:114). This Western

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[6] In the West, the exchange of material gifts for sex is morally sanctioned since it exposes ideals of human accumulation of wealth which governs most spheres of life including the labour market. Therefore, in the West the importance of money in all social interactions is often hidden behind the idea of equal opportunity and individual freedom (Groes-Green, 2013:114).

conceptualization of African sex for money exchange relationships prompted African literature on transactional sex (TS) to differentiate African sexualities from Western conceptions of African sexual exchanges.

However, it was only in the 1980s that African researchers began to analyse various forms of sexual behaviours beyond Western notions of sexualities (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003:215). African studies highlighted the challenges of using Western terminologies of prostitution and commercial sex and emphasised the need to investigate the diverse meanings of sexual exchanges while paying attention to socio-economic and cultural contexts. African scholars argued that, when analysing a variety of sexual exchanges, the terms "prostitution" and "commercial sex" had become synonymous with monetary exchanges for sex between women and men on a professional basis. In addition, if the sexual exchange was not in the form of a cash transaction or if the sex was not initiated on a professional basis, the phrase "survival sex" was used[7] (De Zalduondo, 1991). The use of these terms also resulted in viewing survival sex as the direct result of lack of basic needs and women's financial dependency on men (Muir, 1991).

This Western understanding led to critiques by African scholars who argue that dominant Western academic discourses on TS produce morally charged and narrow assumptions that group TS as either prostitution or commercial sex (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003:215). Furthermore, African scholars highlighted the need for an African understanding of "commercial" and "survival sex" because prostitution for survival was different from professional prostitution as conceptualized in Western societies (Ankrah, 1989:272). From 1989 onwards African scholars began using the term "transactional sex"[8] to define sexual exchanges beyond sex work. However, despite this distinction, African studies in the 1990s continued to detail non-professional sexual exchange using the terms "survival sex" and "informal sex" for all forms of sexual exchange beyond sex work (Stoebenau et al, 2016:188).

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[7] An example of survival sex can be observed in the study by Wojcicki (2002b) on sex for beer exchange relationships in South African taverns. In this context, women who engage in sex for survival do not self-identify as sex workers because the amount of material gifts exchanged is not fixed as compared to sex workers who set a price for sex. Furthermore, in this context of survival sex it is not certain how much money a woman will get from a man. However, the materiality exchanged in the "sex for survival" relationships is less than in commercial sex work. This is because women who have sex for survival are often distressed and are prone to consenting to any terms set by men. See Wojcicki, J.M. 2002b. "She drank his money": Survival sex and the problem of violence in taverns in Gauteng Province, South Africa. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 16(3):267-293.

[8] African scholars argued that using the term "transactional" was an accurate description of sexual exchanges in Africa as young women engaging in TS often call their partners boyfriends as opposed to sex workers who identify their partners as clients (Ranganathan et al, 2017).

In addition, literature on TS continued to focus on women's susceptibility to HIV/AIDS, physical and sexual violence as well as women's inability to insist on condom use, a perspective that perpetuated Western conceptions of women as vulnerable victims (Wojcicki, 2002b:269). It was only in the early 2000s that sub-Saharan African studies began expanding the conception of TS beyond subsistence and investigated other paradigms of transactional sex. The emergence of new literature on TS resulted in the documentation of sex for money exchanges in SSA focusing on sexual relations amongst adolescent girls while highlighting the importance of agency in transactional sex. Studies conducted by Silberschmidt & Rasch (2001), Kaufman and Stavrou (2002), Hunter (2010b), Wojcicki (2002b), Leclerc-Madlala (2003) and Dunkle et al (2004) show that TS is not the same as sex work, because in sex work the exchange is clear and remuneration for sex is immediate.

Yet, in TS reciprocating material gifts can lead or follow sex by an indefinite amount of time and is not straightforwardly linked to sex. Therefore, although the limit between TS and sex work is fuzzy, the universal meaning of "prostitute" cannot be applied in SSA. Furthermore, because there are links between materiality and love in transactional sex, this exchange is not regarded as sex work but as a natural part of any sexual relationship formation, continuation and sustenance (Wamoyi et al, 2010a:3). This is evident in SSA communities where women who seek out TS are not perceived as sex workers by their own communities (Wojcicki, 2002b:284). For Hunter (2003:99), TS is distinctive from sex work because "sugar daddy relationships" are located outside local and Western definitions of sex work. In TS men are "boyfriends" and women are "girlfriends" since women are regarded as being able to "choose a lover" compared to sex workers who "sell their bodies" (Hunter, 2003:108).

Leclerec-Madlala (2003) provides evidence that in SA communities sex work is identified as wearing short skirts, walking the streets and is perceived as being un-African and different to TS. Therefore, this scholars along with Côté et al (2004) and Moore et al (2007) broadened the definition of TS to include any association that governs the interchange of money or material gifts for sex. For these scholars, a broader definition of TS is a more accurate description of non-marital, non-commercial sexual relationships in SSA and introduces different ways of speaking about sexual relations beyond sex work and in less Eurocentric terms (Ranganathan et al, 2017:2). Consequently, this new definition of TS increased the amount of African biomedical and anthropology studies that detailed how TS is not always sought out as a result of immediate material need.

These studies attempted to redefine TS in sub-Saharan Africa by describing cultural scripts which detail how women "cannot have sex for free" because sex without exchange in many SSA

communities is viewed as a sign of low self-worth[9]. Hence, young women in SSA view men as exploiting them if sex occurs without compensation (Wamoyi et al, 2010b:10). Groes-Green (2013:114) adds that, according to women engaging in TS, if men do not give them material gifts for sex, it is a sign of low levels of care and under appreciation of their beauty. Furthermore, studies on TS document how young women assert their agency by exploiting their sexuality for pleasure and to acquire financial resources. These women view TS as balancing power between women and men in sexual relations. However, despite expanding the understanding of transactional sex, studies on TS continue to explore African sexualities while focusing on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. This focus assumes that a limited awareness of the HIV/AIDS pandemic is the main cause for the continuing spread of HIV/AIDS and that individuals will refrain from engaging in unprotected sex if they recognize the dangers involved (Verheijen, 2011:116). This perspective currently dominates literature on TS despite evidence showing that young people in SSA are knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS and realize that it can be contracted through sex (Wamoyi et al, 2010a:14).

2.4.2 South Africa and Transactional Sex

In SA, the practice of TS and its association with high risk behaviour has undergone various transformations shaped by political and historical processes such as colonization, apartheid and the processes of globalization in the post-apartheid era (Zembe et al, 2013:2). In the apartheid era, the migrant labour system changed the nature of sexual relationships by limiting black women's migration to urban areas and resulted in men being separated from their partners for longer durations (Hunter, 2007:692). This created an opportunity for the emergence of commercial sex in urban areas, destabilized marital ties and increased the presence of multiple concurrent sexual relationships and created gender inequalities linked to transactional sex (Jochelson, 2001:55). However, during this period, premarital sexual relationships were not key drivers of sexual behaviour. Instead, girlfriends and boyfriends exchanged gifts and men understood male accomplishment as their capacity to save finances for the bride price (Zembe et al, 2013:2).

Nevertheless, apartheid laws gradually side-lined black Africans from significant economic contribution by racially and geographically establishing wealth inequalities and high rates of unemployment which reduced men's ability to afford the bride price (Hunter, 2007:694). In the post-apartheid era the adoption of the neo-liberal Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policies propelled SA into the world economy and the culture and processes of globalization (Zembe

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[9] This view is different from Eurocentric definitions of prostitution or commercial sex because in SSA women feel that their sexuality is worth "something", therefore not asking for "something" is a sign of low self-worth. Therefore, women in SSA define sex work as being "cheap" because they define a sex worker as a woman who has sex with multiple partners without receiving any form of compensation (Wamoyi et al, 2010b:9).

et al, 2013:3). This resulted in an influx of foreign products and increased the consumption rates of South Africans. Furthermore, the transformation processes of globalization moved black South Africans from socio-economic isolation and exposed them to commodities and a global lifestyle. Therefore, globalization and GEAR led to a rise in TS motivated by the need to attain symbols of global beauty and success.

This increase in commodity/consumption culture occurred against the backdrop of the country's unique history of economic restrictions on black Africans, because commodities were now afforded greater importance amongst black people (Zembe et al, 2013:3). However, in the post-apartheid era historically established wealth inequalities and high rates of unemployment continue to limit black South African's access to global lifestyles. Therefore, men have resorted to other ways of showcasing masculine success through transactional sex. On the contrary, women who engage in TS argue that, unlike sex workers who cannot choose who they want to be with, they have power of choice of partner and seek out transactional sex for consumption and as a lifestyle choice. Therefore, their engagement in TS is not always a consequence of need (Groes-Green, 2013:105). This understanding of TS is contrary to dominant literature on the practice that portrays the image of "impoverished young women who are lured into vulnerable situations through coercion or manipulation" (Leclerc- Madlala, 2008:23).

Recent studies on the characteristics of TS in SA challenge notions that transactional sexual exchanges are primarily based on "poverty-induced economic survival strategies" (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003:216). According to a study by Chatterji et al (2005), poverty is not the principal cause prompting young women to reciprocate money or gifts with sex. Most women who seek transactional sexual relationships do not consider themselves as victims, instead they seek out these relationships to gain control and access material gifts in a manner that confronts and reproduces patriarchal systems (Hunter, 2002:101). Furthermore, studies conducted in urban and semi-urban areas identified "sex for upward mobility and status" linked to modernity and aspirational lifestyles as the dominant reason young urban women seek TS.

According to Hunter (2010a) and Leclerec- Madlala (2008) the drop in formal marriage and an increase in temporary partnerships governed by financial gifts has led to young women seeking and maintaining a relationship with one or multiple older men. These relationships are based on consumption since young women now link sex to agency in bold and assertive ways. This shift in TS relationships is influenced by global images of modernity reflected in how women now actively "choose men" and maintain transactional relationships for consumption purposes (Hunter, 2002:115). Moreover, in urban areas young urban women seeking consumption-based relationships identify themselves as active decision makers (LeclercMadlala, 2008:28). Their identities as empowered

modern-day women are dependent on their capacity to acquire financial and material commodities from older men in exchange for sex. For these women, attracting and maintaining sexual relations for consumption is an act of cleverness and assertiveness, and contributes to their self-perceptions of expressing their sexual freedoms.

These young urban women are mindful of factors such as limited job prospects and inadequate wages that reduce their future goals. Therefore, engaging in TS for material gain becomes the "easiest" and "natural" method to acquire a better life. In the peri-urban and urban SA location, media images of luxury and affluent lifestyles have become a vital influence in moulding young, urban women's dreams and goals. Consequently, young urban women form relationships with older men to attain globalized images of glamour by actively navigating their sexuality to acquire products that reflect high-social positions and lifestyles and to satisfy "wants" as opposed to meetings "needs"[10] (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008). For these women being seen exiting from luxury vehicles or dressed in luxury clothing as well as owning a valued commodity is a status-boosting activity (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008:1). Beyond the social benefits, young women claim that these relationships boost their self-esteem and self-confidence, and assist them in the attainment of long-term ambitions and goals of social success (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008:21).

Leclerc-Madlala (2003) argues further that by engaging in transactional sex for material gain young urban women seek to attain "new needs"- the commodities of modernity - in order to present themselves as being successful, sophisticated and sexually appealing. These young urban women view the pressure to acquire luxury goods that reflect a modern lifestyle, normally understood as "wants", as being similar to seeking basic needs such as shelter and food (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003:224). This conceptualization of "needs" and "wants" creates a continuum, whereby sexual exchange for subsistence, identified as "needs", and sexual exchange for consumption, known as "wants", are both expressed as "needs". Leclerc-Madlala (2003) describes this continuum using the concept of "urban survival" whereby women seeking luxury items use the vocabulary of survival sex and locate their attempts to attain luxury goods in the context of exchanging sex based on survival.

Selikow & Mbulaheni (2013:89) caution that, in this "wants-needs" dichotomy, a "need-want slippage" may occur when young women require an actual need which can diminish their agency. Lastly, in South Africa, men who can assist with the social mobility of young urban black women have acquired colloquial terms such as "ministers", "investors" (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008:22) and most

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[10] This study defines needs as: necessities one must have to survive such as food, water and shelter, whereas wants are defined as desires for luxury goods, services, overseas trips and other commodities one would like to have but one does not need.

recently "blessers". It is also crucial to note that, in sexual exchanges for material gain, love and affection can be motivating factors for TS. However, few studies have explored this paradigm in TS (Stoebenau et al, 2016; Ranganthan et al, 2018). See Figure 2.1: A Continuum of "Needs" within Transactional Sex.

Figure 2.1: A Continuum of "Needs" within Transactional Sex

A CONTINUUM OF "NEEDS" IN TRANSACTIONAL SEX	
NEEDS	**WANTS**
Food	Cellular Phone/Jewelry
Rent/Services	Entertainment/Travel
Essential Clothing	Fashion Clothing
School Fees	Tertiary Education Fees
Basic Transportation	Luxury Transportation

Source: Leclerc-Madlala, 2003.

2.4.3 Male Sexual Politics: African Men and Transactional Sex

According to Hunter (2010b), the notion of men as the provider which fuels transactional sex stems from the new urban economy which emerged in the 19th century in South Africa and reshaped sexual practices. The 19th century mineral revolution gave young men the independent means to afford lobola and dismantled patriarchal systems whereby the head of the homestead sustained the institution of marriage by assigning livestock for their son's bride wealth expenses. Furthermore, the new urban economy transformed sexual norms because sexual relations outside of marriage became normalized in both rural and urban areas. By the start of the 20th century, the rural economy had weakened, and marriage became progressively removed from the rural economy and gradually based on wage labour. Hence, the market economy overtook the homestead patriarch as the custodian of masculinity through marriage (Hunter, 2010a:107).

However, SA's gradual entrance into the global economy in the post-apartheid era led to economic decline for black South Africans and affected this new pathway to manhood. Furthermore, this shift increased unemployment rates and affected men's ability to afford bride wealth payments. Moreover, SA's transition to the global economy increased the gendered socio-economic inequalities and increased women's dependency on men. These factors now made it acceptable for men to have multiple girlfriends, even father children with them, with no intentions of marrying them (Hunter,

2010b:107). Men also began to justify maintaining multiple sexual relationships as "custom" by using the representative significance of the homestead and the polygamous patriarch who leads it to justify their multiple partner relationships. As marriage became unaffordable to many men, a man's material gifts to multiple girlfriends gradually replaced bride wealth payments to the woman's parents. Consequently, men do not perceive women who seek TS as "prostitutes" as the men are considered "boyfriends" and the women "girlfriends" (Hunter, 2010a:108). This is also evident in many communities in South Africa where sex workers are constructed as "outsiders" to further distinguish material exchange relationships from sex work.

For Leclerc-Madlala (2009), men's approach to transactional sex has its roots in cultural scripts which illustrate what is expected from men sexually. These cultural scripts are evident throughout SSA and have resulted in shared norms of sexual behaviour. Firstly, in SSA cultural understandings of male sexuality stipulates that men's sexuality is naturally un-restrainable and men naturally require sex regularly with many women. Linked to this script is the idea that women are accountable for managing men's sexual behaviour. Therefore, through socialization women are conditioned to be cautious in the presence of men's powerful and uncontrolled sexuality. In addition, women are expected to forgive and endure a partner's infidelity based on the belief that, "a woman who tolerates a man's infidelity is respectful and culturally a good woman" (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009:105).

This script also stems from the notion that men are "sexually weak" and a woman's ability to manage this "weakness" by coping with her partner's infidelity is a demonstration of positive attributes of womanhood (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009:106). In addition, men's proclivity to engage in TS is also based on a cultural script which states that sexual gratification is only found outside of marriage. In SSA cultural scripts allow for a man to establish relations with other women when their partner is considered unavailable[11] (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009:107). Lastly, cultural scripts dictate that men demonstrate commitment, love and affection to their sexual partners through gift-giving that is equal to his wealth and status. In exchange, women must demonstrate commitment, love and affection by "giving" sex after receiving material gifts because a woman cannot "give sex for free". Therefore, men feel required to allocate their financial possessions with their sexual partners to show value and gratitude for sex (Leclerc-Madla, 2009:108).

According to Nyanzi et al (2001), in SSA men are suspicious of women who have low interest in monetary exchange for sex as they perceive them as being "loose" and possibly infected with HIV/AIDS. Scholars such as Silberschmidt & Rasch (2001), Leclerc-Madlala (2003), Bagnol &

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[11] A partner can be considered sexually inaccessible (from a cultural viewpoint) if she is menstruating, several months after giving birth, and when she is sick and emotionally unavailable (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009:107)

Chamo, (2004) and Moore et al (2007) state as well that men's desire to prove their "manhood" and "sexual prowess" motivates them to engage in TS. Wamoyi et al (2010) agree with this position adding that masculine esteem is enhanced through sexual experience and contributes to men seeking TS. Campbell (2003) and Wood & Jewkes (2000) add that masculine success based on the idea of acquiring the "best" and many sexual relations while having power over these women adds to men's proclivity to seek TS. For Braun (2018:24), men's sexual appeal in different societies in Africa is tied to personal success and social status while maintaining relationships with several partners is viewed as a signifier of a successful man.

In this context, men seek out TS to portray an image of success that is confirmed by women who engage in TS seeking out these relationships for economic reasons. The gendered socio-economic inequalities in SSA allow men to monopolize their resources and gain access to women for the purposes of satisfying their sexual desires (Luke, 2005:6). Furthermore, research conducted by Maganja et al (2007:974) shows how men believe that "women seek out multiple partner relationships because they have no money". Therefore, men use their economic power to gift women with material and financial goods in anticipation of sex[12]. Men's engagement in TS is thus sexually motivated. Nyanzi et al (2001), Weinreb (2002), and Mills & Ssewakiryanga (2005) have also identified the need for entertainment and a break from workplace and domestic stress as motivators for men to seek TS. However, studies on men's perspectives on transactional sex are under explored since men's motivations for TS continue to be limited or presented from women's perspectives. According to Leclerc-Madlala (2008:22) this is because men are not willing to discuss their relationships with young women and are thus not easily accessed for research purposes. The following section will now analyse the various paradigms of transactional sex and provide a review of blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa.

2.5 Rethinking Perceptions on Transactional Sex in SSA

2.5.1 The Various Paradigms of Transactional Sex

Over the last 15 years, growing literature on transactional sex in SSA has contributed to understanding why young women engage in TS (Stoebenau et al, 2016:186). This section will expand the three prominent paradigms of transactional sex presented in Chapter 1, *Introduction*: "sex for basic needs", "sex for upward mobility and status and "sex and material expressions of love". This section will also present a unified conceptualization of TS necessary when analysing transactional sexual relationships

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[12] This is based on the perception that "men need sex and women have consumerist needs" (Wamoyi et al, 2010b:9).

in SSA. This conceptualization is expressed through a continuum of deprivation, agency and instrumentality.

(1) Sex for basic needs

In the first paradigm, "sex for basic needs", women are framed as defenceless victims who resort to exchanging sex for basic commodities due to their gendered social and economic exclusion (Stoebenau et al, 2016:188). Studies by Epstein (2002), Hallman (2004), Kaute-Defo (2004) and Epstein & Kim (2007) have documented this representation of young women in transactional sexual relationships by presenting an image of women as victims who require intervention and protection from exploitation. For Higgins et al (2010), this classification is developed from a wider discussion that structures women as defenceless victims within the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Furthermore, the "sex for basic needs" paradigm emerged to address Western misconceptions that unrestrained "African sexualities" explained the rising rate of HIV/AIDS in SSA. This paradigm highlights issues of gender disparities and the gendered effects of economic transformation by emphasising poverty and women's financial dependency on men (Stoebenau et al, 2016:188).

Romero-Daza (1994), Hunter (2010b) and Stark (2013) draw attention as well to factors such as the gendered labour market and women's inability to access financial capital, causing women to engage in sex for money exchange relations to acquire money in increasingly monetized economies (Bajaj, 2009:127). According to Peterson et al (2005) & Williams et al (2012), women within this paradigm are often portrayed as victims who are coerced and abused, while in age-disparate relationships young women are referred to as "children" who are sexually oppressed by older men. In South Africa, studies within this paradigm reveal how women's susceptibility in transactional sex is increased by hegemonic masculinity linked with "gaining the best and most female partners and asserting control over women through unequal and violent relationships" (Dunkle et al, 2004:8).

In this context, providing goods and money becomes a strategy to secure women as sexual partners and must be viewed in the broader context of the idea of masculinity whereby men offer women material gifts and women reciprocate these gifts with sex. Clearly, women's engagement in TS upholds hegemonic masculinity and, where there is an alternative means to economic capital, women's engagement in TS reproduces uneven gender relations (Bhana & Pattman, 2011). Lastly, in this paradigm women's limited agency in heterosexual relationships results in them being objects of men's privileged status. Scholars supporting this paradigm emphasise the economic emancipation of women mostly through donor-driven initiatives in order to decrease women's reliance on men.

(2) Sex for upward mobility and status

The second paradigm, "sex for upward mobility and status", emerged in the early 2000s to challenge the unidimensional portrayal of TS by the "sex for basic needs" paradigm. Scholars such as Silberschmidt & Rasch (2001) and Leclerc-Madlala (2003) illustrated that transactional sex should not be restricted to the impoverished and materiality of exchange because it stretches beyond the need for money to survive. Literature in this paradigm argues that most women possess some level of power in TS and must not be viewed only as passive victims. This paradigm differs from the "sex for basic needs" paradigm in the way it highlights women's positions as active and dominant agents in TS (Stoebenau et al, 2016:190). Scholars such as Hawkins et al (2009) and Fox (2012) suggest that the drive to seek out transactional sex does not always stem from desperation but can arise from relative deprivation[13] in the context of growing economic disparities and the rising costs of consumer commodities.

In this paradigm TS is defined as a practice which allows young women to acquire material gifts connected to a modern-day lifestyle while advancing their positions in society. Therefore, what is exchanged in these relationships is not limited to necessities but encompasses luxury items (Stoebenau et al, 2016:189). For Mojola (2014), the march towards global capital and the advertising industry has created the "woman consumer" and the "need" for women to acquire certain goods. For example, Leclerc-Madla (2003) argues that in South Africa goods associated with youth culture such as fashion items are desired by young people who identify with the appeal of the middle class. In this context participants in TS seek to sustain lifestyles otherwise unaffordable for the purposes of networking with their preferred social networks, gaining access to new social networks and achieving new levels of social power (Cole, 2004 & Hunter, 2010).

Women's desires for consumer goods are also fuelled by economic restrictions on men. According to Hunter (2010a), the decline in marriages due to social and economic changes has reduced men's affordability for a bride price. Therefore, instead of showing love and dedication through the payment of "lobola" and setting up a home, men offer material gifts, while women who used to focus on building homes through marriage now focus on being "girlfriends" to wealthy men. This suggests that women's engagement in TS to access modern goods is often due to deliberate action. Furthermore, studies in SSA provide evidence that women label their capacity to receive material gifts from men by using terms such as "skinning the goat" and "milking the cow" (Hawkins, 2009,

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[13] Relative deprivation is classified as being propelled by the economic advancement of globalization, that is the development of neo-liberal economic structures such as privatization and the opening of markets that only benefited minorities in Africa and excluded the majority, and in particular women (Stoebenau et al, 2016:189).

Bell, 2012). In this context women showcase power and agency because they can manipulate cultural gendered norms in relationships.

According to Groes-Green (2013), these women use their "erotic power" to seduce wealthy men and acquire social and economic influence in return. However, Bohmer & Kirumbira (2000) and Bell (2012) note that such manipulations can be risky because women who extract resources without reciprocating sex face risks of sexual violence. For Stoebenau et al (2011), although gender-based violence is present in TS, unwanted sex amongst young women often hinges on the transactional nature of the relationship and is imbedded in internalized self-pressure to deliver sex for material gifts received. Therefore, women's agency in TS becomes limited in the area of sexual decision-making due to unequal social, economic and cultural gender dynamics.

Consequently, young women might have reduced agency in negotiating sexual terms and condom use once the relationship commences. Ranganathan et al (2017:10) adds that, because non-condom use in TS often occurs after the exchange of money, young women justify engaging in unsafe sex by arguing that material gifts and benefits are more in unprotected sexual exchanges because unprotected sex is seen as a symbol of faithfulness and trust (Deane & Wamoyi, 2015:440). In summary, the "sex for upward mobility and status" paradigm insinuates that rising economic disparities and the growing value put on possessing material goods to progress within society prompts women to seek out transactional sex.

(3) Sex and material expressions of love

According to Moore et al (2007), Bhana & Pattman (2011) and Mojola (2014), the "sex for basic needs" and the "sex for upward mobility and status" paradigms do not tackle the degree to which transactions happen within emotionally intimate relationships. These scholars argue that, while earlier writings on TS examined the emotionality of these relationships, the rise of biomedical discourses shifted attention to sexual risk within TS centred on HIV/AIDS awareness and avoidance. Thus, there is a need to reemphasise the importance of love and desire in accounts of TS based on the shifting meaning of "modern" relationships in different parts of SSA. Therefore, scholars such as Stoebenau et al (2016:186) draw connections between money and love and the idea of a man as the provider within the relationship.

Furthermore, the sex and material expressions of love paradigm focuses on the importance of gift giving in romantic relationships where love and money are inextricably linked. Scholars within this paradigm emphasise that although these relations exist globally, in the West these relationships are actively denied. On the contrary, money in many communities across SSA is regarded as the language of love and is expressed through gift giving (Mojola, 2014). However, the nature of gift giving in

these relationships is often marked by the gendered transfer of possessions from men to women. Stoebenau et al (2016) add that relationships within this paradigm emphasise the gendered expectations that men should offer material and financial sustenance with the goal of deepening emotional intimacy while positioning women as subservient to men who offer material support. In addition, this intricacy of love and money stems from gendered beliefs that see men as suppliers of material gifts and women as providers of procreative resources in heterosexual relationships (Stoebenau et al, 2016:191).

According to Leclerc-Madlala (2009), in many parts of SSA men and women's relationships are based on traditional or "cultural scripts" that state that women will give sex if men meet their accepted roles as breadwinners. Therefore, the notion of "provider" is at the core of conversations surrounding masculinity based on the idea that "a real man is one who can provide for his loved ones, including his girlfriend or spouse" (Morrell et al, 2012; Stark, 2013:22). This expectation exists irrespective of the woman's own income such that provision is seen as deepening emotional intimacy. In this context, TS becomes an amplification of expected exchange in intimate relationships. However, despite the prevalence of love in TS, literature within this paradigm continues to be under developed.

2.5.2 A Framework for Conceptualizing Transactional Sex in SSA

The complexity of TS and the interconnectedness between these three paradigms is under explored in SSA. This highlights the need for a theoretical framework that represents the nature and intricacies of TS and the drivers for its practice (Ranganthan et al, 2017:2). Stoebenau et al (2016) established such a theoretical framework[14] that describes motivations for TS as a continuum, and not as three discrete paradigms. According to Stoebenau et al (2016:191), sub-Saharan African literature on transactional sexual relationships often analyses the three paradigms separately. This is problematic because any one of the paradigms taken alone results in an incomplete view of TS and has led to the dominance of literature on survival sex. For Stoebenau et al (2016), women's engagement in TS are shaped by overlapping factors between the three paradigms and by different aspects of globalization.

Firstly, the adoption of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in African countries gendered poverty and structured the "sex for basic needs" paradigm. Secondly, the global opening of markets enhanced access to Western ideals and led to a rise in youth culture as well as a lifestyle and identity linked to consumer commodities. This generated new markers for success and shaped the "sex for

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[14] Stoebenau et al's (2016) conceptual framework is a sociological conceptualization which seeks to establish understanding by illustrating "pure" portrayals of social classifications or behaviours. Consequently, this framework is an "ideal type" and should not be viewed as an accurate representation of all societies. This is because ideal types are reductionist to enable comparison (Weber, 1978).

upward mobility and status" paradigm. Lastly, gendered and patriarchal assumptions that men are the provider both outside and inside the marital relationship structured the "sexual exchange for material expressions of love" paradigm (Stoebenau et al, 2016:191). Therefore, there is a need for a theoretical framework that combines all three paradigms and the structural forces that mould each of them. Consequently, Stoebenau et al (2016:192) argues that the nuance and complexity of TS and motivations for its practice must be denoted through a continuum of deprivation, agency and instrumentality rather than as three distinct paradigms. Luke (2005) and Ranganathan (2015) agree with this position and add that a continuum better conveys the ambiguity present in the meanings and motivations for exchanges across contexts.

At the distal level is a continuum of deprivation which depicts how TS occurs or the level to which TS is shaped by poverty (absolute deprivation) in comparison to economic disparity (relative deprivation). In addition, the deprivation continuum brings focus to the idea that transactional sex occurs throughout a variety of social and economic statuses, while recognizing that women in rural areas are not secluded from modern-day materiality (Wamoyi et al, 2010b). In the agency continuum, the degree of power a woman has determines her role as either "victim" or "agent" in TS. In this continuum, a woman's agency changes in different scenarios and between relationships from excesses of powerful agent to powerless victim (Stoebenau et al, 2016:192). Therefore, even in the context of absolute deprivation women can still possess "thin agency" in areas such as "partner selection", "first timing of sex" and "termination of relationship" (Stoebenau et al, 2016:192).

The instrumentality continuum addresses the degree to which a relationship is driven by money or love. The level on which a relationship is determined by instrumentality may change because it is independent of a woman's agency or the economic environment in which the relationship occurs. Furthermore, in this continuum TS occurs in the middle space of the continuum of instrumentality, such that the relationship varies from being driven by either monetary gain or love. However, the extent of both instrumentality and emotionality can differ from one relationship to another and over time. This theoretical outline of TS captures the interplay and complexity of exchange relationships and how the drive to seek out transactional sex is not mutually exclusive. See Figure 2.2 for a conceptual framework of transactional sex in SSA.

Figure 2.2: Conceptualizing Transactional Sex in SSA [15]
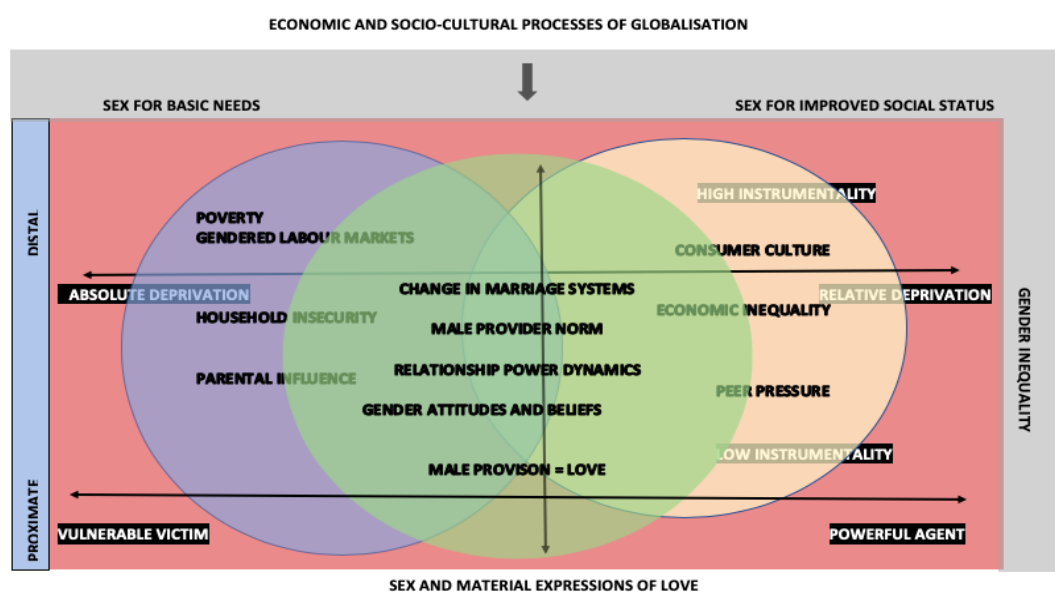
Source: Stoebenau et al, 2016.

2.6. Re-writing and Re-righting African Sexualities

2.6.1 A Review of the "Blessee/Blesser Phenomenon in South Africa

Until recently, marriage in various societies in Africa was regarded as a marker for adulthood. This understanding of marriage is now shifting, a shift in which women are agents. According to Arnfred (2004) & Helle-Valle (2004), women in SSA are opting not to marry and function rather in the independent role of an extra-marital girlfriend. The social and economic base for this approach stems from casual sexual relationships comprising the exchange of economically valuable commodities from men to women. In addition, modern women in African societies in their quest for self-fulfilment and economic independence tend to choose well-established married man, also called "sugar daddies", "business" or "donor"[16] for material benefits while maintaining their social independence. These relationships are based on mutuality and the acknowledgment of sex through financial and

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[15] This ideal type paradigm is the foundation for formulating a consolidated framework for TS. The attributes associated with each archetype are in boxes arranged from the distal to the more proximate. The three continua are presented as arrows that extend across the paradigms. Furthermore, several levels of gender disparities are found from the distal to proximate level and are relevant to all paradigms. The appropriate markers are situated where the paradigms overlap on Figure 2.2. Additionally, at the distal level gender disparities structure women's economic access, limitations and societal expectations regarding men as breadwinners. Lastly, gender disparities are displayed at the more proximate level in the form of relationship power struggles, individual viewpoints and values aligning with the articulation of various forms of masculinities and femininities (Stoebenau et al, 2016:191-192).

[16] The terms "sugar daddy", "business" or "donor" have the same social meaning as the term "blesser" in South Africa.

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material gifts. This differs from Western norms where romantic love and sexual desire are viewed as the "proper" motive for engaging in sex, while deliberate material-orientated uses of sex and sexuality are viewed as taboo (Helle-Valle, 2004:52).

In SA, young urban black women are currently posting images of luxury items such as shoes, clothes and overseas trips on social media. These women claim that their luxury items and goods are received from their "blessers" or wealthy men in exchange for sex and companionship. This blessee/blesser exchange occurs between educated women who already have necessities such as accommodation and food and older married men who are financing the lifestyle of multiple young women at the same time. This form of TS has led to the rise of the "blesser culture" on social media and highlights the prevalence of transactional sex for upward mobility and status amongst young urban black women in South Africa. Furthermore, this blessee/blesser phenomenon challenges dominant literature on sexuality in SA that focuses on poverty and the susceptibility of women and girls. This rise of blessee/blesser relationships also reveals the need to re-evaluate the character of TS in South Africa. The following section will thus analyse the character of the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa.

(1) The Blesser Perspective

A popular South African television documentary (Checkpoint: Blessed Part 1), that seeks to create HIV/AIDS awareness documented the life of a South African blesser to provide insight into the blessee/blesser phenomenon. The blesser interviewed (Mike)[17] states that he sponsors the lifestyle of up to 11 young women simultaneously, arguing that "as the king of the house I can afford to sponsor multiple women at the same time". This understanding of blessee/blesser relationships reflects a Western and Christian moral code which associates a man's multiple sexual relationships with women to whom he is not married with positive masculinity (Hunter, 2003:6). It reflects gendered and patriarchal assumptions that men are the provider both outside and inside marital relationships, while exposing how men's sexual desirability is linked to personal success and status. Engaging in multi partner relationships is viewed as symbolic of a successful man (Braun, 2018:24).

In addition, Mike states that, when he gives or "blesses" a young woman with luxuries such as shopping trips and rent payments the blessee is expected to reciprocate these "blessings" through sex. However, his qualification for "blessings" depends on the women's "attractiveness" and their "moral behaviour" (MTV Shuga, 2017). This perception of blessee/blesser exchanges aligns with Wamoyi et al's (2010b:9) argument that men use their financial power to gift women with material and financial goods in anticipation of sex founded on the view that "men need sex and women have
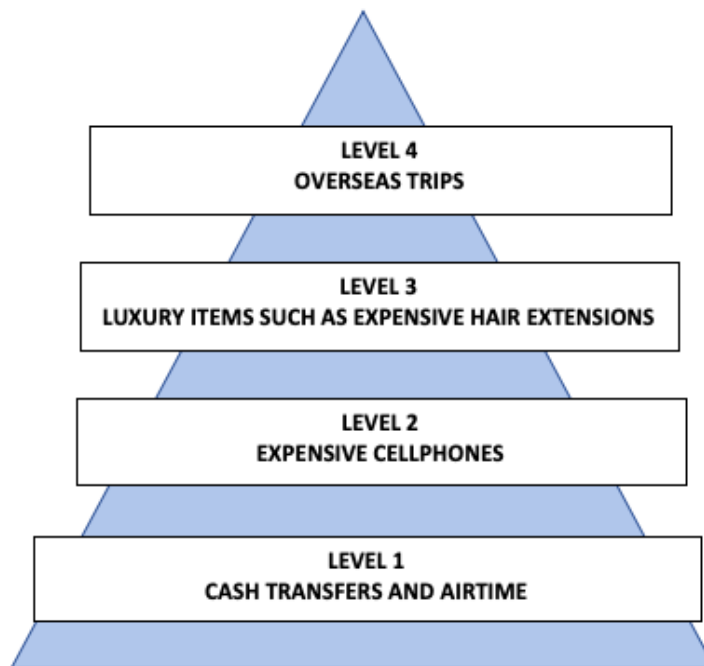
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[17] The name of the blesser has been changed.

consumerist needs". Furthermore, Mike's use of the term "moral behaviour" reflects societal perceptions in South Africa where issues surrounding African women's sexuality are treated from a Western and Christian perspective which sanctions and restricts African women's sexuality (CGE, 2013:2).

In a similar interview by eNCA news on the "blesser culture" in South Africa, the blesser interviewed justifies pursuing TS with multiple women stating that "a man cannot eat chicken every day" (eNCA, 2016). This statement aligns with Maganja et al's (2007:974) argument that men's engagement in transactional sex is sexually motivated. The blesser further explains that in South Africa "for a man to attract a South African woman, he must have money because (the) majority of young women in the country will not give love without receiving money". This understanding stems from cultural inscribed assumption about sexual interactions between men and women which states that for black women "to do sex for free" is viewed as a sign of low levels of self-worth and self-respect (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008:23). Hence, young women in SSA view men as exploiting them if sex occurs without compensation (Wamoyi et al, 2010b:10). On the other hand, it demonstrates Leclerc-Madlala's (2009:108) argument that men display commitment, love and affection to their sexual partners through gift giving that is equal to their wealth and status.

The blesser added that his motivation for seeking TS was not for love but for sexual pleasure and companionship because "blessees are not marriage material as they date multiple men for money" (eNCA, 2016). This reiterates the argument that men enter transactional sexual relationships to receive sex from women. (Maganja et al, 2007:974). The blesser also explained the different levels of being blessed. At the first level, young women receive cash transfers and airtime and at the second level of being "blessed" young women are gifted with luxury items such as lavish hair extensions and clothing. Women who fall under the category of level three blessee are offered expensive brands of cell phones while the fourth level of being "blessed" is reserved for overseas travel with the blesser. Furthermore, women at level four of being "blessed" are not allowed sexual contact with other men. Therefore, if a woman decides to pursue another relationship beyond the one with her blesser, her position as a blessee is revoked by the blesser along with all financial and material benefits. This understanding of blessee/blesser exchanges stems from colonial, cultural and Christian-based assumptions that positively associate men's need for multiple sexual relationships with women as a sign of masculinity, while limiting women's sexual partners based on the image that black female sexuality is threatening, excessive and must be regulated (Arnfred, 2004:17). See Figure 2.3: Levels of Being Blessed.

Figure 2.3: The Levels of Being "Blessed"

LEVEL 4
OVERSEAS TRIPS

LEVEL 3
LUXURY ITEMS SUCH AS EXPENSIVE HAIR EXTENSIONS

LEVEL 2
EXPENSIVE CELLPHONES

LEVEL 1
CASH TRANSFERS AND AIRTIME

Source: MTV, Shuga: 2017.

(2) The Blessee Perspective

In the documentary (Being a blessee and the lifestyle it brings) on the rise of blessee/blesser relationships in SA, the blessee perspective is also documented[18]. According to Mandisa, a level four blessee and one of Mike's girlfriends, Mike provides her with gifts of money and luxury items and never refuses her requests for expensive items. Mandisa adds that she understands the transactional nature of her relationship that includes "sharing" her blesser with other women (MTV Shuga, 2017). She reveals how her relationship with Mike is "emotionally straining" because she has grown to be emotionally attached to Mike and struggles with the transactional nature of their relationship. Mandisa states that "sharing him with other women broke me" and adds that beyond the gift giving "I have grown to know him personally and there is more to him behind the transactional nature of the relationship" (MTV Shuga, 2017). According to Selikow & Mbulaheni (2013:940), emotional attachment beyond transactions exists within TS and further differentiates this form of sexual exchange from sex work. Therefore, Mandisa's experience demonstrates the need to investigate the intricacies of love and desire in transactional sex and the need to re-insert the discourse of "love" into the accounts of heterosexual exchange relationships in South Africa that is currently under developed.

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[18] All names of blessees have been changed.

In the eNCA news documentary on the "blesser culture" in South Africa Charmaine states that her motivation for engaging in TS is based on what the potential blesser can offer her financially. Her relationship with her blesser "is about her and how she wants to live her life". For example, she opted to leave her formal employment because her blesser provides her with various luxury items, an upmarket apartment and an expensive car. For Charmaine, fashionable items and goods that symbolize modernity continuously change, hence her image must "keep up" with these changes in order to reflect a modern and successful lifestyle. Furthermore, she argues that "I cannot eat love", and "I have the need to maintain the lavish lifestyle that I have come to know". In addition, she justifies her engagement in TS saying, "Sex is a small price to pay for the lifestyle I want and receive from my blesser" (eNCA, 2016).

Charmaine's approach to blessee/blesser relationships demonstrates Leclerc-Madlala's (2003) argument that young women in SA actively use their sexuality to acquire material items which reflect a modern lifestyle and to satisfy "wants". These women form relationships with older men to attain globalized images of glamour and for these women being seen exiting from luxury vehicles or dressed in expensive clothing as well as owning a valued commodity is a status-enhancing activity. She reveals that although her blesser is married she "has no issue with his marital status because they practice safe sex and they both understand that the nature of their relationship is "an open and temporary one". However, she also reveals that, although she engages in TS for "fun without committing to a relationship", her obligation to her blesser is her availability whenever he needs to see her because he provides for her lifestyle (eNCA, 2016). Therefore, while she can have other sexual partners outside of her blessee/blesser relationship, her blesser's "needs" are given priority because he provides for her lavish lifestyle (SABC, 2016). According to Wamoyi et al (2010b:13) this understanding of TS stems from cultural traditions where men are biologically polygamous and women are naturally monogamous. Therefore, since the man provides the woman's material needs, there is an expectation from men to be the woman's sole sexual partner. On the other hand, women are aware of this expectation and, while they might have multiple sexual partners, they engage in those relationships discretely.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter sought to expand on post-colonial feminism as a theoretical framework and contextualize the global history of transactional sex by juxtaposing Eurocentric and African perspectives on the practice. Thereafter, it traced the rise and prevalence of transactional sex in SA and included African male perspectives on TS. Furthermore, it highlighted the need for re-thinking sexualities in Africa by evaluating the contexts of sexuality and gender in SSA while emphasising the need to revise dominant and traditional methods of understanding transactional sex in SSA. The

various paradigms of transactional sex were also expanded using Stoebenau et al's (2016) outline for conceptualizing transactional sex in SSA. Lastly, this chapter analysed literature on the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa for the purposes of contextualizing the character of TS in South Africa. The next chapter, Chapter 3, *Research Design and Methodology,* will outline this study's research strategies and data collection techniques implemented to address the main research question and sub-research questions outlined in this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter's central objective is to detail the research strategies and data collection techniques that were used to ascertain blessee/blesser relationships in SA from the viewpoint of young urban black women. Firstly, the study's qualitative research design is explained, and the research methods of snowball sampling and in-depth semi-structured interviews are detailed. Thereafter, a description of the study's participants as well as the backdrop against which the interviews occurred is described. The issue of validity and reliability is addressed and afterwards the study's research path is presented. Moreover, the data processing and analysis framework used in this study is outlined as well as how this study categorized data into themes. This chapter also addresses research limitations and potential problems and the measures taken to minimize these obstacles. Lastly, ethical clearance deliberations faced within this research are detailed.

3.2 Research Design

Qualitative and quantitative research methods are used to tackle a research question while investigating and exploring different claims to knowledge. For this dissertation, the research plan that was chosen was that of a qualitative design as opposed to a quantitative method. A quantitative method was not used because a quantitative study involves a statistical approach for a research design that is distinctive in its measuring and experimentation when testing a hypothesis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:102). This differs from a qualitative method that is an unfolding model, which occurs in a natural setting and allows the scholar to cultivate specific information from extensive interaction with the actual experiences, without providing definitive answers for the selected population (Creswell, 1994). A qualitative approach also provides insight into a specific phenomenon (Babbie & Mouton, 1998) and permits for an open-ended, in-depth exploration of the subject's life. This is because a qualitative enquiry investigates the social phenomenon from the participant's perspective by explaining, describing and interpreting generated data. Therefore, qualitative research is not extremely structured in its depictions since it articulates and constructs new theories from data generated (Creswell, 2003).

Also, qualitative research makes its premises on inductive instead of deductive reasoning. Therefore, there is an established link between the observer and the data which differs from quantitative research where the researcher is detached from the phenomenon being studied (Williams, 2007:67). Consequently, a qualitative analysis was identified as being more suitable for this study because this research consisted of gaining insight into the world of young urban black women. A qualitative research method was useful too because it permitted the collection of in-depth information, using a

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small number of cases as opposed to a quantitative method that requires many participants to provide statistical data (Burnham et al, 2008:40). Lastly, a qualitative approach was used because of its emphasis on detail and smaller samples (Morse & Niehaus, 2009), provided deep knowledge of young urban black women's perceptions and reasons for seeking TS in South Africa.

3.3 Research Methodology

3.3.1 Data Collection

The data collection method used in this study is based on two techniques. The first method relates to secondary data gathering from books, journal articles, social media posts, YouTube videos and documents related to African sexualities, transactional sex (TS) in SSA and the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa. The rationale for using secondary data was to address this study's initial supportive research question: *Do young urban black women in South Africa, view the "blessee/blesser" phenomenon as being different from conventional sex work?* Primary data was used to reach the first objective of this study discussed in Chapter 1, which was *to ascertain young urban black women's opinions and views of transactional sex and sex work.* The primary data collected provided in-depth knowledge needed to ascertain the nature of transactional sex in South Africa.

Primary data in this research was gathered using sampling and semi-structured in-depth interviews with young urban black women who identify as blessees. The collection of primary data was conducted to answer the study's central research question: *What are the perceptions of young urban black women involved in blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa?* And this study's second supportive research question: *Is there a continuum of deprivation (absolute or relative), agency and instrumentality within the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa?* Also, primary data was collected to fulfil the second objective of this analysis, which aimed *to investigate what is causing the rise and normalization of transactional sexual relationships amongst these women.* The collection of secondary data facilitated an opportunity for an in-depth discussion on blessee/blesser relationships in SA from the perspective of young urban black women engaging in this practice.

3.3.2 Sampling

Non-random sampling is linked to qualitative and case study research that focuses on small samples while examining a real-life phenomenon (Yin, 2003). For Padget (2008:14), non-random sampling emphasises homogeneity as well as high levels of detail consistent with the use of a smaller sample size. Therefore, non-random sampling allows the researcher to accurately explore characteristics of a population from a representative sample (Bless & Higson, 1995:166). This is because qualitative non-random sampling seeks to classify and select individuals or groups who are informed about the topic of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Therefore, this research selected non-probability or non-

random sampling because social studies are mostly undertaken in environments that are not conducive for the use of random sampling methods. Another reason for using non-probability sampling is that it allows for the discovery and collection of information-rich cases which allow for the efficient use of minimum resources (Patton, 2002:35). Moreover, because there is no data available on the size, profile and demographic characteristics of young urban black women engaging in blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa, this eliminated the possibility of conducting a probability sample.

3.3.3 Snowball Sampling

There are numerous purposeful sampling techniques and rooted in each approach is the capacity to isolate similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas & Soydan, 2012:3). However, for this investigation a non-probability sampling technique called snowballing was used. Snowballing is a form of non-random sampling and refers to the process of accumulation, whereby the researcher uses their original participants to suggest individuals in similar positions to be interviewed (Burnham et al, 2008:108). This sampling strategy is designed to compare and contrast a phenomenon of interest within a homogenous sample. Snowballing accommodates re-sampling as well to draw an appropriate sample until saturation occurs (Miles & Huberman, 1994:88). Critiques of snowball sampling argue that it might not result in a representative sample when contrasted with random probability sampling methods. However, this study argues that snowballing was more suited for in-depth interview research in comparison to other types of research such as surveys or questionnaires because, snowballing is a valuable approach for producing a sample of a populace or a group that is usually difficult to reach (Burnham et al, 2008:108), such as blessees. Because the topic of transactional relationships is sensitive in nature, this study's participants were also more likely to contribute their experiences if the original contact was made by an acquaintance or family member.

3.3.4 In-Depth Interviews

Qualitative interviewing is a prominent practice in feminist research used to develop knowledge that may change a person or condition and can result in the emancipation and empowerment of the subject studied. The research design that was used for this research was that of in-depth semi-structured interviews. According to Hesse-Biber (2011:7), in-depth interviews seek to ascertain the lived experiences of an individual by analysing the subjective understanding a person brings to a given situation. Similarly, Johnson (2011:2) states that in-depth interviewing involves seeking "deep" information about an individual's lived experiences, ideologies, decisions, cultural knowledge, and perspectives. Such in-depth interviews are issue-orientated and are useful in gaining focused information on an issue from the respondent.

For feminist researchers such as Kvale (1996:58), feminists are interested in accessing knowledge that is often concealed and interviewing can be used to access this hidden knowledge. Reinharz (1992) adds that interviewing allows feminist researchers to acquire women's hidden knowledge by retrieving their thoughts, ideas, and recollections from their own understanding rather than from the perspective of the researcher. Interviews further allow the feminist researcher to attain new perspectives on the subject's experiences (Hesse- Biber, 2011:4). Consequently, this study conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews to answer this study's central research question and sub-research questions. Moreover, in-depth interviews were selected because they are issue-oriented such that the interviewer could investigate a topic and retrieve focused information on that specific issue from the respondent (Hesse-Biber, 2011:4).

As feminists are focused on documenting information that is often disregarded (Hesse-Biber, 2011:4), conducting in-depth interviews allowed the investigator to access the stories and views of young urban black women who are often marginalized in their communities. The flexibility of semi-structured in-depth interviews permitted the researcher to pursue new ideas and issues that emerged during the interviews beyond the drafted questions. In summary, the use of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed the investigator to elicit opinions of young urban black women's subjective world because this method of creating knowledge is a remedy to centuries of disregarding women's viewpoints or having men represent women's interests (Reinharz, 1992:19).

3.3.5 Research Participants

The initial participants for this research were contacted through a gatekeeper, a young urban black woman from northern Johannesburg who self identifies as a blessee[1]. The gatekeeper is familiar with other young urban black women in blessee/blesser relationships and was recruited to build trust between the researcher and potential participants. Firstly, the gatekeeper made initial contact (on behalf of the researcher) with young urban black women who self-identify as blessees and were currently in TS with older men (blessers). The researcher explained to the gatekeeper the terms and procedure for recruiting participants as outlined in the gatekeeper's non-disclosure agreement[2] to ensure that participants of this study were fully knowledgeable about the aims of this research.

The gatekeeper was aware not to provide contact information of participants who were not prepared to share their experiences in this study and only forwarded details of participants (to the researcher) after their written consent was given[3]. Thereafter, the researcher contacted participants forwarded by

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[1] The gatekeeper identified by the researcher was not used as a participant in this study.

[2] See **Appendix B** for the "Gatekeeper Confidentiality Agreement".

[3] See **Appendix C** for the "Participant Consent form".

the gatekeeper and thenceforward the researcher relied on snowballing whereby young urban black women recommended other young urban black women in similar circumstances. Lastly, the researcher did not contact any participants who did not fit the inclusion criteria[4].

3.3.6 Interview Setting

This study conducted qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with young urban black women from northern Johannesburg, a demarcated suburb in South Africa.[5] The main difference between Johannesburg north and other surrounding areas is the socio-economic status attached to the area. Northern Johannesburg is associated with wealth due to surrounding areas such as Sandton which has become the hub for business and is often described as the richest square mile in Africa, such that the prestigious status of this area has created an environment where blessee/blesser relationships occur. This study also identified northern Johannesburg as being suitable for generating a sample size on the blessee/blesser phenomenon because the researcher was originally from this area, which allowed for an easier identification of the gatekeeper used in this analysis.

The women interviewed in this research were between the ages of 20-30 years old. The selection criteria for these women was based on previous research on TS which identified women between the ages of 20-30 years old as having a higher likelihood to seek out transactional sexual exchanges with older men (Mampane, 2018:1-2). Out of all the ten participants in this research, two of the young women admitted to having primary partners outside of their blesser relationships. Moreover, all participants displayed adequate levels of education, as all participants had a tertiary education or were in the process of completing their university studies. The majority of these young women were also employed either part-time or full time, and those who were not employed were either completing their tertiary studies or job seeking graduates. Therefore, all young women had a stable monetary source or income from their jobs or families.

Regarding the sample size, Patton (2002:244) argues that there is no guideline for sample size in qualitative research such that determining a sample size is regulated by the nature of the study question, economic resources and time. This study used a non-probability sampling technique such that the number of participants was not known to the researcher before the interviews. Therefore, the study's use of non-probability sampling resulted in the conducting of ten semi-structured in-depth

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[4] The inclusion criteria included openly identifying as a blessee and the willingness to discuss their relationship status. See **Appendix B** for the "Gatekeeper Confidentiality Agreement".

[5] The interviews were administered over a period of two months in various locations chosen by the interviewees.

interviews before saturation[6] occurred. According to Hesse-Biber (2011:8), in-depth interviews tend to occur in one session. Similarly, the semi-structured in-depth interviews in this study were undertaken in a single seating within a time frame of one hour. The researcher conducted in-person interviews as opposed to telephonic interviews because interviews that are not conducted in person often make it challenging for the researcher to establish a relationship with the respondent.

Furthermore, the interviewer might lose control of verbal and visual signals such as eye contact and gestures (Hesse-Biber, 2011:8). The participants of this study chose the interview locations to protect their identity and privacy, while the researcher alone conducted the interviews and written consent[7] for participation was acquired before the interviews commenced. All participants were well-versed about their rights including the right to revoke their participation in this study as well as their right to refrain from answering certain questions during the interview. The availability of a psychologist as well as additional counselling services were made known to participants as well. The psychologist was provided at the end of the interview if requested by a participant. Moreover, to ensure that the interviews stayed on track this study used an interview guide[8], a set of topical areas and questions that the interviewer brought to the interview as a tool to isolate key issues.

According to Weiss (1994), an interview guide is an important tool that helps the interviewer map out what to ask the respondent. Therefore, the interview questions were prepared beforehand and were asked in an open-ended manner. This is because open-ended questions encourage rich and meaningful responses and explore topics the researcher did not know of or view as important (Hesse-Biber, 2011:13). The use of open-ended questions also allowed the researcher to be receptive to different topics and survey new leads within the boundaries of this study's questions. However, if new leads emerged, they were pursued according to the willingness and responses of the participants. The researcher accordingly went with the feel of the participants such that some of the questions were not posed chronologically and were restated when necessary. The interviewer also jotted down notes throughout the interview session and, after finalizing all interviews, the semi-structured in-depth interviews were digitally recorded to ensure the reliability of the data generated. Thereafter, a record of the interviews was finalized through transcripts and the transcribing of interviews occurred in a private location to protect the identity of participants.

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[6] According to Miles & Huberman (1994:92), qualitative sampling focuses on comprehensive understanding through continuous sampling until no new valuable data is attained.

[7] See **Appendix C** for the "Participant Consent form".

[8] See **Appendix D** for the "Interview Guide".

3.4 Reliability and Validity

The notion of validity and reliability stems from a quantitative approach to research linked to a positivist approach (Golafshani, 2003:598). Reliability is defined as the level to which findings are constant in the long run while also reflecting an accurate representation of the entire populace being observed. Furthermore, if the findings can be replicated using a similar approach then the instrument used to conduct research is observed as reliable (Joppe, 2000:1). On the other hand, validity determines if the study accurately measures what it anticipated to measure as well as how truthful the research results are. However, scholars such as Eisner (1991), Creswell & Miller (2000) and Stenbacka (2001) have called for redefining the notions of reliability and validity from a positivist approach to an interpretive approach more suited for qualitative research.

For these scholars, validity and reliability in qualitative studies are theorized as rigor, quality and trustworthiness in qualitative paradigms (Golafshani, 2003:603). For Lincoln & Guba (1985), in quantitative research rigor, trustworthiness and quality can be measured using external validity, internal validity, objectivity and reliability. However, for qualitative research, these scholars propose that credibility, auditability, dependability, confirmability and transferability should be determinants of validity and reliability. Furthermore, scholars such as Morse et al (2002:17) have identified verification strategies used by qualitative researchers to achieve reliability and validity. These approaches include an appropriate sample, methodological consistency, collecting and analysing data concurrently, theory development and thinking theoretically.

According to Morse et al (2002:17), if these strategies are used correctly, they can lead to the validity and reliability of the study. To guarantee validity and reliability in this study, these confirmation strategies were employed in the following ways. Firstly, to achieve congruence between the research question and methodology, the research identified semi-structured in-depth interviews as the best method for answering the central research question and sub-research questions. To guarantee an appropriate sample, the researcher ensured that participants fit the study's selection criteria, and to ensure an appropriate sample the researcher only stopped collecting data when saturation occurred because saturated data ensures replication, which authenticates and guarantees understanding and completeness (Morse et al, 2002:18).

In the data collection and analysis stage, the researcher was conscious that the process of analysing qualitative data is not a straightforward procedure; rather, it needs constant deliberation of the information generated and the cross-referencing of data with identified themes. Lastly, Morse et al (2002:18) argue that thinking theoretically means that concepts developing from information generated is validated in new data which brings forth new concepts that must be tested in data already generated. This is a process that entails forward and backward linking of secondary and primary data

findings. To achieve this, the researcher related interview findings to secondary data collected in the literature review and discovered new themes.

3.5 Research Path

Figure 3.1 details the research path and data analysis method used in this study. Firstly, this study collected secondary data to develop a literature review. Thereafter, primary data was gathered using semi-structured in-depth interviews with young urban black women engaging in transactional sex. The interview transcripts were transcribed into themes relating to both primary and secondary data. Data description and analysis took place and the analysis of data relied on constant interpretation, reflection and referencing between themes. Lastly, recommendations and conclusions were provided.

Figure 3.1: Research Path
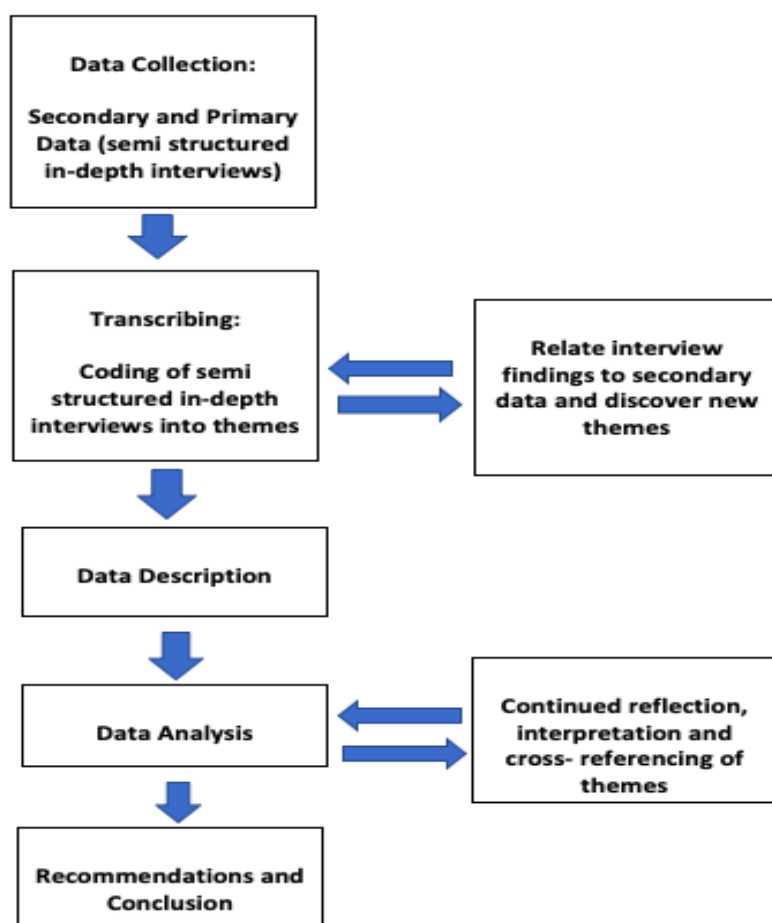
3.6 Data Description and Analysis

Thematic data analysis was used for this research. In quantitative research thematic data analysis starts with arranging information into manageable sizes by isolating ideas and sub-themes stemming from information generated (Creswell, 2013). This study followed the eight stages of thematic data analysis as illustrated by Creswell (2013). Firstly, the researcher sought to understand the full data

by rigorously reading the interview scripts. Thereafter, the researcher read through interview records and wrote down concepts that emerged from the data. Thirdly, a list was made of all themes and similar subject matters were clustered together. Moreover, from this list core interview themes were identified and jotted down. Codes of related topics were then created and rearranged to generate new concepts and appropriate descriptions for these concepts were provided. Lastly, the researcher compared and contrasted topics by identifying similarities and differences while recording the information to produce new arguments and sub-themes.

The description and analysis of primary data generated in the qualitative in-depth interviews was categorized and interpreted in the following ways. Firstly, data generated from the interviews was organised according to the three paradigms of TS: (1) Sex for basic needs, (2) Sex for upward mobility and status, and (3) Sex and material expressions of love. Thereafter, data generated from the interviews was arranged into the following themes: (1) Choice, (2) The complexities of blessee/ blesser relationships, (3) The role of cultural scripts in blessee/blesser relationships, (4) The significance of global images of glamour and success, (5) Power dynamics in blessee/blesser relationships, and (6) Decision-making power. These themes emerged during the interview sessions and became crucial in understanding young urban black women's insights into TS and the blessee/blesser culture.

This study also provided an evaluation of both primary and secondary data gathered. Firstly, data generated was analysed as a continuum of (1) deprivation, (2) agency and (3) instrumentality, according to Stoebenau et al's (2016) conceptual framework which argues that motivations for engaging in TS should be analysed as a continuum rather than as three discrete paradigms. Thereafter, data collected was analysed to answer the study's central research question[9], sub-research questions[10] and objectives[11] as discussed in the introductory chapter.

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[9] **Central Research Question**: What are the perceptions of young urban black women in South Africa about the "blessee/blesser" phenomenon?

[10] **Sub-research Question 1**: Do young urban black women in South Africa view the "blessee/blesser" phenomenon as being different from conventional sex work? **Sub-research Question 2**: Is there a continuum of deprivation (absolute or relative), agency and instrumentality within the" blessee/blesser phenomenon" in South Africa?

[11] **Objective 1:** To ascertain young urban black women's opinions and views of transactional sex and sex work. **Objective 2:** To investigate what is causing the rise and normalization of transactional sexual relationships amongst these women. **Objective 3:** To gather and critically evaluate findings on perceptions and motivations for engaging in transactional sex amongst young urban black women in South Africa. **Objective 4:** To formulate recommendations for further study based on the knowledge generated.

3.7 Limitations and Delimitations to Research

There were numerous restrictions on this study which had to be addressed. Firstly, due to time limitations, primary data on the perspectives of men who are blessers in transactional sex were not included. This study acknowledges that gathering data on men's/ blessers' perspectives would have provided a holistic comprehension of transactional sex in South Africa beyond the secondary data generated in the literature review. However, the core of this research was to provide a post-colonial feminist in-depth exploration of TS from the viewpoint of young urban black women to correct the simplistic and dominant views of African women as one-dimensional poor and powerless victims. Therefore, this study focused on giving a voice and agency to young urban black women engaging in TS.

Another challenge faced in this study pertained to the primary data gathering technique that was used. In conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews, gaining access to the research subjects proved challenging due to the stigma associated with blessees seeking out blessers, who are often married men. An additional limitation to this study related to the data generated in this research. The findings were limited to the perceptions and accounts provided by young urban black women from northern Johannesburg such that generalizations cannot be provided on a macro scale because black women are not a monolithic group with shared lived experiences.

However, though general conclusions cannot be drawn from this research's findings. This study argues that, if more in-depth interviews on the blessee/blesser phenomenon are conducted, it will eventually provide researchers with enough data to make broader generalizations on the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa. Lastly, financial constraints influenced the decision to focus on northern Johannesburg - where the researcher lives - as the geographic location for this study.

3.7.1 Insider/Outsider Status

According to Hesse-Biber (2011:25), the researcher and the researched often come together for an interview with distinctive backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, sexual preference, gender and class which can impact the pace and flow of the interview. If the interviewer is regarded as an outsider, it might make it even more challenging to gain access and understand the position of the "other". Therefore, to decrease the level of difference in the interview sessions, researchers match certain characteristics such as race, gender and age by using their "insider status"[12] to gain access to the

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[12] The use of an "insider status" to gain access to an interview can assist the researcher to gain participation and rapport which helps in understanding the participants of the study and limits the possibility of power and authority imbalances in the interview sessions (Oakley, 1981).

interview (2011:26). As a young urban black woman from the northern Johannesburg my age and familiarity with the area granted me the privilege to identify a gatekeeper and establish the trust needed in accessing the demographics necessary for this study.

However, the researcher was conscious that her insider position could lead to bias. To minimize familiarity, increase objectivity and establish trustworthiness in the quality of this research the researcher interviewed only participants she did not know and did not convene or converse directly with any participants before the interview commenced. On the other hand, the researcher's positionality and her status as a university researcher created moments of tension. Despite being educated themselves, certain participants in this study assumed that the researcher's "academic status" would limit the researcher's awareness of the complexities of blessee/blesser relationships. This status of being simultaneously inside and outside continuously shifted during the interviewing process.

3.7.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity[13] became a crucial exercise throughout this research such that measures were implemented to safeguard objectivity throughout the compilation and analysis of data. The researcher was involved in constant reflexivity to guarantee objectivity and impartiality by handling previous knowledge, personal beliefs and assumptions about the study population with distance, awareness, and suspicion.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was granted by the University of Stellenbosch before conducting this study. The issue of ethical clearance was of great importance in the planning, conducting and evaluating stages of the research. According to Burnham et al (2008:286), although there is no universal code of ethics, there are five fundamental values that must direct research and must be used to limit researchers from certain types of behaviour. Firstly, researchers ought to avoid harm by seeking to do good. Secondly, individuals partaking in the study are within their rights to limit access to data about themselves and the researcher must protect the privacy of participants. Thirdly, the researcher should be truthful and reliable to avoid deception. Furthermore, confidentiality is important as it relates to the idea of discretion and the right to dictate how information about oneself should be used. Lastly, the consent of participants in the study must be obtained as the concept of consent is regarded as the governing standard for the conduct of research.

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[13] Reflexivity allows the researcher to be conscious of their gender, positionalities, race, class and other factors crucial to the research process (Hesse-Biber, 2011:30).

These principles were taken into consideration while conducting this study. Firstly, the researcher only contacted participants after receiving their written consent from the gatekeeper. The researcher only interviewed participants she did not know and did not establish physical contact with any participants before the interview. Before the interviews commenced care was taken to guarantee that participants were well informed on the character and aim of this research. Furthermore, because this study investigated the nature of the blessee/blesser relationships which required the eliciting of personal identifiers such as demographic information, financial records and personal opinions of young urban black women engaging in transactional sex, the researcher informed each interviewee that participating in this study was voluntary and they were not obligated to complete their participation in this study. Therefore, should they request to leave the study, they would be requested to sign a "withdrawal from the research study consent form"[14].

However, participants were reminded that any data collected from this study would remain part of this study's record. To ensure participants' privacy, data collected would be aggregated so that no one individual could be identified. Moreover, participants were informed that the researcher might remove participants from this study if conducting this primary research might be exposing participants to an unacceptable level of risk or affect their well-being. In this context, participants would not be approached about the research except if the researcher needed to notify participants about a safety concern. To further guarantee the privacy of participants in this study, no names were required throughout the interview procedure. In addition, only the researcher conducted the interviews and had access to transcripts and notes from the interview. In the transcribing phase, the researcher used pseudonyms[15] for each participant to anonymize the data. Therefore, all identifiers such as participants' locations were changed or removed. Furthermore, the interview recordings and notes were stored on a password protected computer owned by the interviewer in a hidden folder that only the interviewer can access.

The folder was backed up on Apple iCloud drive[16] which requires password and fingerprint identification to further ensure the privacy of participants. In addition, data stored on the iCloud drive was stripped of any identifiers that can reveal the identity of participants. Any hard copies containing notes were also scanned to the researcher's laptop and kept in a hidden password-protected file. The abovementioned data management plan was implemented with the guidance of this study's

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[14] See **Appendix E** for the "Withdrawal consent form".

[15] The participants in this study were given the option to choose their pseudonyms if preferred.

[16] Apple iCloud Drive automatically secures data by coding it in transit and keeping it in iCloud in an encrypted set up while utilizing sealed tokens for verification. For delicate data, Apple employs end-to-end coding that guarantees that only the user and not even Apple Inc can retrieve the end-to-end encrypted data (Apple Inc, 2020).

supervisor. However, to safeguard the identity of the participants in this analysis, the researcher's supervisor could only access transcribed interviews stripped of any identifiers. The contact details of the researcher's supervisor were also provided to participants, if they wished to request clarifications or had grievances in the way the interviews were managed. Lastly, to ensure that participants in this study could not be identifiable in the research findings, this study allowed its participants to validate transcripts before the study findings were finalized.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology chosen to address the core research question and sub-research questions. This study conducted qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews with young urban black women from northern Johannesburg, South Africa. The feedback from the interviews was transcribed into themes according to Stoebenau et al's (2016) outline for conceptualizing transactional sex and included new themes that emerged from the interviews. This chapter addressed matters of ethical clearance, reliability, validity and the limits and potential problems this study faced. The following chapter, *Data Description and Analysis,* will describe the data generated in this study according to the themes outlined in this chapter. It will also provide an evaluation of both secondary and primary data gathered during this study.

CHAPTER 4: DATA DESCRIPTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The administration of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews facilitated a platform to acquire comprehensive data on young urban black women's engagement in blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa. This chapter will firstly provide a description of interview data according to the paradigms of transactional sex: "sex for basic needs", "sex for upward mobility and status" and "sex and material expressions of love". This section will also detail additional themes that arose from the interview sessions. The second section of this chapter will provide an evaluation of primary and secondary data generated in this research. In this section, blessee/blesser relationships will be synthesized as a continuum of deprivation, agency and instrumentality according to Stoebenau et al's (2016) conceptual framework for analysing motivations for engaging in transactional sex in sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, this section will evaluate data transcripts with reference to literature review findings. Lastly, an overall conclusion will be drawn.

4.2 Reading the Text

In the description and analysis of primary data generated, this chapter will use *italics* to indicate direct quotes from respondents, while quotations inside paragraphs will have *italics* and quotation marks ("…"). If additional phrases or words are added for clarity and readability, square brackets will be used ([…]). Furthermore, texts in **bold** illustrate a question posed by the researcher. Additionally, quoted dialogues containing responses from multiple participants will have a hyphen (-) to signify consensus amongst young urban black women. However, it is vital to note that in making the text more understandable, the essence of the participants' views was not lost.

4.3 Data Description

4.3.1 The Paradigms of Transactional Sex in Blessee/Blesser Relationships

A central objective of this study was to establish the perceptions of young urban black women involved in blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa. To achieve this, young urban women were asked various open-ended questions about their experiences with a blesser/blessers and their responses were grouped into the three paradigms of TS: "sex for basic needs", "sex for upward mobility and status" as well as "sex and material expressions of love".

4.3.1.1 Sex for basic needs

In South Africa, dominant literature on transactional sex argues that young women involved in TS are vulnerable victims who exchange sex for basic commodities due to their gendered social and economic marginalization (Stoebenau et al, 2016). Therefore, to determine the level to which young

urban black women's engagement in blessee/blesser relationships is motivated by poverty and survival, young urban black women were asked various open-ended questions[1] and the following responses were given:

Mbali[2] (23 years old and self-employed) in expressing how she entered a blessee/blesser relationship revealed the following:

> "*Let's be very clear, most blessers will approach you and not the other way around". My blesser approached me and offered me a job. I am self-employed, I do ok for myself, so I rejected his offer. He then pursued a [romantic] relationship with me for about six months but it was only after I went on a date with him, I realized he is rich, and I decided to go for it".*

The majority of the young urban black women argued that their decision to engage in blessee/blesser relationships was motivated by - "*the experiences the blesser gives you*".

Thuli (25 years old and employed full time) stated that:

> *[being with a blesser], "I was able to fly in a private jet for the first time… I learnt everything from him, he groomed me into the woman I am today. He taught me etiquette, how to use all those fancy spoons and knives at a restaurant, he exposed me to an expensive lifestyle".*

In a similar account, Zania (26 years old and employed part-time) provided her reasons for having a blesser:

> *[before the relationship], "I was only able to take care of my basic "needs". OMG! my life was basic, I couldn't buy designer clothes, or nice things you know. I could just do the basic things, make my car payments and buy groceries. But since I started dating this man, now I can have the finer things in life, Brazilian weaves and good quality clothes".*

Gugu (29 years old, employed and studying part-time) gave a similar account:

> *[before having a blesser], "I was middle class, I had a job and a car, but I could not afford luxurious things. So being with him, I was able to get a fancy car and pay for my studies. This is Joburg, you must have a certain lifestyle. In this town, status is everything".*

However, in their accounts certain young urban women acknowledged that:

> *- "Their decisions to engage in blessee/blesser relationships is sometimes linked to whether they are struggling financially. {***struggling financially?***}, - "If I am unable to pay my rent or car payment then I will see a blesser based on what they can give me financially. However, getting money from the blesser is not a spoken thing, I am not a "prostitute", it's a given".*

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[1] Q1-Q7, Q10, Q14, Q15, Q19, Q20, Q21, Q24, Q26, Q28- Q30: See **Appendix D**, the "Interview Questions".

[2] All names of participants have been changed.

Lebo (22 years old and an unemployed graduate) further explained:

"I am a graduate with no job, it's tough, yes my parents can do the basic [food and shelter], but I have to hustle [work hard] to give myself more. Right now, he [the blesser] provides for me in ways my family cannot, he sends money so I can go for job interviews or do my hair and sometimes just to treat myself. My parents cut me off after graduating, they are expecting a job so yeah, I really need this relationship right now".

4.3.1.2 Sex for upward mobility and status

Scholars such as Leclerc-Madlala (2003), Stoebenau et al (2016), and Ranganathan et al (2017) challenge the "sex for survival" paradigm, arguing that young women are seeking TS to ascertain aspirational lifestyles based on global images of glamour and this has given rise to the sex for upward mobility and status paradigm. In this paradigm, women have agency and enter transactional relationships as a result of relative deprivation/economic inequalities[3]. To determine if young urban women seek blessee/blesser relationships motivated by the desires for a high-status lifestyle the young women were asked open-ended questions[4] and, while their responses varied, most of these women revealed that:

- *"For many blessers, having a blessee is a "status thing", it is linked to the male ego. Such that these relationships are based on a trade-off, whereby the blessee wants money/expensive lifestyle and the blesser wants a trophy [a beautiful woman] for sex, so it's an equal exchange".*

In sharing her motivation for engaging in a blesser relationship Zania provided the following account:

"To be totally honest, my decision to be with him [the blesser] was based on what he can give me financially. I want a nice life and he wanted a beautiful girl to have sex with. So, there was a mutual understanding on the nature of our relationship".

Palesa (24-year-old university student) described how she entered a blesser relationship for social networking and status:

"My blesser is an important political figure. So, in the beginning it was about the sophistication, you know. I loved the class that comes with being able to attract the attention of an older rich man, who is willing to give you whatever you want just to sleep with you. But he is also well connected, which I will need when I graduate because we both know that to get a job in this country you have to be well connected".

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[3] Relative deprivation linked to increasing economic disparities as well as the rising prices of consumer goods (Fox, 2012).

[4] Q1- Q9, Q14, Q15, Q20- Q30, See, **Appendix D**, the "Interview Questions".

Zania also expressed the importance of status as a young urban black woman:

> *[being a blessee], "it's a lifestyle, it affirms your status,[because] it is like having a designer bag, when you are carrying a "Louis Vuitton" bag people see you in a different light and hold you to a higher standard as opposed to having an ordinary bag. It's like that when you are dating a wealthy man, other women are looking at you, thinking Wow! how did she manage that?"*

Hlubi (26 years old, employed full time and part-time student) revealed that engaging in a blesser relationship is a calculated strategy for advancing her socio-economic status as a young black woman:

> *"I was introduced to my current blesser, actually boyfriend because I don't like the name blesser. Anyway, I was introduced to him by a friend from work, who is also dating a rich guy. Being with him allows me to get my wants without using my own money. The thing is, I have responsibilities, my car payment, house, fees and I also must send money back home to help my family. I also want nice things, and that's where my man comes in. I use his money for experiences and luxury things and use my own money for my personal responsibilities".*

In addition, young urban women also highlighted the importance of "fun and entertainment" in blessee/blessee relationships:

> *- "All blessers want someone young, fun and entertaining, so that they can live out their 'Trophy fantasy" [as one blessee puts it]. They have reality at home, so they want women who meet their fantasies. Such women want luxury items, they want to be taken on overseas trips. These women are fun and outgoing and keep these men young. Blessers don't want women who remind them of their wives or ordinary women. Blessers want to give you a luxury lifestyle and in exchange you must give them something in return, and sex is the easiest thing to give".*

Gugu further demonstrates how she perceives providing sex, fun and entertainment in exchange for a luxury lifestyle as being a mutually beneficial exchange within her relationship:

> *"My boyfriend is 10 years older than me; he has had enough time to build a life and now he has money. For him spending money is not a problem, he wants to be entertained, he wants someone to enjoy experiences with, without hearing about life problems. On my side, I just recently got a stable job, and you know "black tax"[5] is real sis! I can't afford a lot of things, so basically, my job is to keep him young and give him sex, and he gives me a good life in exchange".*

4.3.1.3 Sex and material expressions of love

Scholars such as Moore et al (2007), Bhana & Pattman (2011), Mojola (2014) and Stoebenau et al (2016) argue that studies on TS ignore the prevalence of love within these sexual exchanges. These

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[5] "Black tax" is a South African slang term that refers to additional money that black professionals give monthly to take care of their extended family members (Urban Dictionary, 2020).

scholars emphasise the degree to which monetary exchanges or gift-giving occurs within emotionally intimate relationships by drawing links between money and love and the ideas of men as the provider in the relationship. Therefore, young urban black women were asked various open-ended questions[6] to determine if they experienced intimacy beyond the transaction in their blesser relationships.

In defining the nature of her relationship, Khanyi (24-year-old university student) revealed that:

> *"I won't lie, when I agreed to try it out and date him, it was not for love but for money, but things change you know. He is so caring, yes, he gives me money and buys me nice things which is why I am with him, but he goes the extra mile, he listens to my problems, gives me advice about life, like he is there emotionally. That's why, I see him as my boyfriend, and a huge part of me loves him"*.

Furthermore, in her definition of a blesser, Khanyi emphasised that:

> *"In exchange for sex, a blesser should take care of the blessee's every need, which includes emotional support"*.

Buhle (26 years old and employed part-time) who recently entered her first blessee/blesser relationship defined it as:

> *"An exchange relationship, whether monetary or emotional. I am new to this blesser thing but in my opinion a blessee receives gifts or an expensive lifestyle from an older man who promises to love her and take care of her in exchange for sex. Because, generally a man will not give you anything without sex"*.

She also underlined that:

> *"For me personally, I know that I have to sleep with my blesser but there is no expectation for sex from my boyfriend [blesser]. It's because the feelings are there between us. I am attracted to him, we have an emotional connection {**does your blesser express the same sentiments?**}- I can tell he cares and he loves me, he doesn't say it a lot but because we love each other, having sex with him is easy because I want to. In all honesty, I know he has sex with other girls, but I know it is strictly sex with them. But when it comes to me it's more of a relationship. {**in what ways?**}- he tells me about his problems, he values my opinion so there is a connection there"*.

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[6] **Q1-Q7, Q15-Q32**, See **Appendix D,** the "Interview Questions"**.**

Gugu also reflected on her first relationship with a blesser:

"Yoh! I did love my blesser, I was young, 22 at that time. We were dating so it was love even though he was married. In the beginning, obviously the relationship was based on gifts and money, and he wanted sex with a yellow bone[7]. But, after some time {how long?}- about seven months things got hectic, yoh! we caught feelings [fell in love]. So, it changed into an actual relationship, emotions and all. I think we built trust, to the point where we stopped really using protection. I was so comfortable with him, maybe because I knew I was the only one he was blessing".

Similarly, Palesa who admits to having multiple blessers stated that:

"Of all three of my blessers, I only love one because he takes care of both my financial and emotional needs and because I love him. I don't really see him as a blesser but as my boyfriend. The other two are just for money, or whatever they give me, so the moment they stop sending me money, I will drop them".

Hlubi also shared the complex nature of her blesser relationship:

"I have a long-term boyfriend, but it's a long-distance relationship which contributed to my decision to get a blesser. In the beginning I only saw my blesser as someone who chose to support my wants, so it was not love at first sight. The relationship was motivated by money but as time went by, he began telling me that he wanted to be in a serious relationship with me because he is not married. The thing is I am now confused as to whether I want to date my blesser or stay with my boyfriend. I feel bad for my boyfriend {which one?}- ooh! the one who is my blesser, sometimes it feels like I am using him. I know I have feelings for him, and I know he sees me as his girlfriend. But, eish! I am worried he wants marriage and I am undecided on what I want to do. I don't know if I should leave my boyfriend for a relationship that started based on money and not love".

Young urban black women also highlighted the dangers of falling in love with a blesser. Mbali stated that:

"I fell in love with my blesser and I ended up getting pregnant, and when I told him, he lost interest, he no longer wanted me. He asked me, "What kind of life was I going to live with a child". In that moment, it hit me I was no longer a trophy, I became a human being to him, an ordinary woman and everything became real, so he distanced himself from me. {as a result of the pregnancy?}- yes, I tried to fix things by terminating the pregnancy, but he replaced me with a younger girl. He took her on a vacation to Mauritius, and this man had the nerve to say he was on a business trip. I knew then it was over, and it forced me to end my relationship with him".

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[7] A "yellow bone" is a colloquial phrase used to describe a black woman of a lighter complexion (Urban Dictionary, 2020).

Kutlwano (22-year-old university student) also revealed that:

> *"The thing is, when we first started dating, I knew he was engaged. But as time went on, I fell in love. But I always wondered where his fiancé thought he was when he was with me. When I asked him, he would always say, baby relax! don't worry about her. I only asked about the fiancé because I loved him. At this stage we were using condoms, but after we started having unprotected sex, he became distant. He stopped talking about leaving her [the fiancé], so eventually I ended things. I saw recently on social media that he got married".*

4.3.3 Choice

The concept of choice was another recurring theme amongst young urban black women, particularly when distinguishing themselves from sex workers:

> *- "blessees are not the same as sex workers, because blessees have a choice, whereas sex work is a hustle {hustle?}- yes, sex work starts from hustling, motivated by a need to survive, to eat. So, blessees are different to sex workers because blessees do not sell their bodies, their basic needs are taken care of. They are mostly motivated by choice, enjoyment and wanting nice things. Sex work on the other hand is a job and not for entertainment. You do not become a sex worker because you want to upgrade your car to a fancy car [as one participant puts it]".*

Similarly, Palesa added that:

> *"The only similarity I see between blessees and sex workers is every black women's dream to have a better life, everyone wants to be able to pay their rent, drive a nice car and fend for themselves. But, blessees are better than sex workers because being a blessee is not high risk. You don't stand at a street corner and sleep with strangers. You choose who to sleep with and what that man must do for you, plus men respect blessees and not sex workers".*

Furthermore, when explaining what is expected from a blessee in a blessee/blesser relationship, Hlubi stated that:

> *"What all blessers want is sex, your time and attention, but for me spending time with my blesser is my choice. I am independent, I go to work, so I am not expected to show up on call, I am not a "prostitute". And even when we are together, I don't get money or gifts every time I see him, it's a relationship. But I do admit that I always try to show up when he calls me because he takes care of my financial needs"*

Lastly, the concept of choice played a part in young women's justification for pursuing blessee/blesser relationships as Kutlwano put it:

> "*The most important thing to understand is that blessees are not "prostitutes". I know women who come from good families but are in that lifestyle, so being a blessee is not only about money or looking*

for money. It's a choice. In that relationship 90% of the time a blesser comes to you and wants to be you and not the other way around".

4.3.4 The Complexities of Blessee/Blesser Relationships

Previous studies on transactional sex argue that love and material exchanges are mutually exclusive which suggests that transactional relationships are purely instrumental and loveless (Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013:86). In determining young urban black women's long-term goals for seeking blessers and what they aim to achieve in these relationships, the following responses were provided,

Hlubi:

"I am still undecided about what my end-goal is. Some days, I just want to get money from him [the blesser], and sometimes I think we could be together, and be in a relationship. I don't know hey, it's a tough thing to think about right now".

Buhle:

"I agreed to date an older man, so money has to be there of course. But you can't sleep with someone, spend time with them and listen to their problems without catching feelings [falling in love]. So it makes the whole thing blurry, a part of you is realistic that it's a temporary thing, but there are moments you know, when he buys you flowers or sends you money without asking and you start to wonder maybe this is going somewhere. I don't know how to put it, but you end up being confused about what is your end goal, is it money or you want someone to love who happens to have money".

Lastly, Lebo explained that:

"You know for me, I am realistic, I know what we have is not love. So, my end goal is to just to get as much money and experiences from him until I am ok {ok?}- yes, until I reach a certain status as a successful and independent woman. You cannot live this type of lifestyle forever, you get in, get what is yours and get out. So, I try very hard to avoid romantic or love things. I am focused on getting a good life for myself and that's that".

4.3.5 The Role of Culture in Blessee/Blesser Relationships

According to Mampane (2018:6), African gender customs require men to pay "lobola" (bride price) for the women they anticipate marrying. This gendered norm has led to cultural expectations for men to provide for women financially. Similarly, scholars within transactional sex argue that TS emerges from cultural expectations for men to give women material gifts, and for women to receive payment for sex. According to Wamoyi et al (2010b:9), these cultural understandings govern TS such that women "cannot have sex for free". Therefore, this establishes links between gendered cultural norms and the rise and normalization of blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa. Young urban black women provided the following accounts,

Lebo:

"I think it's expected in African culture for a man to provide for his woman, so even though my parents don't know that I am dating a married man, the money and gifts he gives me are not an issue because it's a man's duty to provide".

Thuli:

"Growing up my mum always emphasised the importance of marrying someone who can provide, it would be such a disappointment if I dated a broke guy. My actual boyfriend [not blesser], takes care of me. He obviously can't do a lot because he is not as rich as my blesser. But I think it is natural for men to just provide, it's not even something to discuss. And on the other side sex is something you give men to show your appreciation, for them it is how they judge if you love them".

Kutlwano:

"No black man will take you seriously if you just give them sex without having some form of expectation. For me it means you don't have values and you don't care about yourself. I could never just have sex with someone, without some form of benefit, even if that person is my real boyfriend".

4.3.6 The Significance of Global Images of Glamour and Success

According to Zembe & Townsend (2013), in the post-apartheid era SA's ascendance into the world economy increased consumption and exposed previously marginalized black South Africans to commodities and a global lifestyle. Furthermore, this shift led to an increase in TS amongst black people motivated by the need to attain symbols of global beauty and success. Leclerc-Madlala (2003) adds that the effects of neoliberal globalization have led to the development of new needs, wants and desires that reflect modernity, sexual equality and relationships that reflect global images of luxury amongst young women. As a result, South African women are now actively using their sexuality to acquire products that reflect a high-status lifestyle, while satisfying their wants rather than their needs. Therefore, to determine the significance of global images of glamour and success, young urban women provided the following accounts,

Mbali illustrates the desire and importance of appearing successful as a young urban black woman:

"I do get why people judge this lifestyle and the things we get might seem "unnecessary" to the outside world. But for me, I have realized that image is so important. If you dress nice, have a nice weave, drive a nice car and stay in certain areas, people want to network with you because you bring value. It's so easy for people to judge black women but trust me they would not last 24 hours in our shoes. This is a tough world, so what you have will determine who wants to join your network".

Kutlwano demonstrates her "need" for a high-status lifestyle, money and global images of success as being easily attainable by exchanging sex for gifts and money:

> "*I am in varsity right now, so I know I made it, I am going to have a good life. But it wasn't always the case. I am not coming from wealth, my mum is a single mum and she is sacrificing everything for me to be here. So, yah! she can only give me the basics. At the same time, I go to class with rich kids who get everything. I have to keep up with trends and look good amongst my peers, so if giving sex for that lifestyle is what it takes so be it*".

Zania:

> "*Listen here, money makes the world go around, we all need money to survive. It's even worse for us black women, nobody cares about us {in what ways?}- you know what I mean, we are excluded from real money, not these peanuts we get from our jobs. So, in a sense it makes you use what you have to get what you want, and for us women the gold mine between our legs is what can give us the life we want and deserve. On my own, I could never live in the apartment I am staying in or drive the car I am driving, but thanks to my boyfriend, I can live a good life*".

Lastly, Palesa added that:

> "*These older guys have money and are willing and ready to spend more than 10k [R10 00]) a month to sleep with you. My friend that is someone's salary in this country, so if you are smart you just take that money and sort yourself out. You won't lose anything from giving them sex, but if you want to have high morals, you will sit there at home hungry or with a rent bill. While the people who judge you are driving fancy cars, going for dinners and living the life. At the end of the day, these people are not black women, they don't understand our struggle, so for me, shame, I could(n't) care less. I want money and I want nice things, period!*"

4.3.7 Power Dynamics in Blessee/Blesser Relationships

Research on transactional sex argues that when sex is exchanged for material gifts and money it increases the relational power of men over women leaving women without agency in exchange relationships (Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013:87). However, scholars such as Masvawure (2010), Maganja et al (2007) and Bhana & Pattman (2011) provide evidence on how women navigate power dynamics in transactional sex while asserting their agency in multiple ways. Therefore, to determine the nature of agency in blessee/blesser relationships, young urban women explained the power dynamics within their relationships.

Age Differences

Young urban black women revealed that their blessers were at least ten years older than them. Furthermore, they stated that their blessers have professional careers ranging from politicians to lawyers and doctors and all men (except for one) were married or engaged.

Hlubi:

> *"My blesser, is 12 years older than me. It doesn't really affect our relationship, like I said I am an independent person. He doesn't force anything on me and he respects my decisions. It's also nice to have someone who can give you advice, as he has a lot of life experience".*

Khanyi:

> *"Sometimes he tries to father me and talks to me like I am a kid. I know I am still in university but come on. It sucks sometimes but I just have to tolerate it because I need the money".*

Zania:

> *"He is not stupid, he knows at the end of it, it's all about money. So, at times he acts difficult, he will demand silly things {like?}- sex, you know. He will flex [exert dominance], because he is an older man and knows how to manipulate women".*

Economic Asymmetries

Young women in this study (except for two participants who are university students[8]) indicated their capability to provide for their necessities such as shelter and food. However, although these women demonstrated high levels of agency in their relationships, they highlighted the various ways in which receiving money from their blessers affected their agency.

Thuli:

> *"If I am honest, the fact that he gives me money, it gives him power. I obviously need the money, so I play along {play along?}- sometimes he will give me an expensive gift or money and then he will want unprotected sex, I end up doing it because I have to keep him happy".*

Palesa:

> "*The fact that he gives me money, it doesn't really change much between us. I know I am there to give him sex, and he is there to give me money. He doesn't have an ego about it, so he doesn't rub it in my face, and I like that about him".*

Buhle:

> *"I don't really ask him for money or gifts, he just gives me. But, this one time, things were bad in my life {in what way?}-financially, my car was broken down and I need it for work. So, I asked him for money, and yoh, he just flipped. He gave me the money eventually, but he was verbally abusive to me for a while, calling me a prostitute because I asked for money. I just took it, because I was desperate, and I had no choice".*

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[8] For these participants their needs (accommodation, allowance and food) are provided by their families.

Gugu:

> *"In my experience, men like control and power. So, if he is giving you money, he will control you. As a blessee, I guess it comes with the lifestyle. Just focus on what you are getting and deal with it".*

Exploiting Sexuality for Material Gain

According to Hunter (2010b:115), young women in transactional sexual relationships often connect sex with power in bold and assertive ways so that to attain a high-status lifestyle and modernity, young women actively "choose men" and maintain relationships for consumption purposes. In addition, Leclerc-Madlala (2008:28) argues that young urban women identify themselves as active decision makers and view themselves as empowered modern-day women based on their capacity to receive material gifts from wealthy men in exchange for sex. For these women, attracting and sustaining transactional relationships is seen as an act of cleverness and self-assertion and contributes to their self-perceptions as modern sexually liberated women. Therefore, to establish whether young urban black women exploit their sexuality for material gain, young women shared instances when they initiated interactions with their blessers, and the following accounts were provided.

Kutlwano:

> *"In the beginning he told me, he wasn't sure about me because he had a fiancé. So, I had to turn up the heat {**turn up the heat?**}- yes! I seduced him, I made it difficult for him to say no to me and after that, he couldn't resist me, that's when I told him what I was expecting in return {**which was?**)- money of course, he had to take care of me emotionally and financially".*

Palesa:

> *"I know his weaknesses, so sometimes when I need money, I play the part {**play the part?**}- I dress up in the way he likes, show some skin, legs, cleavage and I know he will give me whatever I want".*

Gugu:

> *"In my previous situations [relationships with blessers], they approached me. But, with my current boyfriend, I just went for it. I was like Gugu, you can use your assets [your body] to get him, so I did just that".*

Avoiding or Delaying Sex after Receiving Gifts

Young urban black women facilitated a construction of blessee/blesser relationships to distance themselves from sex workers which centred on their ability to determine the timing of their initial sexual encounters with their blessers after receiving gifts. This theme became apparent amongst young urban women when they illustrated the difference between sex work and being a blessee as well as when defining their roles in their relationships.

For example, Mbali shared that:

> *"I really wanted to go to Dubai for holiday with my friends, and he kept saying no. Instead, he bought me a new expensive phone and usually I would take it and give him sex as a thank you, but this time I didn't. I didn't have sex with him, I wanted him to know I was serious, after a while I knew he would give in and he did".*

Lebo added that:

> *"You have to take your time you are not a prostitute. Let him spoil you, show you what he can give you and then you can give him sex. If you are too easy, then he will treat you like a prostitute, it's a relationship sis. The only difference is, it's based on money".*

4.3.8 Decision-making Power

To determine the levels of decision-making power young urban black women possess in blessee/blesser relationships the respondents were asked various open-ended questions to establish if they had decision-making power in the initiation, duration and termination phases of the relationship.

Initiation Phase

For Khanyi:

> *"I met him at a club with my friends, he invited us to the V.I.P. section and spent a lot of money on us. I knew he really liked me, so I was in control of whatever was happening between us. He was chasing me [pursuing a relationship], not the other way around. So, he had to spoil me and do a lot of things to show his seriousness and commitment, before I agreed to date him".*

Thuli shared that:

> *"I initiated the whole thing [the blesser relationship]. I met him through a friend from work… she is also in this lifestyle. I saw the things she had, and I wanted in…but it was not easy to get him to bless me. I had to do a lot for his attention **{what did you have to do?}-** give him sex earlier than I wanted, but it worked so I don't regret it".*

Duration Phase

According to Gugu:

> *"… It's a relationship, not a transaction, so you not going to get money and gifts all the time. You also need to take care of his needs beyond sex, like sometimes he just wants to talk about his stresses and won't open his wallet".*

Palesa shared that:

> "You have to compromise and give in to his demands, because after a while you realize there are a lot of pretty girls out there and he can replace me. So, you don't always get your way, sometimes it's his way or you are out".

For Thuli:

> "This one time, he wanted me to come over to his place because his wife and kids were out of town. I didn't want to but at the same time my rent was due, so it forced me to go and see him".

Lastly, Buhle revealed that:

> "The condom thing is a big issue he doesn't like them. Honestly, it doesn't sit well with me, but I think because we have built trust, and he does give me everything I want, I just let it go because giving him what he wants, means I get everything I need".

Termination Phase

Palesa described how her last blesser relationship ended:

> "… my last blesser went broke or whatever, I entertained it for a week, and I couldn't do it anymore. I can't just give sex for free and listen to problems. I just had to sit him down and explain that our agreement was over, but I still cared for him as a friend".

Thuli provided a similar account:

> "With my last blesser, I ended things, I wanted more, and he couldn't give me what I needed. **{what did you want?}-** I wanted him to increase my allowance, and to do more financially but he kept making excuses. So, I told him, we can be friends but nothing more. Plus, I was already talking to someone else who could pick up the pieces. I can't be stupid to give someone sex who doesn't take care of me".

Hlubi in explaining whether she would terminate her relationship stated that,

> "I do love him, so maybe I can stay. I don't know, it's tricky. I would have to see if he can come back up and get back the money he lost. Let's be real, money is a big reason why I am with him. If he fails to get back on his feet, I would eventually leave, there is plenty fish in the sea".

Lastly, Zania shared that:

> "It ended, [the relationship with a blesser] after two years. I got tired of it, I just felt there was nothing more he could give me, so I ended things. Plus, everyone knows these relationships don't last forever".

These various accounts aimed to provide insight into the reality, agency and material complexities of blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa. The documentation of young women's experiences in their own voices intended to give a systematic description of their individual and collective stories aimed at uprooting black women from the margins of conversations about their own lives and

sexuality. The interviews thus investigated the various settings of young women's roles as blessees influenced by cultural, social, economic and political contexts. While recognizing the intersectionalities of race, class and gender, this section sought to illustrate how sexuality is lived and made sense of by young urban black women engaging in blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa.

4.4 Data Analysis

4.4.1 Synthesizing Blessee/Blesser Relationships: A Continuum of Deprivation, Agency & Instrumentality

There is a need to illustrate the complexities of gender in non-Western contexts by developing post-colonial theories that are not Eurocentric to limit a dependency on Western feminism. This can be achieved by formulating theoretical frameworks that analyse African women's sexualities within their contexts as this provides an understanding of sexuality and gender diversity while avoiding past tendencies of adopting Western conceptualizations into non-Western knowledge of sexuality and gender (Pereira, 2014:17). Leclerc-Madlala (2008:22) consents with this position and suggests that the key to understanding young women's sexualities and reasons for seeking blessers can be achieved through African centred theoretical frameworks that enhance the scope of sexualities in Africa, while remaining culturally sensitive. This study argues that by combining post-colonial feminism with Stoebenau et al's (2016) conceptual framework for analysing transactional sex in SSA an African centred analysis of TS can be achieved. Therefore, this section employs a post-colonial feminist analysis of blessee/blesser relationships using Stoebenau et al's 2016 conceptual framework for analysing transactional sex in SSA. Data generated from the interviews is synthesized with the literature review findings and categorized into a continuum of deprivation, agency and instrumentality to illustrate the nuance and complexities of blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa.

4.4.1.1 Deprivation: Relative deprivation

Previous scholars on TS focused on the gendered impact of economic changes in the post-apartheid era, while emphasising young women's financial reliance on men due to poverty. In this context, young women engaging in TS are portrayed as impoverished victims motivated by absolute deprivation and are susceptible to sexual exploitation from older men (William et al, 2012:357; Siberschmidt & Rasch, 2001). This understanding of transactional sex analyses black women's sexuality from a Eurocentric perspective using globalization and a neoliberal perspective which re-inserts racist and colonial modes of analysing African sexualities. Therefore, this study contends that globalization transfigured the cultural and socio-economic society in South Africa, and impacted sexuality in multiple and interrelated ways. It argues that young urban women engaging in

blessee/blesser relationships are not motivated by absolute deprivation. On the contrary, these women's relationships with blessers occur in the context of relative deprivation linked to the "need" for high-status lifestyles, fun and entertainment, upward social mobility as well as the *"experiences the blesser gives you"*.

Despite young women thus channelling gifts and money from their blessers towards "needs" such as tertiary fees, rent and car payments, evident in statements such as *he wanted me to come over to his place… I didn't want to but at the same time, my rent was due, so it forced me go and see him",* their engagement in blesser relationship is not motivated by absolute deprivation. On the contrary, the majority of young urban women fashion themselves as blessees to satisfy their wants rather than needs, while using the language of absolute deprivation. This is apparent in how the word "need" was used loosely throughout the interview sessions to address desires for items such as "designer clothing", "expensive cars" and "overseas trips". For these women, these items qualify as needs because they are central to constructing an image of sophistication, status and success required for *"networking"* in Johannesburg where *"status is everything"*. This understanding of needs can be described using Leclerc-Madlala's (2003:224) concept of "urban survival" whereby young urban women view the pressure to acquire luxury goods that reflect a modern lifestyle - normally understood as "wants" - as being the same as seeking basic needs such as shelter and food. Therefore, young women seeking a high-status lifestyle use the language of absolute deprivation to justify their efforts to attain commodities of modernity.

Moreover, young women emphasised their independence and their ability to *"take care of their basic needs"*[9]. This assertion discredits dominant views presented by scholars on TS which portray young women as impoverished victims. This image of poor women stems from a Eurocentric perspective that renders African women as economically dependent on men such that exchanging sex for money becomes the only source of survival for black women. Furthermore, this viewpoint entrenches notions of black women as helpless, uneducated and without control of their bodies and sexualities (Mohanty, 1984:337). Yet, contrary to this image, young urban women see blesser relationships as a *"trade-off"* whereby the blesser requires sex with a *"trophy"* to boost his male ego, while the blessee requires money and luxury commodities to advance her social and economic position. These relationships are also propelled and sustained by the racialized, gendered social and economic inequalities prevalent in South Africa. Therefore, young urban women's interpretation of blesser relationships aligns with Silberschmidt & Rasch (2001) and Leclerc-Madlala's (2003) argument that transactional sexual

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[9] Apart from three participants whose basic needs are provided by their families.

relationships do not always emerge as a result desperation but from relative deprivation due to the increasing economic disparities and the rising prices of consumer goods.

Because young urban women do not see themselves as being coerced into these relationships but willingly engage in blesser relationships for "*the lifestyle*", "*nice things*", "*fun and entrainment*", "*status*" and "*networking*", their understanding of blesser relationships challenges narratives within transactional sex that describe all women as children and victims, coerced and exploited by older men who prey on young women (Stoebenau et al, 2016:189). Therefore, in statements such as, "*So it makes you use what you have to get what you want, and for us women, the gold mine between our legs is what can give us the life we want and deserve*", and "*In exchange for this luxury lifestyle you have to give something and sex is the easiest thing to give*", *y*oung women demonstrate how they navigate their sexuality in order to acquire commodities of modernity. By exploiting their sexuality young women illustrate the significant role of money in their lives and how it is central to attaining aspirational lifestyles.

This centrality of money in young women's lives was expressed in statements such as, "*money makes the world go around, we all need money to survive*", and "*I decided to date him… for money*". This significant role of money amongst young women is due to the influence of global capital which created the "woman consumer". The increased access to consumer commodities and "consumer culture" has fuelled relative deprivation and manufactured the "need" for commodities of modernity amongst economically marginalized black women (Mojola, 2014). Moreover, the rising economic disparities and the significance put on the possession of commodities for social status amongst black people lead young women who are unable to acquire the high-status lifestyle of their peers to seek transactional sex and achieve a modern lifestyle (Zembe et al, 2013:3; Baba-Djara et al, 2013). Therefore, these women view blessee/blesser relationships as the easiest way to distinguish themselves from their less fortunate peers and sustain high-status lifestyles associated with their desired peer groups (Masvawure, 2010; Gukurume, 2011; Shefer et al, 2012b). For young urban women this is demonstrated through statements such as, "*This is Joburg, you must have a certain lifestyle. In this town, status is everything*".

Furthermore, by engaging in blessee/blesser relationships young women actively exploit their sexuality for material gain, stating that "*If giving sex for this lifestyle is what it takes, so be it*". As another blessee put it, "*… it affirms your status…people see you in a different light and hold you to a higher standard…other women are looking at you, thinking wow, how did she manage that?*" In summary, young urban black women's motivation for engaging in blessee/blesser relationships aligns with Leclerc-Madlala's (2003:216 & 2008:17) argument that neoliberal globalization has led to the establishment of new needs, desires and wants amongst young women that reflect modernity, equality

in sexual matters and relationships that mirror globalized depictions of success and luxury. Therefore, relationships between younger women and older men for material gain are becoming normalized and perceived as being economically beneficial. Consequently, transactional sex for material gain is on the rise because young women view it as an easy way to achieve social goals, gain material gifts, affirm their self-worth and assert agency.

This understanding of blessee/blesser relationships challenges the universal grouping of black women as poor and powerless victims and aims to uncover new ways of evaluating transactional sexual exchanges by underlining that not all sexual exchanges are harmful, coerced and without consent from young women. In addition, young urban black women's experiences illustrate that blessee/blesser relationships should be understood from this perspective and that of the structuring roles of money, race and culture (Zatz, 1997:279). In doing so, it allows for the contextualization of black women's subjective lives without reducing them to one dimensional representations of "oppressed" women against "empowered" men.

4.4.1.2 Agency in blessee/blesser relationships

Previous studies by Petersen et al (2005) and William (2012) on transactional sex in South Africa emphasise young women's limited agency in heterosexual relationships. In this context, gendered poverty constrains their choices which subject them to depend on men for survival while making them victims of men's privileged status (Potgieter et al, 2012; Shefer & Strebel, 2012a). This unidimensional view of black women misrepresents the nature of African women's sexualities and ignores studies on TS which demonstrate that, even in highly patriarchal societies, young women find spaces for female assertiveness and express agency in multiple ways (Groes-Green, 2013:103). This viewpoint by Groes-Green (2013) aligns with accounts provided by young urban black women, who portray the varying nature of agency in blessee/blesser relationships over time and between relationships.

For young urban black women, the notion of "*choice*" was used repeatedly to facilitate a construct of blessee/blesser relationships while distancing themselves from sex work which they view as a "*hustle*" and motivated by "*a need to survive, to eat*". Furthermore, young urban women emphasised that "*blessees are not the same as sex workers…blessees have choice, blessees do not sell their bodies, their basic needs are taken care of, they are motivated by choice, enjoyment and wanting nice things*". From this perspective, young urban black women engage in blesser relationships to acquire a high-status lifestyle and from deliberate action. This aligns with Stoebenau et al (2013) who argue that young women seek TS to access symbols of modernity and do so from deliberate action which makes them powerful agents in these relationships.

They demonstrated their agency by expressing how, *"being a blessee is not high risk, you choose who to sleep with and what that man must do for you… men respect blessees and not sex workers"*. They further revealed that "*spending time with my blesser is my choice, I am independent…I am not expected to show up on call, I am not a prostitute"*. These understandings of blesser relationships align with Groes-Green's (2013:105) argument that women who engage in TS maintain that, unlike sex workers who cannot choose their sexual partners, they have agency over the choice of their partner and seek out TS as a lifestyle choice and not for survival purposes. Moreover, they emphasised the temporary nature of blesser relationships when compared to sex work that is viewed as a *"job"*. In statements such as, "*You cannot live this type of lifestyle forever, you get in, get what is yours and get out"* and *"everyone knows these relationships don't last forever"*. The young urban women maintained that their educated status guarantees them future opportunities for upward mobility and economic freedom from their blessers.

The temporary nature of blesser relationships was also expressed in statements such as, "*I am in varsity right now, so I know I made it, I am going to have a good life"* and *"my end goal is to just get as much money and experiences from him until I reach a certain status as a successful and independent woman"*. In these statements the young women present themselves as active agents in their relationships, and counter the argument that women who practice TS motivated by material gain walk a fine line. If they fail to manage their identity or marry at an appropriate age and if they rely too heavily for too long on such relationships they may transition to sex work (Fielding-Miller, 2016). Furthermore, young urban women illustrate how agency is performed by exploiting their sexuality for material gain. According to Wamoyi et al (2010a), young women express power and agency by manipulating traditional gendered assumptions and use sex to charm rich men and access socio-economic power in return.

This was evident in accounts such as, "*I seduced him, I made it difficult for him to say no to me, and after that he couldn't resist me* and *"… when I need money… I dress up the way he likes, and I know he will give me what I want"*. These statements echo Leclerc-Madlala's (2003) argument that young women perceive themselves as active decision makers and empowered modern-day women due to their ability to receive material gifts from wealthy men after providing sex. Hence, sustaining these relationships is seen as an act of cleverness and self-assertion, and contributes to their self-perception as sexually liberated modern women. This construct of sexuality is further evident in expressions such as, "*I loved the class that comes with being able to attract the attention of an older men, who is willing to give you whatever you want just to sleep with you"*. Masvawure (2010) adds that young women's agency is further extended to their ability to extract gifts from older men while avoiding

sex. This viewpoint was dominant in accounts provided by young urban women who control the timing of their initial sexual encounters with blessers after receiving gifts and money.

For young women, avoiding or delaying sex is used as a chance to get to know the blesser so that the *"choice"* of engaging in the relationship is based on *"what the blesser can give you"*. As one blessee put it, *"you must take your time, you are not a prostitute. Let him spoil you... If you are too easy, then he will treat you like a prostitute".* This approach to blesser relationships illustrates how women are not powerless victims but reflexive agents in transactional relationships (Giddens, 1984). Regarding decision-making power, research on transactional sex offers a simplistic view of young women's decision-making power in exchange relations by framing men as the providers of resources who possess absolute power while women are viewed as recipients without agency (Bhana & Pattnam, 2011). This understanding highlights a need to examine women's agency beyond Western portrayals of black women as passive and submissive beings bound by patriarchy. It highlights as well that the amount of agency women display must not only be described as a dichotomy between agent and victim but also as a continuum of volition (Weissman et al, 2006).

In doing so, women's roles and agency are understood as varying within a given relationship over time and in sexual decision-making from extremes of powerful agent to vulnerable victim (Wight et al, 2006). It acknowledges that even in the context of absolute deprivation young women can still possess "thin agency" in areas such as partner selection, first timing of sex and termination of the relationship (Stoebenau et al, 2016). This understanding of agency was expressed in blessee/blesser relationships where young urban women's agency fluctuated in the various stages of their relationships. Agency was evident in the initiation phase, diminished in the maintenance phase and resurfaced in the termination stage of their relationships (Jewkes & Morrell, 2012). In the initiation stage of the relationship they explained that, *"most blessers approach you and not the other way around"* which allows young women to be *"in control of whatever was happening…".* According to young urban women this allows them to choose their sexual partners before engaging in sex[10]. This was expressed in statements such as, *"he had to spoil me and do a lot of things to show his seriousness and commitment, before I agreed to date him".*

However, in the maintenance phase of the relationship, young urban women's agency diminished. According to Jewkes & Morrell (2012:1732), although women possess agency in choosing their partner, once the relationship begins their agency diminishes after sex takes places due to lack of condom use. In the accounts provided by young urban women *"compromising"* was central to the

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[10] In the few instances where young women initiated relationships with blessers, their agency was compromised because sex was offered earlier than anticipated in order to secure the relationship.

sustenance of the relationship and often undermined young women's agency. Furthermore, Selikow & Gibbon (2010) and Jewkes &Morell (2012) argue that if sex is compensated with material gifts, this may increase men's dominance over women. This power dynamic was illustrated by young urban women who argued that, "*getting money from the blesser is not a spoken thing... it's a given*". *"The fact that he gives you money, it gives him power, he will want unprotected sex"* and through the understanding that *"men like control and power, if he is giving you money, he will control you"*.

In addition, young urban women's agency was further undermined when their wants slipped into needs. According to Selikow & Mbulaheni (2013:89), a "need-want slippage" occurs when young women have an actual need that diminishes their power in transactional exchanges. This was illustrated by one blessee who shared that, *"I don't really ask him for money or gifts, he just gives me. But, this one time, things were bad in my life {in what way?}-financially, my car was broken down and I need it for work, I asked him for money... he gave me the money eventually, but he was verbally abusive to me for a while, calling me a prostitute because I asked for money. I just took it, because I was desperate, and I had no choice"*. Age disparities also contributed to young urban black women's diminished agency. For these women, age differences which allowed blessers to act as advisors - evident in expression such as, "*he listens to my problems and gives me advice about life*" - often resulted in blessers exerting control over young woman which undermined their agency. This was evident in statements such as, *"sometimes he talks to me like I am kid, but I just have to tolerate it because I need the money"* and *"...at times he acts difficult, he will demand sex and he will exert dominance because he is an older man and knows how to manipulate women"*.

For Stoebenau et al, (2011), young women are restricted when negotiating sexual terms and condom use once the relationship commences and after the exchange of money. This unequal power relation between blessees and blessers was observed through statements such as, *"he will give me an expensive gift or money and then he will want unprotected sex, I end up doing it because I have to keep him happy"*. Another young urban woman revealed that, *"the condom thing is a big issue, but he gives me everything I want, so I let it go"*. These narratives about unwanted unprotected sex revolved around the materiality of the relationship that is embedded in young women's internalized self-pressure to "meet their side of the bargain". Therefore, young women's various accounts of diminished agency such as the lack of condom use, need-want slippages and their internalized pressure to live up to the expectations of their blesser relationships suggests coercion and should be regarded as a form of violence within blessee/blesser relationships. This is because the exchange of money creates unequal power relations that increase young women's vulnerability and susceptibility to coercion which are both markers of violence.

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However, in the termination stage of the relationship young women's agency resurfaced. For these women, the blesser's ability to provide is central to the maintenance of the relationship. Therefore, if a blesser can no longer provide financially, it leads to young women terminating the relationship.

As one blessee puts it, "*I ended things, I wanted more…I wanted him to increase my allowance, and to do more financially and he couldn't give me what I needed…I can't be stupid to give someone sex who doesn't take care of me*" and in statements such as, "*my last blesser went broke…I just had to sit him down and explain that, our agreement was over*". For these women, there is always someone willing to bless them as, *"there is plenty of fish in the sea"* and because "…*everyone knows these relationships don't last forever".* The abovementioned accounts of agency in blessee/blesser relationships provide insight into the material complexity, agency and experiences of young urban black women. Young women's experiences expand dominant understandings of transactional sexual relationships that often portray African men as the active, powerful and controlling agent in the area of sexuality while framing African women as victims of men's desires.

4.4.1.3 Instrumentality in blessee/blesser relationships

South Africa's high levels of HIV/AIDS shifted research from adequately addressing the extent to which money and love are tightly linked within TS to a focus on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention (Stoebenau et al, 2016:190). Therefore, when investigating the notion of "love" in TS dominant studies only focused on the coercive nature of sex for money exchanges linked to materiality (Harrison, 2008). This Western neoliberal approach analyses transactional sex from the contexts of excessive levels of disease, violence and poverty. Furthermore, it employs a Eurocentric conception of money as being taboo in intimate relationships based on the argument that money "corrupts and destroys the purity of love" (Groes- Green, 2013:114). This perspective ignores cultural aspects of love and the normalcy of gift giving in African sexual exchanges. According to Mampane (2018:6), African gender norms which detect that men must pay "lobola" (bride price) for the woman he intends to marry led to expectations for men to take care of women. Therefore, scholars of transactional sex argue that TS emerges from such cultural notions that expect men to offer women material gifts, and for women to reciprocate gifts with sex.

Wamoyi et al (2010b:9) add that these cultural understandings govern TS and have produced narratives whereby women "cannot have sex for free", because sex without compensation is seen as sex work and being "cheap". However, this interplay of love and money within TS continues to be underdeveloped. This highlights a need to investigate the diverse meanings of sexual exchanges by exploring the different contexts of young women's subjective lives while paying attention to socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. To address this, scholars such as Hunter (2010a), Bhana & Patttman (2011) and Mojola (2014) now emphasise the importance of love and desire in transactional

sex by looking at the shifting meaning of contemporary sexual exchanges in various parts of SSA. These scholars argue that there is a need to re-insert the discourse of "love" when analysing heterosexual relationships in SA because limiting transactional sexual exchanges to materiality is reductionist as TS is more complex than a straightforward exchange of sex and money because love and materiality are linked in intricate ways. This understanding of love in transactional sex is applicable in African communities, where women are taught to view men as breadwinners. Hence, notions concerning a supportive and loving partner are described by material support.

Similarly, in transactional relationships young women often refer to their partners as boyfriends as opposed to sex workers who identify their partners as clients (Ranganathan et al, 2017). Young urban black women expressed this in statements such as, *"I was introduced to my current blesser, actually boyfriend because I don't like the name blesser"*, and "*I don't really see him as a blesser but as my boyfriend".* Moreover, young women view it as normal to receive material gifts in sexual relationships since articulations of romantic love are associated with gift giving (Ranganathan et al, 2017:2). This understanding of love stems from cultural scripts, whereby men must redistribute their wealth to illustrate love, commitment, and appreciation and women reciprocate material compensation with sex as confirmation of their value, love and commitment (Leclerc-Madlala, 2008:23). This understanding demonstrates how the notion of love in Africa is rooted in a complex configuration of economic, social and cultural dynamics suggesting that, while there may be a universal ideology of love, how love manifests is always local (Harrison, 2008).

For young women, the link between love and money is a natural part of any sexual relationship construction, continuation and sustenance (Wamoyi et al, 2010a:3). In defining their blesser relationships, young women revealed that, *"a blesser should take care of the blessee's every need, which includes emotional support"* and *"a blessee receives gifts or an expensive lifestyle from an older man who promises to love her and take care of her".* The importance of love and emotional support was further emphasised by young women who state that, *"he is so caring…he goes the extra mile…he is really there emotionally…that's why I see him as my boyfriend, and a huge part of me loves him"* and *"we love each other...when it comes to me it's more of a relationship…there is a connection there,* as well as, "*of all three of my blessers, I only love one because he takes care of both my financial and emotional needs…I don't really see him as a blesser but as my boyfriend".* However, although young women claim the existence of love in blesser relationships, they attach love to the amount of material resources provided by their blessers.

This intricate linking of love and money stems from cultural understandings, where the strongest sign of a loyal partner is measured by a man's capacity to offer gifts and material support (Stoebenau et al, 2016:191). Therefore, to express affection is to offer gifts, and the greater the gifts, the more the

love (Maganja et al, 2017:978). Young urban black women further illustrated this understanding of love through statements such as, *"…when I agreed to date him, it was not for love but for money but things change…he is so caring, he gives me money and buys me nice things which is why I am with him"*. In addition, gendered beliefs that men offer financial support and women procreative labour within sexual relationships (Stoebenau et al, 2016:191) were exemplified by young urban women in statements such as, *"…Its expected in African culture for a man to provide for his woman…the money and gifts he gives me are not an issue because it's a man's duty to provide"* and *"Growing up my mum always emphasized the importance of marrying someone who can provide…I think it's natural for men to provide…and on the other side, sex is something you give men to show your appreciation for them, it is how they judge if you love them"*.

This understanding of blesser relationships aligns with Leclerc-Madlala's (2009) and Mains' (2013:343) argument that men and women enter relationships based on cultural assumptions that women will provide sex if men meet their role as breadwinners. In this context, men and women are expected to uphold these gendered roles which are based on exchange, since for men being a breadwinner is central to their constructs of masculinity, because a "real" man is seen as one who can take care of their loved ones, girlfriend or partner. This understanding is fundamental in young people's sexual relationships, irrespective of the women's own earnings or potential income (Nobelius et al, 2010). Moreover, because transactional relationships are rooted in cultural beliefs that men provide material gifts to women after receiving sex, young urban women revealed that, *"No black man will take you seriously, if you give them sex without having some form of expectation"*. This understanding of relationships aligns with Nyanzi et al's (2001) argument that African men are suspicious of women who have low interest in monetary exchange for sex as they perceive them as being "loose" and possibly infected with HIV/AIDS. In addition, Wamoyi et al (2010b:10) argue that young women view men as exploiting them if sex occurs without compensation. This perception of blessee/blesser relationships was illustrated by the respondent who state that, *"If you just give them sex without having some form of expectation. For me it means, you don't have values and you don't care about yourself"*.

This notion of exchange in blesser relationships reproduces men's sense of entitlement to women's bodies because when material gifts are provided by blessers young women are expected to give sex in return. Furthermore, these cultural understandings of sexual interactions between women and men play a role in defining beliefs and attitudes towards sexuality and meanings attached to contemporary sexual relationships. Moreover, to further demonstrate the intricacies of love and money in blesser relationships young urban women alluded to feelings of love beyond the transaction.

As one blessee shared:

> *"in the beginning, I only saw my blesser as someone who chose to support my wants, it was not love…the relationship was motivated by money…I am now confused as whether I want to date my blesser or stay with my boyfriend…I know I have feelings for my blesser but I don't know if I should leave my boyfriend for a relationship that started based on money and not love".*

Furthermore, another young urban woman revealed that:

> *"you can't sleep with someone and not fall in love, it makes the whole thing blurry, a part of you is realistic that it's a temporary thing, but there are moments when he buys you flowers or sends you money without asking. You start to wonder maybe this is going somewhere, you end up being confused about what is your end goal, is it money or you want someone who happens to have money".*

On the other hand, some respondents argued that they were realistic about their expectations in blesser relationships. As one blessee put it, *"I am realistic, I know what we have is not love, so my end goal is just to get as much money and experiences from him… I try very hard to avoid romantic or love things. I am focused on getting a good life for myself and that's that".* These various understandings of blessee/blesser relationships illustrate how instrumentality is linked to emotional intimacy, as male provision is linked to love. Moreover, like agency, the extent of emotionality and instrumentality vary in relationships and over time (Stoebenau et al, 2016:192). For example, Clark et al (2010) argue that the linkages between love and provision may increase an individual's risk to HIV/AIDS because condom use diminishes based on the ideas of love and trust. The lack of condom use in blesser relationships was demonstrated in accounts provided by the young urban women. These women had limited power to negotiate sexual terms and condom use after establishing love and trust in their blesser relationships. However, they justified their lack of sexual decision-making power by arguing that material gifts and benefits are found more in unprotected sexual exchanges because unsafe sex is seen as a symbol of faithfulness as well as trust (Deane & Wamoyi, 2015:440).

This understanding was expressed in statements such as,

> *"I did love my blesser…in the beginning the relationship was based on gifts and money…but after some time we fell in love, so it changed into an actual relationship. We built trust to the point where we stopped really using protection",* and *"The condom thing is a big issue he doesn't like them. Honestly, it doesn't sit well with me, but I think because we have built trust, and he does give me everything I want, I just let it go because giving him what he wants, means I get everything I need".*

Lastly, the young women's relationships with blessers were initiated for material gain with these women exhibiting considerable levels of agency which allowed the nature of the relationships to transform over time and encompass varying degrees of love, friendship and affection. Young urban women highlighted the dangers of falling in love with a blesser as it might lead to the termination the

relationship if a blessee's *"feelings of love"* are not reciprocated by the blesser. As one blessee explains:

> *"I fell in love with my blesser and I ended up getting pregnant…he lost interest…he asked me what kind of life was I going to live with a child…he distanced himself from me…I tried to fix things by terminating the pregnancy but he replaced with me a younger girl…I knew then it was over, and it forced me to end the relationship with him"*.

Another blessee also shared that, *"…I fell in love…but after we started having unprotected sex, he became distant…eventually I ended things. I saw recently on social media that he got married"*. These accounts provided by young urban women display the intricacies of money and love in blesser relationships, and the need to develop new methods to theorize the evolving character of love and relationships in Africa. Firstly, this study acknowledges that there is some conflation of Western and African culture in post-apartheid South Africa, specifically in urban areas. This shift transformed the nature of love and relationships by partly eroding traditional norms and institutions and further dispersed ideas about sexual behaviour and identity (Selikow & Mbulaheni, 2013:86). This shift resulted in new ways of understanding sexuality that promote individual autonomy and choice which now compete with traditional ways (Gatter, 2000:563). Yet, despite these developments the notion of "love" is not featured in African research pertaining to sexuality and gender.

Therefore, there is a need to acknowledge the existence of love in blesser relationship and explore how love manifests in complex ways. This can be achieved by developing autonomous, geographically, historically and culturally grounded theories on love and desire in transactional sex. In doing so, African literature on TS will begin to recognize that the nature of love in blesser relationships is contingent, temporary and is based on fluid modernity and consumerism. Hence, blessee/blesser relationships must be understood as objects of consumption such that love becomes fluid and disposable (Bauman, 2003). Consequently, love for young women is then viewed as being linked to a mutual reciprocation based on the blesser's ability to provide financially and emotionally in exchange for sex and entertainment. However, this understanding of love is based on the condition that if one party cannot fulfil their side of the bargain the relationship ends or continues to exist in a different form such as a friendship.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided the data description and analysis of young urban black women's perceptions and motivations for engaging in blessee/blesser relationships. In the data description section, the research findings were presented in a concise and thematic manner and though all responses could not be cited, the most important accounts were detailed to capture young urban black women's voices, reality and agency in blessee/blesser relationships. In the data analysis section, the chapter sought to

drew attention to the multiple and overlapping contexts in which young urban women engage in blesser relationships shaped by political, socio-economic and cultural conditions. In addition, the analysis of blessee/blesser relationships aimed to highlight the intersectionalities of race, class and gender and illustrate how sexuality is lived and made sense by young urban black women beyond a Eurocentric perspective. The final chapter, *Conclusion,* will present this study's empirical findings on young urban black women's perceptions on blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

From a post-colonial perspective, this study explored the perceptions of young urban black women engaging in blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa. This research focused on understanding whether young urban black women view their blesser relationships as being different from conventional sex work. It investigated if there is a continuum of deprivation (absolute or relative), agency and instrumentality within blessee/blesser relationships. Furthermore, it explored what is causing the rise and normalization of blesser relationships amongst these women. This chapter will now present an analysis of the empirical findings on blessee/blesser relationships in SA from the perspectives of young urban black women. Thereafter, theoretical contributions to literature on African sexualities and transactional sex will be outlined. Lastly, based on the information gathered in this thesis, recommendations for further study will be made and an overall conclusion will be given.

5.2 Empirical Findings

5.2.1 The Nature of Blessee/Blesser Relationships in South Africa

To date, dominant literature frames young women's involvement in TS within the vulnerability paradigm with intervention efforts centred on creating awareness on the inappropriate and abusive character of relationships between young women and wealthy men. While this research acknowledges the layers of disparities found in transactional sexual relationships, the study argues that a sole focus on young women's vulnerability ignores research by scholars such as Brouard & Crewe (2012) and van der Heijden & Swartz (2014) who provide evidence that such an approach to TS stigmatizes both parties involved in TS because it limits men participating in these relationships to perpetrators and women to victims. Furthermore, it overlooks data that highlights how transactional relationships are not always based on a perpetrator-victim dynamic because young women may approach older men instead of the opposite. Zembe et al (2013) agree with this position and add that, while relationships between young women and older men can be exploitative, they can also be nurturing or caring[1].

Similarly, a post-colonial feminist analysis of blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa revealed that transactional relationships are not always motivated by absolute deprivation or sought out by impoverished young women at risk of sexual mistreatment by their older male counterparts. On the

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[1] For example, a study by Luke (2003) demonstrates how older male partners are more marriageable and are likely to support their multi partner relationships as well as any children that can result from these transactional relationships. Furthermore, the study provides evidence that the wealthier the men the more likely they are to engage in protected sex.

contrary, young women engaging in blesser relationships seek out blessers due to relative deprivation. These women pursue blessers to acquire a high-status lifestyle, upward social mobility as well as for fun and entertainment. This was demonstrated through young women's ability to meet their basic needs such as shelter and food. Consequently, young women fashion themselves as blessees to satisfy their wants rather than needs. They seek luxury items such as designer clothes, expensive cars and overseas trips which they regard as "needs" because they are central to their construction of a sophisticated lifestyle, status and success associated with northern Johannesburg. Therefore, they view blesser relationships as a mutually beneficial exchange which allows them to give sex and access commodities of modernity in a gendered and racialized South Africa.

In Chapter 2, the literature review, evidence was provided on the significance placed on attaining financial and material commodities for social mobility amongst black people in South Africa. Similarly, young women argued that seeking out blessers is motivated by societal pressures to acquire luxury consumer goods and the "need" to attain markers of modernity. This is because the desire to acquire symbols of success driven by increased visibility of consumer goods occurs in an environment of growing economic inequalities in SA that marginalizes black men and women. Therefore, young women seek out blessers for material gain and exchange sex for financial gifts because they regard it as the *"easiest"* way for them to gain luxury items and achieve their desired social status. Furthermore, these women also seek blesser relationships to enhance their status, to maintain lifestyles otherwise unaffordable to them and to differentiate themselves from their "poorer" peers. Simply put, neoliberal globalization has led to young women developing new needs and desires for modernity and aspirational lifestyles and this has resulted in a rise in blessee/blesser relationship for material gain because young women view these relationships as the easiest way to achieve social upward mobility in a society that economically marginalizes black women.

Regarding agency, young women's accounts of agency challenge Western understandings of African sexualities which portray men as powerful and controlling agents in the area of sexuality while framing women as victims of men's desires. Firstly, young women perceive themselves as powerful agents who engage in blesser relationships by choice by arguing that their relationships with blessers are from deliberate action, emphasised through their ability to "choose" a blesser. From this standpoint, young women distinguish themselves from sex workers whom they portray as having no choice and exchange sex for money motivated by absolute deprivation. The respondents emphasised their choice by describing the temporary nature of blesser relationships. They focus attention on their educated status as guaranteeing them future opportunities for upward mobility and economic independence from their blessers. Therefore, they regard blesser relationships as a temporary lifestyle

choice motivated by a "need" for a high-status lifestyle which they state is different from sex work, a "hustle" for survival.

Thirdly, young women demonstrated how they express agency by exploiting their sexuality to attract wealthy blessers and access socio-economic power in return. These women see their ability to sustain relationships with blessers while simultaneously choosing the initial timing of their sexual encounters as an act of cleverness that contributes to their self-perception as sexually liberated women. They showcase their agency through their ability to avoid or delay sex in the initiation stage of the relationship in order to see what the blesser can provide financially. This ability to navigate their sexuality leads them to self-identify as active decision makers and empowered modern-day women who reciprocate sex after receiving financial and material gifts from wealthy men. However, despite having high levels of agency in blesser relationships, their accounts of blesser relationships also revealed that young women's agency fluctuates within a given relationship and over time. Therefore, their agency was evident in the initiation stage of the relationship, diminished in the maintenance phase and resurfaced in the termination of the blesser relationship.

Firstly, the majority of young women expressed that most blessers approached them in the initiation stage of the relationship. Forming a relationship with a blesser happened at their own pace which allowed them to be in control. However, this control and agency diminished in the duration phase of the relationship as "compromising" becomes vital to the sustenance of the relationship. According to young women, receiving material gifts and money from their blessers diminishes their power in the area of sexual decision-making. Due to their blesser's ability to manipulate their "need" for money by exerting sexual dominance within the relationship, the respondents provided reasons such as "fear of being replaced by their blessers", "trust", "love" and substantial material gifts if sex is unprotected as factors that further limit their agency. Their agency was also undermined when their wants converted into actual needs and created a "need-want" slippage. In this scenario, young women were prone to giving into their blesser's requests for unprotected sex. However, their narratives of engaging in unprotected sex with blessers mostly revolved around the transactional nature of their relationships that is rooted in their internalized self-pressure to give sex after receiving material gifts.

In the termination stage of the relationship, young women's agency resurfaced. According to these women, a blesser's ability to provide is central to the maintenance of the relationship. Therefore, if a blesser is unable to provide financially they will end the relationship. Young women rationalized this decision using gendered cultural norms which dictate how *"a woman cannot give sex for free"* and how *"it is a man's duty to provide".* Therefore, while some women expressed feelings of love for their blessers, all women emphasised that sex without compensation is a sign of low self-worth and

is understood as a signifier for low levels of care and appreciation from their blessers, a notion which was extended to their primary partners.

Secondly, young women revealed that they may terminate their blesser relationships if they achieved their desired social status or realized economic independence. This rationale was linked to the temporary nature of blesser relationships as well as young women's educated status which they view as guaranteeing them future opportunities for job opportunities and economic independence from their blessers. In addition, reasons such as *"losing interest in the relationship"* and *"the need for more material gifts"* were also provided as motives for terminating a blesser relationship.

Young women also demonstrated that blesser relationships are more intricate than a simple exchange of sex and materiality by illustrating how money and love are interlinked in complex ways. Their accounts of blesser relationships also revealed that there is a conflation of African tradition and Western culture in the urban areas of South Africa such that new ideas about love and relationships have emerged. Therefore, their experiences with blessers must be understood by looking at the interplay and the structuring roles of money, race and culture. Firstly, their accounts of blesser relationships are influenced by cultural understandings of love that normalize gift giving in African sexual exchanges[2]. Young women also believe that it is normal for partners to exchange gifts in sexual relationships because demonstrations of romance and love are connected to gift giving. Consequently, these women argue that love and money are a crucial part of forming, maintaining and sustaining a relationship. Because they view their blessers as boyfriends, they state that a loving and supportive boyfriend provides financial support.

Beyond financial support some women expressed how they expect love and emotional support from their blessers. However, their understanding of love and support is based on the amount of material resources provided by their blessers. This intricate linking of love and money also stems from cultural understanding where the strongest indication of a committed partner is measured by a man's ability to offer gifts and material support. Therefore, to show love is to give presents and the bigger the gifts, the more the love. Young urban women seek out blessers based on this perspective and will only provide sex if a man lives up to this expected role of the provider. Blessee/blesser relationships are influenced as well by cultural norms that require men to share their resources with women and for women to reciprocate with sex. Young urban black women view men as exploiting them if sex occurs

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[2] The normalization of gift giving in African sexual exchanges stems from African gendered norms that require men to pay "lobola" (bride price) for the women they anticipate marrying. This gendered norm has led to cultural expectations for men to provide for women financially and TS emerges from this cultural expectation for a man to give women material gifts, and for women to reciprocate gifts with sex (Mampane, 2018:6).

without compensation because they view their sexuality as being worth something. Simultaneously, this notion of exchange in blesser relationships reproduces men's sense of entitlement to women's bodies because, when material gifts are provided by blessers, young women are expected to give sex in return. These accounts of blesser relationships demonstrate how instrumentality is linked to emotional intimacy, as men's provision is linked to love. It is important to note that just like agency the amount of instrumentality and emotionality varies in blesser relationships and over time and for young urban women this was highlighted through experiences surrounding *"condom use"*. It was clearly acknowledged that unprotected sex with blessers yielded more material benefits. The respondents revealed that condom use was reduced by feelings of love and trust which limited their power to negotiate sexual terms in the maintenance phase of the relationship. According to the young women, they consent to unsafe sex because their blessers view it as a sign of faithfulness and trust. In addition, some women highlighted the dangers of falling in love with a blesser. For those women, falling in love with a blesser (if the blessee's feelings of love are not reciprocated by the blesser) not only leads to non-condom use but may result in a blesser losing interest after engaging in unprotected sex. Furthermore, if a blessee falls pregnant it might lead to the premature termination of the relationship by the blesser. This is because blessers have primary partners and engage in blesser relationships to have sex with beautiful women or *"trophies"*. Consequently, falling pregnant "ruins" the *"trophy fantasy"* because it reminds blessers of the reality they have at home (wife and children) which leads to a loss of interest in the relationship or the replacement of the blessee with someone else.

In summary, the accounts provided by the young urban women demonstrate that blessee/blesser relationships can be understood as being contingent, temporary and based on fluid modernity and consumerism. From this perspective, love in blesser relationships is based on receiving emotional and financial provision from blessers in exchange for sex and entertainment. Therefore, if one party can no longer fulfil their obligations within the relationship, it may lead to either parties terminating the relationship, or the relationship transitioning to another form such as a friendship.

5.2.2 Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasised Femininity

This study acknowledges that young women's accounts of blessee/blesser relationships demonstrate their agency and challenge one-dimensional representations of transactional relationships. However, this research argues that their engagement in blesser relationships challenges and reproduces patriarchal structures (Hunter, 2002:101) in the following ways. Firstly, their beliefs that men must provide and take care of their needs, while simultaneously attempting to achieve financial independence from their blessers, upholds their emphasised femininity in blesser relationships and reproduces gender inequality over time. In addition, it entrenches hegemonic masculinity and

reinforces core characteristics of hegemonic masculinity which view men as breadwinners and promote ideas that men have "uncontrollable" sexual appetites which makes them prone to sexual risk taking (Connell, 2005; Lindeggar & Maxwell, 2007; Mankayi, 2008; Muntingh & Gould, 2010 and Dworkin et al, 2012). Because these characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity are present in shared norms of sexual behaviour in African societies, they strengthen TS in South Africa by promoting problematic notions that men's sexuality is by nature uncontainable and men are naturally designed to require sex frequently with multiple women (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009:105). Consequently, pleasure in sex is then understood as being found in non-marital relations.

Young women's involvement with blessers also supports cultural scripts that men must demonstrate commitment, love and affection to their sexual partners through gift giving that is equal with a man's wealth and status. In exchange, women must demonstrate commitment, love and affection by *"giving"* sex after receiving material gifts because a woman cannot *"give sex for free"*. This understanding of African sexual relationships results in men feeling obligated to allocate their finances to women as a way of showing respect and appreciation for sex (Leclerc-Madla, 2009:108). This approach to blesser relationships not only fuels hegemonic masculinity but it also puts pressure on men to achieve these traits associated with this version of masculinity. Therefore, if men are not able to achieve these status markers of masculinity, they might compensate by over-emphasising other aspects of their masculinity in order to "prove" their masculinity through multiple partner relationships, lack of condom use and intimate partner violence (Walby, 1990).

With regard to multiple partner relations, scholars such as Silberschmidt & Rasch (2001), Leclerc-Madlala (2003), Bagnol & Chamo, (2004) and Moore et al (2007) argue that men's desires to illustrate "manhood" and "sexual prowess" leads them to engage in TS to boost their masculine esteem. This is because masculine success is often based on the idea of attracting the "best" and most partners while having power over those women. Therefore, male sexual attractiveness in various regions in Africa is connected to personal success and prestige as well as maintaining relationships with multiple partners (Braun, 2018:24). Consequently, by engaging in blesser relationships young women reinforce these problematic notions associated with African men's masculinity.

Furthermore, while young women engage in blesser relationships to challenge gendered economic inequalities, their relationships with blessers sustain notions that men seek out TS to portray an image of success and women engage in TS for economic reasons. It upholds their subservience to men because blesser relationships perpetuate the view that "men believe women seek out multiple partner relationships because they have no money" (Maganja et al, 2007:974). It also preserves problematic stereotypes that young women seek out blesser relationships due to absolute deprivation and that African men are suspicious of women who have low interest in monetary exchange for sex as they

perceive them as being "loose" and possibly infected with HIV/AIDS (Nyanzi et al, 2001). Therefore, by seeking out blessers for upward mobility and status, young women entrench unequal gender power relations where men use their economic power to gift women with material and financial goods in anticipation of sex. This uneven power dynamic is then sustained due to the gendered socio-economic environment found in SSA and South Africa that allows men to monopolize their resources and gain access to women in order to satisfy their sexual desires while undermining their marital relations (Luke, 2005:6).

Lastly, young women's diminished agency and limited decision-making power in blesser relationships entrenches men's "need" to demonstrate masculinity through the lack of condom use. According to Ranganathan et al (2017), agency amongst young women is limited when negotiating sexual terms and condom use once the relationship commences because non-condom use in TS often occurs after the exchange of money. Consenting to unprotected sex for material gain is seen as a sign of faithfulness and trust (Deane & Wamoyi, 2015:440), while simultaneously seeking financial emancipation from their blessers. Young women challenge and reproduce patriarchal structures as well as uphold the unequal socio-economic and political gendered society of South Africa.

5.2.3 Risk of Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Intimate Partner Violence

This research documented how young women's engagement in blesser relationships demonstrates their agency in areas such as partner selection, first timing of sex and in terminating the relationship. In their accounts of blesser relationships the respondents expressed agency by using their sexuality to meet needs and acquire wants from blessers, while perceiving blesser relationships as equalizing gender power in sexual relationships. However, this study argues that young women's attempts to reshape masculine power dynamics in blesser relationships occur within a gendered and unequal society since their expression of agency creates layers of inequality within blesser relationships. This inequality upholds the socio-economic dominance of men over women, linked to violence and GBV[3] (Dunkle et al, 2004). According to Duncan et al (2007), gender-based violence is high in TS. Shefer et al (2012a:436) argue that there has been an increase in gender-based violence in Southern Africa, particularly in age-disparate heterosexual transactional relationships.

In South Africa research on TS reveals that women that have lifetime experiences of abuse from their male intimate partners. Women with problems of alcoholism and drug use, women who live in urban

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[3] The theme of gender-based violence was not fully explored in the gathering of secondary and primary data for this study. Based on young women's experiences, this study identifies violence and gender-based violence as a risk factor that can manifest over time within blessee/blesser relationships. This is because women involved in TS are at a high risk of sexual and physical abuse (Maganja et al, 2007:975).

areas and those facing economic deprivation are more likely to engage in transactional sex. On the other hand, women who delay first timing of sex, married women and those who have completed their tertiary education are unlikely to participate in TS (Dunkle et al, 2004). Participants in this study delay the first timing of sex, have a tertiary education and form relationship with wealthy men. Therefore, their accounts of blessee/blesser relationships did not include experiences of physical coercion or abuse. However, although young women's accounts of blesser relationships did not include incidents of gender-based violence, recent studies on TS provide evidence that middle- and upper-class intimate partner violence occurs within South Africa (Gibson & Rosenkrantz Lindegaard, 2007).

Based on this evidence, this study argues that young women engaging in blesser relationships face risks of intimate partner violence in these relationships. Firstly, despite having choice and agency in blesser relationships demonstrated in their ability to navigate their sexuality and gain material gifts from their blessers, young women do so at the risk of GBV and intimate partner violence. According to Groes-Green (2013), while young women express power and agency by utilizing their "erotic power" to lure wealthy men in the prospects of economic and social power, they do so at the risk of sexual violence and the contraction of STIs. Dunkle et al (2004:1589) support this position adding that young women's perceptions that *"a woman should get something tangible from sexual relationships"* creates an avenue that enhances partner violence (Dunkle et al, 2004:1589).

 In addition, because young women's agency diminishes during the maintenance stage of a relationship, it puts them in a space of vulnerability (Shefer & Strebel, 2012b:60) and at risk for sexual and physical violence. According to Steobenau et al (2011), in the maintenance stage of the relationship men often determine the sexual terms of the relationship and they may do so with violence. Certain young women also revealed that they engage in unwanted sex with their blessers to meet their "needs". By doing so, it puts them in a vulnerable position and might lead them to tolerate sexual or physical violence from blessers in order to maintain the relationship and access their "needs" (Dunke et al, 2007:1237). In this study, young women's experiences of diminished agency in the maintenance phase of the relationship should be viewed as forms of violence because the exchange of sex for money occurs in the context of unequal power relations, coercion and vulnerability. And suggests the need to investigate the presence and risks of GBV within the sex for upward mobility and sex and material expressions of love paradigms of transactional sex.

Thirdly, although young women demonstrate agency in the termination phase of the blesser relationship, their decision to terminate the blesser relationship can also put them at risk of intimate partner violence. Studies conducted by Gibson & Rosenkrantz Lindegaard (2007) and Shefer et al (2012a:436) reveal how young women are in danger of abuse if they refuse sex or try to terminate

the transactional sexual relationship. Watts et al (2012) add that, if a man becomes suspicious of a woman's motives for engaging in the relationship or if a woman does not reciprocate sex after exchanging material gifts, he may feel justified to physically or sexually violate the woman.

Some respondents revealed that they have primary partners outside of their blesser relationships which increases their risk of intimate partner violence. According to Wood & Jewkes (2000), if a women's primary partner discovers their involvement in transactional relationships, he might respond with violence. This association between transactional sex and violence can be linked to male sexuality, men's need to exercise gendered power and the pressures put on men to show their ability as the breadwinner or provider (Shefer & Foster, 2009; Anderson, 2010). In South Africa research on men engaging in transactional sex reveals that a man's capacity to provide for their girlfriend or spouse is crucial to dominant constructs of masculinities. Consequently, the perpetration of physical or sexual violence stems from such ideas that men are financially responsible for women and that women reciprocate material gifts from men with sex (Maganja et al, (2007).

For Hunter (2010:108), the decline of marriage is linked to the rise of transactional sexual relationships with multiple partners that has resulted in men valuing multiple partner relationships while labelling women with multiple boyfriends as promiscuous. This framing of women's engagement in TS has led to men feeling legitimatized to violently "discipline" women. Therefore, if women do not reciprocate sex after receiving material gifts, men may resort to violence on women in order to assert control over them (Duncan et al, 2007:1244). Firstly, these acts of violence against women are rooted in men's privileged socio-economic status that gives them substantial power over women's sexualities. Secondly, the need to "prove" masculinity through violence is also perpetuated by cultural understandings of masculinity in South Africa which adds to young women's vulnerability to physical and sexual violence (Zembe et al, 2013:2).

For instance, in many South African communities physical and sexual violence is committed by men after the exchange of material gifts. Gender-based violence is tolerated in these communities because women who accept material gifts from men are seen as giving "implied consent" and are expected to reciprocate gifts with sex[4] (Wojcicki, 2002b). These communities view the acceptance of gifts by women as entering a mutually agreed upon sexual relationship, meaning when women accept material gifts from men it is understood as providing consent for sex which leaves them with no power to refute or negotiate sexual terms. Therefore, if women receive gifts from men and do not reciprocate with sex, they risk being beaten or raped by men. Also, if a woman fails to reject a man's sexual

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[4] See Wojcicki 2002b, "She drank his money": survival sex and the problem of violence in taverns in Gauteng Province, South Africa. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 16:267-293.

advances after the exchange of gifts, it is not considered rape[5] by the community because accepting material gifts from men is equated with giving consent for sex (Wojcicki, 2002b).

Similarly, a study by Potgieter et al (2012) provides evidence on how South African communities believe that young women who receive money from men cannot decline their sexual advances. Young women within these communities are also of the opinion that women who receive gifts from men without reciprocating with sex warrant to be beaten[6]. This normalization of violence against women in SA mirrors the general silence that shrouds sexuality in southern African which prevents open discussions about sexual matters and contributes to the condoning of violence against women (Wojcicki, 2002b:284). It suggests that intimate partner violence, rape and gender-based violence are a "private affair" not classified as violence that needs to be criminalized or prosecuted (DeKeseredy, 2011). Moreover, it suggests that sexual and physical violence against women by men is acceptable and is viewed as an effective way for men to keep control of their relationships. Although young women have agency in blessee/blesser relationships for upward mobility and status, they engage in blesser relationships at the risk of physical and sexual violence because blesser relationships occur within a gendered and unequal society where intimate partner violence is prevalent and normalized.

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

5.3.1 The utility of Post-colonial Feminism(s) for Analysing African Sexualities

This research illustrated the importance of post-colonial feminism in challenging the limitations of Western feminism when analysing African sexualities. In the literature review of this study, a post-colonial feminist analysis identified Western feminisms' constraints of Third World women's voices that has produced a "superior" feminist script. In addition, it demonstrated how Eurocentric ideals of knowledge production result in the universalizing of feminist experiences that excludes African experiences. Therefore, a post-colonial analysis illustrated how dominant literature on African sexualities alienates African feminist writing and deems it satisfactory when approved by Western counterparts (Lazreg, 2005:71). Based on this understanding, post-colonial feminism highlighted the need for feminist research that analyses Africa on its own merits while making African experiences a priority when producing social theory (Oyewùmí, 2001:3).

Regarding women, scholars such as Nfah-Abbenyi (2005:270) and Nnaemeka (2005:57-58) argue that women in Africa have discussions about their sexualities and bodies and thus it is African women who must set their own agenda and priorities. Consequently, anyone seeking to contribute to their

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[5] Rape defined as sex without consent between partners.

[6] See Potgieter et al, 2012, "Taxi "sugar daddies" and taxi queens: Male taxi driver attitudes regrading transactional relationships in the Western Cape, South Africa.

struggle must participate based on their agenda (Nnaemeka, 2005:57-58). Therefore, this study's use of a post-colonial lens was instrumental to this objective because post-colonial feminism seeks to deconstruct the image of black women as a singular group with the same desires and interests regardless of social class, ethnicity and racial location. In addition, it aims to dismantle the homogenization of black women's oppression which labels them as "exploited", "powerless" and "victims" of socio-economic systems. Furthermore, this study identified post-colonial feminism as crucial in analysing African sexualities because of its ability to question African sexualities without marginalizing them by recognizing that sexualities in Africa are viewed differently by various cultures and classes of women (Mekgwe, 2006:16).

The use of a post-colonial lens in this study also contributed to problematizing dominant studies on sexualities in sub-Saharan Africa that limit conversations on women's sexualities to HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention while drawing on Western literature to analyse the very same sexualities (Tamale, 2011:32). This research also highlighted that dominant research on HIV/AIDS awareness stems from the ever-growing commodification of sexual health that has contributed to the distribution of subjective interpretations of African sexualities by Western scholars (Tamale, 2011:34). Therefore, the bulk of the body of knowledge on sexualities in Africa continues to emanate from the Global North and in publications authored by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and agenda-setting donors (Stoebenau et al, 2016:188). This is evident in current HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention efforts implemented in SSA that are rooted in gender stereotypes gained from the West and highlight men's domination and women's subordination (Arnfred, 2004:25).

 This focus on high levels of HIV infection has led to linking women's lack of "bedroom power" to assumptions that, if women had the agency to refuse unprotected sex, the HIV infection rate in Africa would decrease (Machera, 2004:179). Postcolonial feminism illustrated that by focusing solely on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention measures it undermines the multifaceted nature of sexuality in SSA and ignores the post-colonial contexts in which TS occurs (Undie & Benaya, 2006:125). It also re-inserts colonial modes of analysing sexuality in Africa that are paternalistic, moralistic, racist, and rooted in neoliberal thinking (Stillwaggon, 2003:809-810). Moreover, a post-colonial feminist lens highlighted Western feminists' failure to conceptualize the status of African women as a historically evolving phenomenon by reducing African women to one dimensional representations. Therefore, by using post-colonial feminism this study documented young urban black women's accounts of blesser relationships to generate positive discourses around women's sexual desires as well as to describe

and create African women's sexualities beyond a Western denial of sexual pleasure[7] (Undie & Benaya, 2006: 147).

This study used a multi-disciplinary approach to TS that combined Stoebenau et al's (2016) sociological framework for TS with post-colonial feminism to document the blessee/blesser relationships in SA from the perspective of young urban black women. In doing so, this research captured the core and complexity of transactional sexual relationships. This is because few studies investigate the interplay between the three paradigms of TS, "sex for basic needs", "sex for upward mobility and status" as well as "sex and material expressions of love" with most literature focusing on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. Furthermore, this study illustrated young women's perceptions and motivations for engaging in blessee/blesser relationships as a continuum rather than as three discrete paradigms because any one of the paradigms taken alone results in an incomplete view of the blessee/blesser phenomenon. The purpose of this analysis was to contribute to the enhancement of discourses on sexualities in SSA beyond HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

However, in reconstructing the understanding of African sexualities, this study did not simplify or ignore the issue of HIV/AIDS pertinent to sub-Saharan Africa[8]. In fact, it sought to balance the image of sexuality in Africa by revealing different motivations for young black women's engagement in TS beyond the dominant "sex for survival" and HIV/AIDS discourses. Post-colonial feminism was central to achieving this goal because it gave voice and agency to young urban black women by documenting their perceptions and motivations for pursuing TS outside of HIV/AIDS discourses. Therefore, a post-colonial feminist analysis of the blessee/blesser phenomenon in SA contributed to the body of scholarship on TS and explored young urban black women's sexualities and agency in their pursuit for modernity. Moreover, its analysis of African women's sexualities explored the different contexts of women's subjective lives influenced by social, economic, cultural and political

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[7] Despite it being crucial to develop African theories of sexuality. Western approaches to sexuality cannot be completely disregarded because modern codes of sexual morality and legislation concerning sexuality in Africa are rooted in European traditions. In addition, using existing theoretical bases (despite them being based on Western understandings) can be vital in examining sexualities in Africa if it is done with continental specificities in mind (Tamale, 2011:41).

[8] This study acknowledges that SSA is classified as an epicentre of the HIV epidemic worldwide. Furthermore, SA is viewed as a nation with high numbers of individuals living with HIV on a global level. Women in SA are also more vulnerable to HIV infections than men with new infections dominant amongst teenage girls and young women between the ages of 15 to 24 years. Young black South African women are at risk of HIV/AIDS as research identifies black women between the ages of 20 to 34 years as the demographic with a high HIV prevalence rate. However, young women who reside in non-urban communities have a bigger risk of contracting HIV than young women in urban areas (Mampane, 2018:1).

environments while acknowledging the intersectionalities between class, race, and gender (Mohanty, 1984).

Furthermore, a post-colonial feminist analysis of blessee/blesser relationships sought to address Western biases that portray the African male as the active, powerful and controlling agent in the area of sexuality while rejecting notions of an all-encompassing hegemonic masculinity presented by the West, which continues to view African women as subordinate to men's wants and needs (Groes-Green, 2013:115). In doing so, it challenged Western misconceptions that women and girls in Africa often seek exchange relationships to acquire basic needs rather than for sexual desire or to form sexual intimacy. This is a theme that continues to shape understandings around the sexuality of young people in SSA. Therefore, a post-colonial feminism analysis of the blessee/blesser phenomenon from the perspective of young black women was an attempt to correct the conceptual framing of sexuality in SSA that has produced the portrayal of black women's sexuality as dangerous, excessive and spreading deadly diseases (Anfred, 2004). This study sought to detail and describe African sexualities while creating a worldview that puts both African men and women at the centre in affirming ways (Apusigah, 2006:39; Gqola, 2006:46).

5.4 Recommendations for Future Study

This study adopted Stoebanau et al's conceptual framework on transactional sex and provided a post-colonial feminist evaluation of young urban black women's perceptions as well as motivations for engaging in blessee/blesser relationships. However, due to the limited reach of this research there are a numerous areas that require further study. Firstly, there is a need to move beyond Stoebenau et al's framework for analysing transactional sex by exploring other paradigms of transactional sex beyond the continuum of deprivation, agency and instrumentality. This will broaden the understanding of African sexualities, the motives for engaging in sex for money exchange relationships and the multifaceted nature of transactional sexual relationships in SSA.

Secondly, the experiences documented in this study are restricted to young urban black women residing in northern Johannesburg. Therefore, there is a need to apply the methodology and theoretical frameworks used in this study to capture the accounts of young urban black women in different regions of SA. In doing so, it will reveal experiences that are unique to those contexts and will help broaden the understanding of African women's sexualities beyond Western simplistic views of African women as one-dimensional, poor and powerless victims. Furthermore, expanding the scope of this study might generate data for comparative analysis that will broaden the understanding of TS while giving voice and agency to young urban black women engaging in blessee/blesser relationships.

In addition, this study included only young urban black women in its sample population, so there is a need to explore men blessers' experiences, perceptions and motivations for seeking blessees. To date, the documentation of blesser experiences is under explored or presented from women's perspective, thus highlighting the need to provide a holistic understanding of men's engagement in TS beyond existing literature. However, the detailing of men's perspectives should be done using a post-colonial feminist lens because post-colonial feminism acknowledges the importance of men, based on the logic that for African feminism to succeed it cannot be detached from the opposite sex, since post-colonial feminism does not reject men but encourages men to be conscious of women's subordination which differs from the general subjugation of all Africans. Its inclusion of men is a defining feature that separates it from Western feminism (Mekgwe, 2006:16) making it appropriate for exploring men's roles in transactional relationships. By researching the subjective narratives of men engaging in transactional sex it will allow for both intervention and scholarship to move beyond narratives of young women as victims of older men.

Lastly, there is a need to explore the role of masculinities in transactional relationship and its links to GBV. This study highlighted the role of hegemonic masculinities in blesser relationships as well as how men can overemphasise other aspects of masculinity if they are not able to achieve societal markers of masculinity. This study also identified violence and GBV as manifestations of men's attempt to "prove" their masculinity. However, since dominant research on GBV in transactional sex focuses on violence within the sex for survival paradigm, there is a need to expand the scope of research and investigate the presence and risks of gender-based violence within the sex for upward mobility and sex and material expressions of love paradigms of transactional sex.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings concerning the nature of the blessee/blesser phenomenon in SA from the perspectives of young urban black women. It demonstrated that young women seek blessers based on relative deprivation and to access a high-status lifestyle and upward social mobility. These women engage in blesser relationships mostly from a position of agency and power and view blesser relationships as a mutually beneficial exchange that allows them to give sex and access commodities of modernity. These women distinguish themselves from sex workers by constructing themselves as girlfriends, while emphasising the temporary nature of their relationships. Therefore, their experiences of blesser relationships challenge dominant Western understandings of African sexualities that frame women as powerless victims of men. Thereafter, this chapter demonstrated the utility of post-colonial feminism when investigating African sexualities and its contributions to re-righting the conceptual framing of black female sexuality in SSA. Lastly, this chapter mapped out

areas for future study necessary for expanding the scope of sexualities and transactional sex in SSA and South Africa.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Social Media Posts on the Blessee/Blesser Phenomenon

Blesser Finder SA @Ble... · May 12, 2016 ∨
Blessers?

> Hi , im a lady of 26 studying towards my diploma i would like a blesser who likes traveling and not afraid to spoil me at any cost.

💬 5   ↻ 3   ♡ 26   ⬆️

Blesser Finder SA @Ble... · May 12, 2016 ∨
Joburg Blessers?

> Hey I'm looking for a Blesser. A guy who is not older than 45 and lives in Jo'burg. He must have lots of money. Also willing to talk on WhatsApp only.

💬 5   ↻   ♡ 14   ⬆️

Blesserfinder
May 26, 2016 · 🌐

Praise Guard bazalwane. the devil is a liar

> I'm so happy guys after I decided to go to your website I couldn't put my pic because I'm in a relationship but I saw a potential Blesser invited him to whatsapp, we started chatting last week Wednesday then on suturday he sent me 500 he said its 4 airtym today he sent me 3000 to do my hair then tomorrow he's taking me shopping oh an yesterday we meet for dinner he's such a nice guy thanx for your service

Blesserfinder
June 2, 2016 · 🌐

Ku Bird bazalwane

> I'm not a dollar girl so the guy must be very rich.

> And can I be kept strictly confidential

> how much are you looking for

> 20 grand going up

> per year ? or ?

> Per year?no. Per month.

> I'm 19 and I live alone. I have fees to pay. Shopping to do. Rent. My hair to be done. I need someone that can afford me.

Appendix B: Gatekeeper Confidentiality Agreement

UNIVERSITEIT·STELLENBOSCH·UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

GATEKEEPER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

(Please fill out all sections of the form)

This agreement is entered into this ———— day of ———— 2018 between Ruvimbo Zawu (the researcher) and ———————————————————— (the gatekeeper) regarding the recruitment of participants for this study on blessee/blesser relationships in South Africa.

THE AIM OF THIS RESEARCH

This research analyses the blessee/blesser phenomenon in SA from the perspective of educated young urban black women from the age group of 20-30 years. This study focuses on young urban black women's views on sex for money exchange relationships or blessee and blesser relationships and whether these relationships are different from sex work. This study also investigates if there are any links between the different types of sex for money exchange relationships or blessee and blesser relationships based on the following types:

1. **Sex for basic needs**- sex is exchanged for necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, and education.

2. **Sex for upward mobility and status**- sex is exchanged for consumer goods such as expensive cell phones, luxury items and clothes, overseas trips and can be used to gain social status.

3. **Sex and material expressions of love**- based on an idea that sex is given by a woman if a man meets his expected role as a provider in emotionally intimate relationships.

This study identifies "educated young black women" as:

1. Black women who have acquired a secondary education/tertiary education or are in the process of completing their matric/tertiary studies.

And

2. Black women who are currently or have been in a blesser relationship.

In summary, this study explores young urban black women's views on blessee/blesser relationships and sex work as well as their motivations for participating in these relationships.

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TERMS OF CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

The gatekeeper agrees that:

1. The gatekeeper acknowledges their full understanding of the "**permission to be contacted for research"** consent form as explained by the researcher.
2. The gatekeeper will only approach participant/participants of this study who meet the requirements of educated young black women, within the age group of 20-30 years who self-identify as blessees.
3. The gatekeeper will ensure that members of this research are informed of the purpose of this research and fully understand the terms documented in the **"permission to be contacted for research"** consent form.
4. The gatekeeper will only forward contact details of participants to the researcher after written consent has been given by participant/participants.
5. The gatekeeper acknowledges that there will not be any form of remuneration for their role in this study. However, the researcher is responsible for the gatekeeper's travel costs in recruiting individuals for this research.

The researcher agrees with the following:

1. The researcher fully explained the "**permission to be contacted for research**" consent form to the gatekeeper before recruitment of participants begins.
2. The researcher will rely on the gatekeeper to initiate the first contact with potential participants of this study.
3. The researcher will only contact participants after receiving their written consent from the gatekeeper.
4. The researcher will not convene or converse with participants before written consent is given and/or before the interview.
5. The researcher will only interview participants that she does not know.

BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

The gatekeeper is in breach if:

1. The gatekeeper does not fully explain the **"permission to be contacted for research"** consent form to the potential participant/participants.
2. The gatekeeper forwards contacts details of participant/participants without their written consent.

If the gatekeeper is found in breach of this agreement, participant/participants recruited by the gatekeeper will not be used in this study. In addition, the gatekeeper will be released of their duties as the gatekeeper for this study.

The researcher is in breach if:

1. The researcher discovers the abovementioned gatekeeper breached the confidentiality agreement and continues with gathering data for this study.

2. The researcher speaks to any participant/participants before written consent has been granted and/or before the interview.

3. The researcher interviews people she knows.

If the researcher is in breach of this agreement, the gatekeeper is not under any obligation to continue participating in this study.

TERMINATION

The duties of the gatekeeper will be terminated in the following manner:

1. The gatekeeper can withdraw from participating and recruiting participants of this study at any given time without any consequence.

2. The gatekeeper is not waiving any legal rights because of their recruitment of participants for this research study or for withdrawing from this study.

3. The gatekeeper is not obligated to continue recruiting a participant/participants for this study after initial contact has been made.

4. Upon forwarding the contact details of participant/participants the duties of the gatekeeper are completed.

CONTACT DETAILS OF RESEARCHER

If you have any questions or queries concerning this research, please contact:

Ruvimbo Zawu at 079 663 8171, and/or the supervisor Professor Amanda Gouws at ag1@sun.ac.za.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT BY THE GATEKEEPER

As the gatekeeper I uphold that:

1. I have read the above requirements and it is worded in a language that I can understand.

2. I have had the opportunity to address any concerns and all my questions have been resolved.

3. All matters concerning confidentiality, privacy and the disseminating of information provided have been addressed.

By signing below, I _____ agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by _Ruvimbo Zawu___

_____
Signature of Gatekeeper   **Date**

DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER

As the **principal investigator,** I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the gatekeeper. I also declare that the gatekeeper has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, the conversation with the gatekeeper was conducted in a language in which the gatekeeper is fluent.

_____

Signature of Researcher   **Date**

Appendix C: Consent to Participate in Research

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in this research administered by <u>Ruvimbo Zawu</u>, from the Department of Political Science at Stellenbosch University. The researcher has identified you as a potential participant for this study as you were identified as an educated young urban black woman residing in northern Johannesburg, South Africa who can contribute their lived experience to this study on sex for money exchange relationships/blessee and blesser relationships. By giving your permission to contribute in this study, you confirm that you are or have been in a sex for money exchange relationship or blessee/blesser relationship.

1. AIM OF THIS RESEARCH

This research analyses the blessee/blesser phenomenon in SA from the perspective of educated young urban black women from the age group of 20-30 years. Additionally, you have been identified as a candidate because you have acquired a secondary education/tertiary education or are in the process of completing your matric/tertiary studies and are currently or have been in a blesser relationship. This study focuses on young urban black women's views on sex for money exchange relationships or blessee and blesser relationships, and if these relationships are different from sex work. This study also investigates if there are any links between the different types of sex for money exchange relationships or blessee and blesser relationships based on the following types:

4. **Sex for basic needs**- sex is exchanged for necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, and education.

5. **Sex for upward mobility and status**- sex is exchanged for consumer goods such as expensive cell phones, luxury items and clothes, overseas trips and can be used to gain social status.

6. **Sex and material expressions of love**- based on the idea that sex is given by women if a man meets his expected role as a provider in emotionally intimate relationships.

In summary, this study explores young urban black women's views on blessee/blesser relationships and sex work as well as their motivations for participating in these relationships.

2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?

By agreeing to participate in this study, you will be required to describe in detail your relationship with a blesser/blessers. The study will ask questions concerning your sexuality, previous and current sexual relationships with your blesser/blessers and/or other sexual partners. In addition, this study requires you to provide details concerning:

1. Your sexual relations with a blesser/blessers and other sexual partners.

2. Your financial information, specifically the source of your current lifestyle.

3. Personal feelings, views, and reflections on your relationship with a blesser/blessers.

4. Perceptions and opinions of others e.g. your family, friends and blesser/blessers on your blesser/blessers relationship.

5. Your long-term goals and how they might or might not relate to a blesser/blessers.

The aim of the discussion is to gather information on your opinions of blesser and blessee relationships, sex work and what motivates you to seek out these relationships. This study will ask you to recommend young urban black women in similar circumstances, who might be interested in sharing their lived experiences. **Please note**:

1. Recommendations of a potential participant/participants are voluntary and as a participant of this study, you are not under any obligation to do so.

2. You can withdraw your recommendations for this research at any instance without repercussions.

3. The details of potential participant/participants should only be forwarded to the researcher after receiving signed consent from the potential participant/participants.

4. The researcher will only contact participants after receiving their signed consent form

Gathering of Information

The gathering of information for this study will occur in the following way:

1. This research will be administered through in-depth semi-structured interviews.

2. The interview will be conducted in one seating ($\pm$ 1hr), in a location and time chosen by the participant.

3. The interview will be conducted in English and by participating in this study you consent to the use of English as the official language for conducting this interview. Furthermore, by participating in this study, you acknowledge you have acquired a secondary/tertiary education or are in the process of completing your matric/tertiary studies and such that you are able to answer questions in English.

4. The researcher alone will conduct the interview, using a research guide (pre-planned questions) to navigate the direction of the interview.

5. All interviews will be digitally recorded for reliability and accuracy and the interviewer will also make notes where necessary. The interviewer will digitally record the interviews to guarantee that your views, personal feelings, and opinions are presented in an accurate manner.

☐ **By ticking this box, you give permission to the interviewer to tape-record the interview**.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

This study foresees the following potential risks and discomforts:

- Loss or breach of confidentiality

- Risk to participant's livelihood/ income/employment/insurability.

- Stigmatization/Reputational risks/Embarrassment.

- Minimal inconvenience (time, travel).

The researcher will manage the abovementioned risks in the following way:

1. The researcher will make sure that discretion and confidentiality is used; therefore, no names will be asked during the interview process.

2. The researcher will use pseudonyms for each participant (e.g. Participant 1). However, although the researcher will assign the pseudonym to safeguard the confidentiality of participants, participants can choose their own pseudonyms if preferred.

3. The interview will happen at a time and in a venue that is suitable for the participant to ensure the privacy and anonymity of participants.

4. Only the researcher can view the interview responses.

5. Although the study investigates blesser relationships, whereby most young women in these relationships use their agency (the ability to act for oneself), the sharing of lived experiences may lead to emotional distress or discomfort.

Therefore, during the duration of the interview the following free counselling services will be made available:

Yolan Moodley- Counseling Psychologist

HPCSA No: PS 0124249

- Contact number: 071 342 7910

- Email: psychologist@yolan.net.

The services of the psychologist will be made available during the duration of the interview. However, if additional free counselling services are required this study recommends the participant to contact the following South African helpline service:

Lifeline Johannesburg

Counsellors assist individuals with challenges such as distress, suicide, and relationship challenges.

- National counselling line: 0861-322-322.

- WhatsApp number: 063 709 2620.

Website: www.lifeline.co.za

4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE COMMUNITY

Indirect advantage to the participant

By contributing to this research on blessee and blesser relationships the participant contributes to creating a better understanding of sex for money exchange relationships amongst young women in South Africa. The participants contribute their voices and lived experiences that are needed to change the understandings of black women as victims, powerless and exploited. This study intends to change the manner that black women's sexuality is viewed and linked to male control as well as HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

Benefit to society

This study aims to bring further understanding to blesser and blessee relationships in South Africa. This is important because few studies have investigated these types of relationships. Therefore, conducting research on the blessee/blesser phenomenon in South Africa will:

- Provide an accurate picture of blesser and blessee relationships from the viewpoint of young urban black women/blessees.

- Document lived experiences, opinions, and feelings of young urban black women/blessees.

- To provide an overall understanding of young urban black women's engagement in blesser relationships.

5. COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Participating in this research is by choice and for the purposes of understanding blesser and blessee relationships in SA from the perspective of the participant. Therefore, there is no compensation for contributing to this research. However, the participant will be paid for any expenditure incurred while partaking in this study such as travel costs.

6. PRIVACY

Any experience you discuss with the researcher in this study that might reveal your identity as a participant in this study will be safeguarded.

To safeguard the identity of the individuals participating in this study:

- The researcher will change the names of the participant, social media handles and location of participant used in the study.

- The researcher will remove any information that may lead to the participant's identification and will use pseudonyms for each participant in order to anonymize the data. The participant has an option to choose their own pseudonyms if preferred.

- The researcher alone will conduct the interviews.

- The interviews will occur in a place selected by the participant in order to protect their privacy and identity.

- The researcher's supervisor will only access interview responses stripped of any identifiers such as names, social media profiles, and location and will combine data from all the interviews conducted for this study so that no one individual can be identified.

Data Storage

To ensure the protection and integrity of your data against loss, corruption or theft as well as to protect the privacy of the participant, the interview tapes and notes will be kept on a password secured laptop belonging to the interviewer, in a hidden folder that only the interviewer can access. The folder will also be stored and backed up on a cloud namely, iCloud. The iCloud drive is a file hosting service that is password protected and can only be opened through fingerprint scanning. Therefore, iCloud automatically safeguards your data by putting it into code when it is in transit and keeping it in iCloud in a coded setup, while using reliable tokens for verification. This means only the interviewer can

access the recordings and notes from the interview. In addition, the computer will be kept in a secure filing cabinet in northern Johannesburg and in a room that will only be accessible to the researcher.

The original copies of notes from this interview will be scanned to the researcher's laptop and stored in a hidden password safeguarded file and stored on iCloud. Thereafter, hard copies of the interview responses will be destroyed. The transcribing of the interview tapes will occur in a private location and the researcher will use headsets to prevent eavesdropping or revealing the identity of the participant. Lastly, data will be stripped of any identifiers such as names, location and social media handles and stored on iCloud. This will also guard participants' identities in case of hacking.

Future use of Data

The data gathered from this research can be used for future research such as books, chapters in books, articles, social media campaigns, interventions, and presentation. However, participants' information will only be given after written permission has been sought out from the participants in this study. Furthermore, to protect the anonymity and privacy of participants, only combined data from all the interviews conducted for this study will be used such that no one individual can be identified.

7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose to continue with this research or not. If you decide not to continue with this research, you may remove yourself without any repercussions. You can decline to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with and continue in this research. However, the researcher can remove you from this research if:

- There is a concern that the primary research is exposing the participant to an unacceptable level of risk that is affecting or could affect the wellbeing of the participant.

In the case where the participant requests to withdraw from the study the participant will be required to sign a withdrawal from a research study consent form. This form will stipulate that:

- The participant will not be required to contribute to this study except if the researcher needs to notify the participant about a safety concern.

- Information about the participant will no longer be collected.

However, the participant will be reminded that all information collected in this study will continue as part of this research's record. However, only combined data from all the interviews conducted for this study will be used in this study such that no one individual can be identified.

8. CONTACT DETAILS OF RESEACHER

If you have any questions or queries about this research, please contact:

Ruvimbo Zawu at 079 663 8171, and/or the supervisor Professor Amanda Gouws at ag1@sun.ac.za.

9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

You can revoke your permission at any time and withdraw your involvement in this research without consequences. You are not waiving any rights by participating in this research study. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Ms. Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT

As the participant I consent that:

4. I have read the stated terms for this study and it is worded in a language that I understand.

5. I was able to address any concerns and all my questions were answered.

6. All concerns relating to confidentiality and the use of data have been addressed.

7. I give my permission to be contacted for this study.

By signing this document, I _____ consent to participate in this study as administered by Ruvimbo Zawu

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   **Date**

DECLARATION BY THE GATEKEEPER

The **gatekeeper** hereby acknowledges that the data included in this document has been fully explained to the gatekeeper. I also confirm that the participant has been prompted (and has been given enough time) to pose any questions. In addition, the discussion with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.

_____

 Signature of Gatekeeper   **Date**

DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

The **principal investigator** declares that the data presented in this document has been fully explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given enough time) to raise any concerns. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The interview with the participant was done in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The interview with the participant was administered with the help of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

_____ _____

Signature of Principal Investigator   **Date**

Appendix D: In-depth Semi Structured Interview Guide

Interview Guide for Young Urban Black Women Engaging in Blessee/Blesser Relationships.

1. Tell me about yourself?

   - Age

   - Occupation

   - Monthly income

2. Regarding your aspirational lifestyle, where do you see yourself in 5 years?

   Researcher, explain needs and wants:

   Needs are defined as things we must have to survive such as food, water and shelter.

   Wants are defined as desires for luxury goods, services, overseas trips, and other things you would like to have but do not need.

3. Based on your current and aspirational lifestyle, how do you define needs and what are your needs?

4. Based on your current and aspirational lifestyle, how do you define wants and what are your wants?

5. Tell me about your relationship with a blesser, how did it come about and who initiated the relationship?

6. Before entering a relationship with a blesser what was your:

   - Socio-economic status

   - Level of education

   - Employment status

   - Lifestyle

7. Based on your definition of wants and needs, was your choice to participate in a relationship with a blesser based on satisfying your "needs" or "wants"?

8. What is your understanding of a blessee? How would you define it?

9. What is your understanding of a blesser? How would you define it?

10. Do you see a difference between sex work and being a blessee?

11. How would you define sex work/prostitution?

12. How would you feel if someone called you a sex worker?

13. Are there any similarities between sex work and being a blessee?

14. How many blessers have you had?

15. How many blessers do you currently have and why?

16. What is the age difference between you and your blesser/blessers?

17. What is your blesser's marital status and does it matter to you?

18. Do you identify your blesser/blessers as your boyfriend/ boyfriends?

19. Are you in any other type of relationship besides the one with your blesser/ blessers?

20. What is your role in the relationship? What is expected of you?

21. What does your blesser/blessers give you? And what is expected of you in return?

22. Are you obligated to have sex with your blesser after receiving money or gifts?

23. Do you have feelings of emotional intimacy towards your blesser?

24. Is your decision-making power in the relationship/relationships influenced by the number of gifts and/or money you receive in the relationship?

25. Do you practice safe sex? If not, why?

26. What is your long-term goal for engaging in a blessee/blesser? (What do you aim to gain from the blessee/blesser relationship?)

27. Have you ever been taken on an overseas trip?

28. If your blesser/blessers cannot provide money or gifts, would you end the relationship?

29. Are you in a position to terminate the relationship at any given time?

30. What are the reasons that could lead to terminating a relationship with your blesser/blessers?

31. How would you go about terminating your relationship with your blesser/blessers?

32. Do you ever feel guilty about being in this relationship? If so, why?

33. Do your parents and family know about your relationship?

34. Do you have any friends in similar relationships?

35. Do you talk to each other about your blesser relationships and, if so, what is the nature of your conversation?

Appendix E: Request to Withdraw from Research Study

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

REQUEST TO LEAVE THE RESEARCH STUDY

(Kindly complete all parts of this form)

Name of Principal Investigator: ⸻

Title of Research: ⸻

I, ⸻ **request to terminate my contribution in this research.**

    (Name of Participant)

OR

I, ⸻ **consent with the researcher's**

 (*Name of Participant***)** **decision to terminate my contribution in this research.**

Removing my experiences from this research means:

- I will not be contacted about this study except if it is to notify of a safety concern.
- My experiences will not be gathered for this research.

I understand that any information documented as a contribution to this study will continue to be a part of this research records and will not be removed. However, data will be aggregated so that no one individual can be identified.

Signature of Participant   **Date**

Signature of Principal Investigator   **Date**