

“Remember to be faithful”: Socio-structural and Relationship-level Barriers to Fidelity in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Megan Klein Hattori (megan.klein-hattori@umb.edu), PhD
Department of Sociology, UMass Boston
(c) 202-258-1874

Word count: 2959

ABSTRACT

Until the recent interest in concurrency, there has been limited research on fidelity, leaving little known about how young adults in regions with HIV epidemics understand fidelity and its role in relationships as they transition to adulthood. Data stem from two rounds of semi-structured in-depth interviews with 48 participants aged 15-24 in the Mtoni ward of Dar es Salaam. Interviews were transcribed and imported to Nvivo, where elements that emerged as common or divergent from others were analyzed. Before becoming sexually intimate, young adults often discuss mutual expectations of fidelity. Young men’s sexual desire, driven by their inability to deny the attractiveness of women’s bodies, was the main reason participants felt young men struggled with fidelity. Young women’s structural disadvantages and need to use their sexual resources to attain other resources were seen as barriers to their fidelity. Young adults described both sexes as struggling with fidelity when their emotional and sexual needs were not met. Fidelity as a method of AIDS prevention permeates discussions between couples, yet social and structural factors such as a powerful male gaze and women’s limited access to resources must be addressed for couples to be able to meet their goals of long-term mutual fidelity.

Key words

Fidelity
Concurrency
Young adults
Tanzania
Social and structural intervention

Acknowledgements

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0623233 and conducted in collaboration with Population Services International. Comments and support from Ulla Larsen and Jon Hattori were instrumental throughout this research project. I would like to acknowledge the debt I owe to my colleagues in Tanzania, especially James Kajuna of PSI, Melinda Matinyi, Grace Mayala, Thobias Rutta of MAdeA, and Cerelinus Balthazar of MAdeA. Kim Longfield and Nancy Luke provided valuable feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript.

INTRODUCTION

Promoting fidelity—that individuals have one sexual partner at a time—has important ties to both biological and social-structural HIV interventions (Heise and Watts, 2013). The recent focus on fidelity—or its opposite, concurrency—before and after marriage is driven by mathematical models that show the epidemic could be halted through decreases in exposure during the acute phase in early infection (Morris and Kretzschmar, 2000). Although there are debates regarding the conclusiveness of this line of research (see Lurie & Rosenthal, 2010 and Tanser et al., 2011), understanding how young adults interpret the social and structural barriers to fidelity remain important when constructing comprehensive HIV prevention programs.

In recent years there has been a decrease in Tanzanian women (from 10% in 1999 to 4% in 2010) and men (from 32% in 1999 to 21% in 2010) reporting multiple partners in the past year (Tanzania Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and ORC Macro, 2005). Focus group participants in Tanzania described numerous supports for fidelity, including love, respect, communication, sexual satisfaction, keeping a harmonious household, and fear of diseases (Baumgartner et al., 2010). Taken together, research suggests that promotion of fidelity as AIDS prevention may gain traction in Tanzania.

Three major sources of support for fidelity include the major religions, HIV prevention messages, and monitoring within relationships. Merits of monogamy are preached by major religious traditions in sub-Saharan Africa (Watkins, 2004). HIV, through personal fears and widespread prevention communications, provides an important motivation for Tanzanians to remaining faithful (Lary, Maman, Katebalila, McCauley, and Mbwambo, 2004). At an interpersonal level fidelity is monitored and infidelity may lead to multiple negative

consequences, such as partner violence, in Tanzania (Baumgartner et al., 2010; Lary et al., 2004) as elsewhere (Conroy 2014).

Despite supports for fidelity, important social and structural barriers exist. Polygamous marriage provides a model of sexual behavior in which men are legally and socially permitted to, if not given prestige for, maintaining concurrent partnerships, as Tomori and colleagues (2013) found in Iringa, Tanzania. Regardless of this acceptance, the proportion of women in polygamous marriages has decreased (NBS [Tanzania] and ICF Macro, 2011). However, even in formally monogamous marriages in Tanzania, men may have an informal “outside” wives (Silberschmidt, 2001).

Social constructions of masculinity support concurrency. Sexual experience and assertiveness are associated with the transition to adulthood for young men and maintaining multiple partners is a symbol of masculinity in Tanzania (Tomori et al., 2013; Silberschmidt, 2001; Plummer, 2012). Being able to support multiple wives requires substantial wealth or assets; men in Iringa, Tanzania referred to these requirements when explaining the prestige men receive from concurrent relationships (Tomori et al., 2013). In Malawi, young men are expected to offer their partners gifts and money, which, in addition to providing support, are also expressions of love and commitment (Poulin 2007). Such expectations intertwine men’s financial status, sexual accomplishments, and masculinity. Ideas surrounding men’s sex drive and the male gaze—where men and women have come to see women’s bodies as sexual objects—have been internalized and naturalized (Maganja, Maman, Groves, & Mbwambo, 2007; Scorgie et al, 2009; Smith 2007). Women in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa describe men as having insatiable sex drives (Scorgie et al., 2009). Maganja and colleagues (2007) found similar

explanations for male infidelity in Dar es Salaam, with men likening the need for multiple sex partners to the need to not eat the same food every day.

For women, multiple partnerships are a means to attain financial resources, food, or favors (Author et al., 2007; Luke et al., 2001; Smith, 2007). Research in sub-Saharan Africa shows that when young women are dependent on men, it decreases their negotiating power (Luke et al., 2011) and ability to refuse sex (Author et al., 2008). The need to exploit sexual resources to attain financial resources is higher among the poorest of women (Author et al., 2007). However, Smith's (2007) work in Nigeria highlights the role of transactional sex among women who are using the resources to attain higher status.

The threat of HIV infection appears to be an important motivation to remaining faithful to one partner despite the many negative perceptions of men having only one partner and the support system that sexual networks provide women. Given the changing context of sexual relations due to the HIV epidemic and the strong correlation between number of partners and HIV prevalence in Tanzania (TACAIDS, Zanzibar AIDS Commission (ZAC), NBS, Office of the Chief Government Statistician (OCGS), and Macro International Inc, 2008), understanding how young adults interpret the social and structural barriers to fidelity is particularly germane.

METHODOLOGY

I conducted two rounds of semi-structured in-depth interviews in the Mtoni ward of Dar es Salaam between December 2006 and May 2007. Interviews were conducted in Swahili, the lingua franca of Tanzania, with the assistance of a bilingual English-Swahili interpreter. The Mtoni ward of Dar es Salaam was chosen due to its ethnic and economic diversity. A local community-based organization, Mass Development Association (Madea), which works with

Mtoni youth in various arenas, including HIV prevention, facilitated contact with neighborhood-level leaders (the “cell leaders”).

With the cell leaders’ permission to work in their neighborhoods, Madea helped identify youth aged 15 to 24 who fell into the various categories of our purposive sample: young couples (as the participants defined themselves) of varying educational attainment and marital statuses. However, this study was not designed to differentiate educational, ethnic, or socioeconomic differences; the sample is neither representative nor sufficiently large for such analyses. Each individual was interviewed individually. Finding youth willing to give their partner’s contact information was initially difficult because sexual relationships between youth are hidden from those outside their peer group. Many youth (14 out of the first 15 interviewed) consented to be interviewed knowing we wanted to interview their partner, but did not provide contact information for their partner. However as youth saw that we did not tell their elders what we were discussing, we easily attained partners’ contact information (interviewing 11 of the last 12 partners).

The first round of in-depth interviews included 39 participants. Of the 26 participants initially recruited, 12 provided contact information for their partners (one participant listed two partners). Only individuals whose partners participated in the first round were recruited for the second round. Of those 25 individuals, 18 were re-interviewed. We recruited nine additional individuals in the second round for a total of 48 individuals and 66 interviews. With participants’ permission, we audiotaped interviews for transcription and analysis. Analysis was conducted in Nvivo using the data primarily at the individual level.

RESULTS

Importance of fidelity

Fidelity, trust, and commitment were relationship characteristics young adults valued highly. Swahili is a descriptive language and the term for fidelity, *uaminifu moja kwa moja*, involves the term *uaminifu* meaning “believable” or “trust.” Consistent with the linguistic ties between trust and fidelity, when we asked young adults what it means to trust a partner, the majority said that they could trust a partner who is faithful, as Salah¹ does

When they say that they’re committed to their partners they mean, “now I’m committed to this one.” If it’s a man and he’s married you won’t find him with another girl in a way that you would suspect that they’re lovers. (*19-year-old female student, middle class*)

Young adults closely considered whether a potential partner would be faithful. When the young adults discussed “exploring” their partner prior to beginning a relationship, they wanted to understand their partner’s *tabia*, or “a combination of moral character, personality, and one’s human nature” (Setel 1996). The type of *tabia* that participants desired in a partner was patient, polite, and faithful. Young women often voiced their expectations for their partner’s *tabia* as a condition for beginning the relationship as Akila, a middle-class, 23-year-old female student, described,

I was asking myself what kind of person he is because before I had another boyfriend who did bad things to me. So when this one came, I told him about the first one and he promised that he wouldn’t be like the first one. (*Interviewer: what type of bad things did you want him to promise not to do?*) Like having partners other than me.

Most participants explained that desire for monogamous relationships was multifaceted, including fear of diseases, feeling that fidelity equated love, and wanting to avoid the drama of infidelity. However, for some, as Azizi (18-year-old, teenage runaway, some primary school) explained, “If there was no AIDS, no other sexual diseases then I’d have continued having many partners.” Azizi described how after a series of illnesses he decided to get tested for HIV and be

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

faithful to his ex-girlfriend, Fatuma. Fatuma, a 16-year-old student, refused to accept his pledge of fidelity preferring, “someone who will love me and won’t cheat on me again.”

Many young adults discussed fidelity as part of living well and frequently reminded each other to “be faithful.” Saleh, a 19-year-old female student, recounts the advice her boyfriend gave her after she had a sexually transmitted infection (STI), “[My boyfriend] continued advising me that I should be careful and avoid other boys because... I need to be careful because of the diseases.” Many young adults explained that they “remind each other not to be like other people who are in many relationships... to keep the relationship just the two of us” (16-year-old female student). “Reminding” each other to be faithful was a common part of partners’ farewells.

Although Haram (2005) found that secrecy and discretion were more important than actual fidelity among the Meru, all but two young women in this study placed a higher value on actual fidelity than discretion. Fatuma, who ended her relationship with Azizi over his infidelities, discussed the importance of keeping infidelity hidden, “It’s better that he doesn’t show me, it’s better that I don’t see any of his bad behaviors. I want someone who won’t show me.” The second young woman who prioritized discretion, an engaged 18-year-old female, emphasized that her fiancé could keep her free from HIV by using condoms if he had sex with other women.

Masculinity

Despite the value young adults placed on fidelity, both young men and women explained that it is “normal” for men to have strong sexual desires and difficulties controlling their sexual behavior. As Elizabeth, an 18-year old female tailoring apprentice, explained, “If they see a beautiful girl today then they want to have sex with her. If they see another tomorrow then they want to too.” Young men and young women explained that the desire to be like other men and to

be seen as masculine by women influences men's behavior. As Idi, a 23-year old male DJ/singer explained,

They take sex as a pride, although (not all men). For example, if they go somewhere meeting a girl and don't ask for sex, then the girl will think that he's not sexually active. So other boys just decide to go for sex with other girls because they want them to know that they are sexually normal and active.

Many of the young men said that they began stable relationships because a stable relationship would help them fight the temptation to have multiple partners. Concern about temptation was not only due to the possibility of getting STIs, but also due to their concern that having many partners is a sign of bad *tabia*. Musa, a 24-year-old day laborer with primary schooling, explained his decision to marry his wife, "I thought that since (I'm the right) age it's better to get one woman who'll be my wife instead of just going out with a girl, tomorrow another girl, then the next day another girl." Idi explained that despite the pressures to have multiple partners, "[fidelity] isn't hard for me because I love her and our relationship's important for both of us."

Women's inferior position

When discussing women's struggles with fidelity, participants often pointed to structural disadvantages and women's use of sexual resources to attain other resources. Many of the young women knew clichés to describe how women needed multiple partners to fulfill their different needs. Young women were critical of the notion that they needed more than one man to have their needs met, yet all young women stated that a man is necessary to have one's needs met. While most participants acknowledged women's structural disadvantages, some framed infidelity around women's desire for money. Salah, a 19-year-old, middle class, student, explained that desire lead her to be unfaithful, "So desire got me and I decided to have someone else—to

cheat—because of the money. So I was going out with another too because of his money. I didn't love him—I just loved his money.”

Relationship-level barriers

Many participants tied infidelity to more general problems in the relationship, explaining that if one is not sufficiently cared for, provided for, or understood, he or she might seek another partner. Participants expected that males and females needed to have their sexual needs met. Justini, an 18-years-old male student explained, “Even if they're married and the man isn't good in bed then the woman might decide to go to other men.” Many of the participants described the need to have a partner who truly knows and loves them. Some explained that if someone's partner is not sufficiently affectionate then that person may take another partner, as Arifa explained,

Maybe if you don't show enough love to your partner, when he comes you aren't happy, you're just there staring at him while when he goes to another woman she's happy for him, she puts water for him to bathe, she makes food for him, she takes him to bed...
(20 years old, female nurse, completed primary school, poor)

DISCUSSION

Increasing fidelity among young adults in Tanzania would decrease the likelihood of transmission and is closely related to many social and structural factors that contribute to the epidemic, such as transactional sex and gendered behavioral expectations (Heise and Watts, 2013). This analysis highlighted the social and structural factors that need to be addressed before fidelity can be successfully promoted as part of a comprehensive HIV prevention program. In the face of these barriers, young adults in Dar es Salaam valued fidelity to one partner over discretion with multiple partners. Young men were expected to perform masculinity through their desire to have sex with many women yet stable relationships helped young men fight temptations to have multiple partners. For young women, their inferior position contributed to

infidelity through reliance on men for access to basic resources as well as luxuries. Although many of the barriers to fidelity are gendered, this analysis contributes to the growing body of literature finding that young men and women in Tanzania have shared barriers (see Baumgartner et al 2010). At the relationship level infidelity and partner turnover stems from not having sexual and emotional needs met. While previous research has outlined that men are likely to do so, I found that women are as well. Taken together, young adults descriptions of the social and structural barriers suggest that interventions targeting these aspects are needed to create an environment where fidelity and lower partner turnover can thrive.

Although previous research suggested that discretion might be more important than fidelity (Haram 2005), a large majority of participants prioritized actual fidelity, describing multiple partners as a sign of bad *tabia*. Many young adults, such as Salah, were clear in their expectations that the type of partner they could trust would be faithful, not discrete. Further, participants often reminded their partners that their relationship would end if they were unfaithful. However, these reminders seemed to be more of a ritualized parting remark. As such, programs should encourage meaningful conversations about fidelity and seek to reinforce the value that most young adults have for fidelity.

Young men and women explained that men have strong sexual desires and difficulties controlling their sexual behavior. This construction of masculinity is consistent with the notion that maintaining multiple partners is a way to enact masculinity and a source of power and prestige (Silberschmidt 2001; Scorgie et al 2009). At the interpersonal level, male and female peers reinforced this notion despite girlfriends' fears of STIs. HIV prevention messages tying masculinity to fidelity, being in control of one's sexual behavior, and respecting women, may be particularly effective.

Young adults underscored women's structural disadvantages leading to multiple partnerships. Consistent with Smith's (2007) findings in Nigeria, not all financially motivated relationships described by participants were motivated by survival; some, like Salah, were motivated to gain resources. Projects targeting women's structural disadvantages at multiple levels—such as access to financial resources and social capital within the family, community, marketplace, and state— through income and social capital generating activities would reduce economic dependency on men (Gupta, Parkhurst, Ogden, Aggleton, & Mahal 2008) and are necessary before women will be able to rely on resources other than their sexuality. In addition, programs targeting young women not engaged in survival sex with messages that stable relationships are greater status markers than nice soaps or clothes may make fidelity more attractive than luxury items.

Participants' descriptions of barriers to fidelity underscore the social and structural barriers tied to HIV prevention. Analysis of these descriptions points to the importance of addressing socio-structural obstacles. Behavior change communications offering alternative constructions of masculinity, by tying masculinity to fidelity and being in control of one's sexuality, and messages positioning stable relationships as status markers may increase fidelity. Income and social capital generating activities would reduce young women's dependence on their sexual resources. In conjunction with these structural interventions, interpersonal communication campaigns that encourage meaningful conversations about fidelity would support the couple-level commitment required to establish mutual fidelity. However, without intervention at the structural level, fidelity promotion programs and young adults' farewells to, "remember to be faithful," may have limited impact.

REFERENCES

- Author. (2014).
- Author et al. (2008).
- Author et al. (2007).
- Baumgartner, J. N., Lugina, H., Johnson, L., & Nyamhanga, T. (2010). "Being faithful" in a sexual relationship: perceptions of Tanzanian adolescents in the context of HIV and pregnancy prevention. *AIDS care*, 22(9), 1153-1158.
- Bracher, M., G. Santow, & Watkins, S.C. (2004). Assessing the Potential of Condom Use to Prevent the Spread of HIV: A Microsimulation Study. *Studies in Family Planning* 35(1):48-64.
- Conroy, A. A. (2014). Marital infidelity and intimate partner violence in rural Malawi: a dyadic investigation. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 1-12.
- Gupta, G. R., Parkhurst, J. O., Ogden, J. A., Aggleton, P., & Mahal, A. (2008). Structural approaches to HIV prevention. *The Lancet*, 372(9640), 764-775.
- Haram, L. (2005). "Eyes Have No Curtains": The Moral Economy of Secrecy in Managing Love Affairs among Adolescents in Northern Tanzania in the Time of AIDS. *Africa Today*, 51(4), 57-73.
- Heise, L., & Watts, C. (2013). Intervening upstream: a good investment for HIV prevention. Structural Approaches to HIV Prevention Position Paper Series. Arlington, VA: USAID's AIDS Support and Technical Assistance Resources, AIDSTAR-One, Task Order 1.
- Kapiga, S. H. (1996). Determinants of Multiple Sexual Partners and Condom Use Among Sexually Active Tanzanians. *East African Medical Journal* 73(7):435-42.
- Lary, H., Maman, S., Katebalila, M., & Mbwambo, J. (2004). Exploring the association between HIV and violence: young people's experiences with infidelity, violence and forced sex in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 200-206.
- Longfield, K., Glick, A., Waithaka, M., & Berman, J. (2004). Relationships between older men and younger women: implications for STIs/HIV in Kenya. *Studies in Family Planning*, 35(2), 125-134.
- Luke, N., Goldberg, R. E., Mberu, B. U., & Zulu, E. M. (2011). Social exchange and sexual behavior in young women's premarital relationships in Kenya. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 73(5), 1048-1064.
- Lurie, M. N., & Rosenthal, S. (2010). Concurrent partnerships as a driver of the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa? The evidence is limited. *AIDS and Behavior*, 14(1), 17-24.
- Maganja, R. K., Maman, S., Groves, A., & Mbwambo, J. K. (2007). Skinning the goat and pulling the load: transactional sex among youth in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. *AIDS Care*, 19(8), 974-981.
- Morris, M., & Kretzschmar, M. (2000). A microsimulation study of the effect of concurrent partnerships on the spread of HIV in Uganda. *Mathematical Population Studies*, 8(2), 109-133.
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) [Tanzania] & ICF Macro. (2011). Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey 2010. *Dar es Salaam: NBS and ICF Macro*.
- Plummer, M. L. (2012). *Promoting abstinence, being faithful, and condom use with young Africans: Qualitative findings from an intervention trial in rural Tanzania*. Lexington Books.
- Poulin, M. (2007). Sex, money, and premarital partnerships in southern Malawi. *Social Science & Medicine*, 65(11), 2383-2393.

- Scorgie, F., Kunene, B., Smit, J. A., Manzini, N., Chersich, M. F., & Preston-Whyte, E. M. (2009). In search of sexual pleasure and fidelity: vaginal practices in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 11*(3), 267-283.
- Setel P. (1996). AIDS as a paradox of manhood and development in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania, *Social Science & Medicine, 43*(8), 1169-1178.
- Silberschmidt, M. (2001). Disempowerment of men in rural and urban East Africa: implications for male identity and sexual behavior. *World Development, 29*(4), 657-671.
- Smith, D. J. (2007). Modern marriage, men's extramarital sex, and HIV risk in southeastern Nigeria. *American Journal of Public Health, 97*(6), 997-1005.
- Tanser, F., Bärnighausen, T., Hund, L., Garnett, G. P., McGrath, N., & Newell, M. L. (2011). Effect of concurrent sexual partnerships on rate of new HIV infections in a high-prevalence, rural South African population: a cohort study. *The Lancet, 378*(9787), 247-255.
- Tanzania Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), & ORC Macro. (2005). Tanzania HIV/AIDS Indicator Survey 2003-04. *Calverton, Maryland, USA: TACAIDS, NBS & ORC Macro.*
- Tanzania Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS), Zanzibar AIDS Commission (ZAC), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Office of the Chief Government Statistician (OCGS), & Macro International Inc. (2008). Tanzania HIV/AIDS and Malaria Indicator Survey 2007-08. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: TACAIDS, ZAC, NBS, OCGS, and Macro International Inc.
- Tomori, C., Francisco, L. V., Kennedy, C. E., Kajula-Maonga, L., Likindikoki, S., Babalola, S. O., Beckham, S. W., Mbwambo, J.K., & Kerrigan, D. L. (2013). The changing cultural and economic dynamics of polygyny and concurrent sexual partnerships in Iringa, Tanzania. *Global Public Health, 8*(7), 857-870.
- Watkins, S. C. (2004). Navigating the AIDS epidemic in rural Malawi. *Population and Development Review, 30*(4), 673-705.