



# **CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINE SEXUALITY, HIGH RISK SEX AND HIV/AIDS AMONGST YOUNG XHOSA MEN IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**PRESENTED BY: Vuyelwa Mehlomakulu**

Social science that makes a difference



# BACKGROUND

- ✚ Most campaigns aimed at combating the spread of HIV infections in South Africa focus on behaviour modification in the form of:
  - Abstinence from sex,
  - Being faithful and
  - “Safe sex” practices.

# BACKGROUND, cont...

Social Aspect of HIV/AIDS  
and Health



However, these are not enough to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS on their own.

07/08/2008

Social science that makes a difference

# GAPS

Social Aspect of HIV/AIDS  
and Health

- ❖ Comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of HIV infections in specific social contexts.
- ❖ Lack of empirical findings exploring the gendered nature of HIV/AIDS particularly Constructions of Masculinity

# OBJECTIVES

- ✘ Relationship between constructions of masculinity and male sexual behaviours and practices
- ✘ To shift the focus HIV/AIDS interventions.

Social Aspect of HIV/AIDS  
and Health

# OBJECTIVES

This study aims to explore:

- Constructions of masculinity as a dimension of gender identity,
- Masculine sexuality as a dimension of masculine gender identity, and

# OBJECTIVES

- How these intersect and play out in the male sexual behaviours associated with the heterosexual transmission of HIV that have been implicated in increasing women's vulnerability to infection.

# METHODOLOGY

Social Aspect of HIV/AIDS  
and Health

- ✚ The study was done in South Africa, in the Western Cape province.
- ✚ A qualitative research method specifically Social Constructionist framework was employed.

07/08/2008

Social science that makes a difference



# METHODOLOGY

Social Aspect of HIV/AIDS  
and Health

- ✚ Social constructionism focuses on the discourses found in a particular culture at a particular time.
- ✚ Discourses can be seen as ‘practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak’, or simply as ways of speaking, thinking about, and doing things that are culturally legitimised.
- ✚ Thus discourses themselves have an organising function that serves an important purpose in establishing a sense of community and social identity.

# METHODOLOGY

- ✚ The sample consisted:
  - African Males,
  - Between the ages of 18-25 yrs.
  - Xhosa-speaking,
  - Sexually active males

# METHODOLOGY, cont...

- ✘ Data collection was done using:
  - Semi-structured interviews.
  - Interviews were taped, and transcribed verbatim

# METHODOLOGY, cont...

- ✚ The researcher used the Grounded Theory Method to analyse the data where:
  - A detailed line-by-line coding of each interview was done.
  - Then specific descriptions of each interview were done by laying out categories that came up from each interview.

# METHODOLOGY, cont...

- Then a focused selective coding of the most significant and frequent categories from the coding of each interview was done.
- This was done in a form of a general description of all the interviews by selecting the most common categories that came up from the specific descriptions which were relevant to the research question.

# RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

- The quality of the raw data was high in terms of its consistency, richness and texture.
- The responses from the participants indicated that the interview questions were unambiguous and were closely related to the phenomena under investigation.
- The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the participants spontaneity and expansion of expression in their responses, but that the responses were all closely related to the research question.

# RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

- Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure that researcher subjectivity did not influence what was recorded or how it was recorded.
- All the interviews were conducted in isiXhosa. The Xhosa transcripts were then translated into English.
- Back translation -To make sure that the English translations had the same meaning as the data collected in the tape recorders.

# RESULTS:

✚ Some of the important categories or themes that emerged during data analysis were:

➤ SEXUALITY AND MASCULINITY

➤ SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS



# RESULTS:

## SEXUALITY AND MASCULINITY

- sexuality as a competition
- sexuality as separate and uncontrollable
- sexuality as a source of self esteem
- sexuality as a cornerstone of masculinity

# RESULTS, cont...



## SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS

- Multiple sexual partners
- Interpretation of women's behaviour
- Coercive sexual behaviour
- Use of condoms
- Casual sex
- HIV disclosure

# CONCLUSIONS:

- ✚ Given that the men's identities, and the dynamics of worth that accompany them, appear to be firmly rooted in, and legitimised by prevailing gender discourses in the social environment, it follows that any intervention that fails to focus attention on :

# CONCLUSIONS, cont...

- a) Interrogating and altering those discourses and,
- b) Interrogating and reconstructing the relationship between men's sexuality and self worth, may fail to deliver satisfactory outcomes.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The Stellenbosch University Psychology Department for their supervision.
- EngenderHealth and the Men as Partners Project at Stellenbosch University campus for financing the study.
- Human Science Research Council for financing my trip to Mexico to present this study.