

mony should be recognized as not coming just from fringe conservative groups; it is reinforced through both government and private activities in HIV/AIDS prevention, often amidst secular and politically correct rhetoric. This new hegemony is all the more dangerous because often unrecognized for its subtext of surveillance, contro stigmatization.

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Chapter Eight

Survival Sex and HIV/AIDS in an African City

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It is better to die in fifteen years' time of AIDS than to die
in five days' time of hunger.

The argument of this paper is that the context of most sex work in African cities, and probably in the countryside as well, can be summed up in a single word—survival. Shorn of controversy and emotion, sex work is about making money to remain alive, making money to feed one's children, and, in extreme cases, finding a place to "hang out" or negotiating some modicum of physical safety and protection. But it is often hard for outsiders to grasp this fact; like HIV/AIDS, sex for money or other "gifts" is an emotive issue, and both are the center of hot debates over the nature and limits of sexual relationships and acceptable sexual practice.

Bringing HIV/AIDS and sex work together highlights the elements they share in the popular imagination—multiple sex, dangerous sex, payment for sex—all activities feared to threaten social life as typified in those widespread icons of "correct" sexual life—heterosexual love, fidelity, marriage, and today of course health and survival itself. If we accept these stereotypes, and if we think of culture as a set of shared understandings that drive behavior, it is difficult to see the "culture" of sex work as mundane, pragmatic, supremely unromantic; it is easier to picture it as dangerously, excitingly, erotically illicit. Sex work may be all these things, at different times and for different people, but in most African situations, current research suggests, it is, at least from the perspective of sex workers, about surviving poverty. Sex work may

indeed be dangerous, but the danger lies in the social contexts and geographical areas in which it is practiced—although there are notable exceptions, sex work tends to concentrate in the poorest and roughest parts of town. To these dangers has been added the health hazard that HIV/AIDS presents both to sex workers and to their clients. In short, sex work is about “getting by” in a world of poverty, disempowerment, and probably prejudice—a situation that applies, as we shall see, as much to male as to female sex workers.

In trying to encapsulate the above complexity, we find the term “survival sex,” if not entirely original, at least useful.¹ “Survival sex” brackets sex work with other forms of small-scale informal money-making—with selling homemade items of clothing, with petty trading in fruit and vegetables, with brewing illicit liquor and running “she-beens” (local, informal, and largely illegal bars), with pick-pocketing, and with a wide range of so-called “petty crime.” All over Africa, many, many women and some men, of all colors, cultures, and class backgrounds, engage in these activities at some time during their lives (Preston-Whyte and Rogerson, 1991; Bozzoli, 1991). Many combine informal money-making with formal jobs, but as unemployment grows, selling sex is, for an increasing number, the only experience of “working” to earn a living. Viewed in this light, sex is merely another commodity for sale—as using the word “commercial sex work,” in preference to “prostitution,” suggests so well. In the African situation, however, there are problems with the term “commercial” to cover all nuances of “sex work.” Some whom the outsider might label sex workers are not always paid in hard cash; and their interaction with sex partners is relatively longlasting, with characteristics of a “relationship” rather than of a “one-off” contract for a single sexual episode. Such persons do not consider themselves prostitutes, nor do the communities in which they live and struggle to survive. Yet these persons agree they receive “gifts” and various kinds of “help” from lovers. As one woman put it, “This is how we survive.”

The notion of “survival sex” emerged recently among researchers and sex workers engaged in a research project based at the University of Natal in Durban. Durban is a bustling tourist and port city on the east coast of South Africa, and we began by focusing attention on commercial sex workers servicing these aspects of city life. Initially, our research participants were drawn from the ranks of men and women who consciously depend on sex to make a living or to augment

other means of survival. Most are single, although they may have long-term partners or lovers; since they have no full-time employment and seem unable to secure formal work, they look to commercial sex as their main support. They acknowledge they “sell sex” for a living, and accept the term “prostitute” to describe themselves.

A second and very different group of women have now been incorporated into our study. Some live in settled working-class communities but have few means of long-term income—except lovers who provide limited support. Others are very young women who come to Durban from nearby rural areas to buy and sell goods bought cheaply in one place and not available in another. If they have no success in selling other commodities, they may “try their luck” (in Zulu, *umuntu ophantaye*) selling sex in places known as haunts of street prostitutes. Some pass by a truck stop on the bus route home to “earn something,” albeit only bus fare. They acknowledge they sell sex on these occasions, but do not regard themselves as regular long-term or “professional” sex workers. Highlighting the difference between these two categories of “sex worker” is the attitude among self-identified commercial sex workers toward men who want to treat them as “girl friends” rather than prostitutes—which would entail not necessarily receiving payment after each sexual encounter: “They [the men concerned] say they give us ‘gifts’ and only give money at month ends . . . We are their ‘girlfriends,’ so they say, and they hit us if we ask for money . . . But how do they expect us to live with no money?” Clearly, here is a blurring of categories that bears further investigation.

The above comments are from women, but male sex workers, although operating in a different milieu, tell much the same story of need; “Its really just a kind of job . . . I couldn’t get another,” in the words of one. It is, however, impossible to lump together all men and women who use sex for survival. Like other employment, some sex work is full-time, some part-time, some permanent, and some stop-gap. All have, however, one thing in common—and the workers recognize it—HIV/AIDS is a permanent danger, and the tragedy of their current situation is summed up in the citation that heads this chapter. The paradox of what we refer to as “survival sex,” strictly commercial or not, is that relatively short-term (but nonetheless pressing) social survival is achieved only at the cost of exposure to long-term risk of illness and death.

As these introductory comments suggest, we are concerned with major social and political issues of our time—poverty, unemployment, gender disempowerment and domestic violence, sex, and the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS. Debates rage and research abounds around each topic, but there is the common theme: the use of sex to struggle for daily survival by many people in social groups that, for one reason or another, are disadvantaged and thus vulnerable. Around this theme, we build our argument and present the ethnographic work in which we are currently engaged—and out of which our argument emerged.

Sex Work and Survival in Durban

Durban is South Africa's major commercial port. It has long been a favorite holiday city for white South Africans and is an increasingly attractive international tourist destination. The city has, however, another side. Within the province of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban is a mecca for Black rural migrants in search of formal employment and of opportunities for informal money-making. Sex is one commodity, and one much in demand both among rich and poor, and it is, we argue, an integral part of the city's informal economy. Although little-remarked in the local literature, selling (and also exchanging) sex is one of the most frequent and enduring strategies used by the casual poor (see Bromley and Gerry, 1979)—and, within that category, in particular by women—to survive.

While our observations derive from work done in Durban, our conceptualization of survival sex resonates with research findings from other African cities where socially and economically disadvantaged women or men use sex as a bargaining point in relationships with those more wealthy or more powerful. The implications of our findings for understanding HIV transmission are severe, and call for urgent action with respect to intervention; if sex is, as we argue, a *survival* strategy, it is to economic and personal empowerment, as much as to education and peer counseling, that public policy must, in the long term, be directed.

Beginning to Study Sex Work in Durban

Until the advent of HIV/AIDS, little scholarly attention, with one exception (Posel and Posel, 1991), focused on commercial sex work

either in Durban or in the wider KwaZulu-Natal region. Much the same was true for the country as a whole, and the "strategic silences" to which Lützen (1995) has sensitized us characterized those anthropological studies explicitly designed to deal with the behavioral intimacies and biology of sexual relationships (Varga, 1996a). It is against this background that we formed a loosely coordinated team that, working from a base provided by the University of Natal, began to explore sex work in Durban. Using a qualitative and largely anthropological approach, we aimed first to initiate an introductory ethnographic scan of commercial sex in the city and its environs. This overview was aimed at denying or confirming the diversity and complexity suggested by anecdotal evidence and reports in the popular press. This initial research resulted in a number of ethnographic vignettes of sex work in the city, which we are in process of integrating within a common analytical and theoretical framework. One of us had been, for many years, involved in studies of the informal economy of the region (Preston-Whyte and Rogerson, 1991), and this background led to the conceptual thrust of this paper, although other perspectives are emerging from our work (Varga, 1996a, 1996b).

Ethnographic Vignettes

Background

Fanning out from the harbor and beachfront, the port and inner-city holiday and tourist areas of Durban are encircled by what historically have been mostly white middle- and upper-class suburbs, parts of which are becoming multiracial. These give way to black suburbs and a sprawl of industrial and semi-industrial areas and informal settlements, which in turn shade into peri-urban, and eventually fairly dense and predominantly black rural, settlements. Public transport is slow, but it is possible from the perimeter to reach the center of this arc, or any point within it, in an hour or less by communal taxi. Holiday-makers and tourists fly in to the international airport and are transported speedily across town to the beachfront with only a glimpse of the poorer areas, where residents depend directly or indirectly on the port, beaches, and industrial sections for employment—and, as unemployment rates increase, for informal money-making opportunities. Small stalls and hawkers abound in all but the

most "up-market" suburbs of the inner city, and selling sex forms part of the array of money-making strategies open both to Durbanites and to temporary migrants.

The idiom for commercial sex in Durban is predominately Western and gendered. The "trade" is said to stretch from formal "escort agencies" to "street walkers" in the "red-light district" of the so-called "Point" area, which links "dockland" and the expensive hotels of the "holiday mile." Prostitutes are conceptualized, in popular imagination and press, as *women*. Indeed, women do predominate, but there are also men who make an income in this manner. For neither these men nor most women involved is the notion of "the oldest profession" felicitous or accurate. Increasingly, commercial sex workers are black, drawn from the poorest inhabitants of the city and province—a demographic reality borne out by our fieldwork, to date concentrated on three distinct areas and social contexts in which, in Durban, commercial sex work occurs.

The first area, "the Point," includes the beachfront hotels and the traditional "red-light district" between beachfront and docks. With the exception of black domestic and service workers, this area was, as recently as five to ten years ago, the preserve of white residents and of largely white "call girls" operating from clubs, escort agencies, and flats. It is now increasingly black, in terms both of sex workers and of their clientele. In the days of apartheid, black women wishing to sell sex used dark back allies or accompanied sailors onto their ships, where local police were unlikely to challenge their activities. Such women were under constant threat of prosecution, as much for being in a "white" area and for engaging in sex across the color line as for "soliciting." Today African and Indian female (and some male) commercial sex workers frequent this area along with their white counterparts, and are becoming the majority of the sex worker population.

In the other two research areas, there are no white sex workers. The second, which we named "Industria," is a strip of mixed light-industrial and small business premises, including a small commercial hotel and a number of large truck stops. It is a rough and dangerous area, and the women working in it are tough and resilient. Most are short-term (weekly or daily) migrants from semirural areas on the Durban periphery, and engage in other income-generating strategies, such as hawking. The third research area, which we call "Suburbia," is, in contrast, a fairly typical African working-class suburb in a peri-

urban area. It is in these two locations that we have explored the grey area between what the women consider "proper" commercial sex work (prostitution) and a series of longer- and shorter-term sexual relationships with men they know relatively well, for which payment is seldom in money "up front." These latter interactions have the connotation of an "exchange" rather than of a "one-off" contract. As an extension of this practice, black research participants in all three areas have complained "Our [African] men do not like to pay for sex, it is different than with whites."

Although most attention has been paid to women's sex work, one of us (Oosthuizen) worked, in the early 1990s, among men frequenting the beach area in search of clients. The rubric of sex for survival applied as much to these men as to the women in the study. A number of features, however, distinguish male from female commercial sex work in Durban, including the former's extreme fluidity, not only in personnel but in location. The "sex oasis" we shall describe has ceased to exist; both clients and sex workers have moved, and are continuously forced to move their locale of interaction. Gay sex is still controversial in some circles, and men in search of sex with other men, as well as male commercial sex workers, are far more often the focus of police attention than are their female counterparts. This point is highlighted in the following ethnography that demonstrates the marginality and insecurity of the lives of many men who sell sex to other men. At another level, commercial sex work among men is less institutionalized than between women and male clients; some also shades into non-commercial sexual exchanges.

One result of our work so far has been to raise questions about the usefulness of the blanket terms "prostitution" and "commercial sex work." Both are taken directly from non-African contexts, and neither capture the complex nuances of survival sex as we see it in Durban. In a nutshell, neither allow for the fact that "cash" may be only one of the goods for which sex is exchanged. The words of the women quoted earlier encapsulate this concern. Let us turn to our ethnography to explore such issues.

The Durban Beachfront and the Point

The Beachfront and "Point" areas are the traditional centers of commercial sex in Durban. While this is changing rapidly, it is useful to

begin by describing the scene in these areas when we began fieldwork. The Beachfront is largely the preserve of "gay sex" and the haunt of male sex workers, while heterosexual sex and female sex workers dominate the "Point."

The Durban Beachfront is relatively narrow and consists of several beaches used by both locals and visitors for swimming, surfing, and sunbathing. It is separated from tourist hotels and holiday flats by a wide avenue, below which are such public facilities as an amusement park, oceanarium, snake park, eateries, and, at one point, public gardens. Changing rooms are also present, and there is a fair amount of public parking. Along this strip, two areas were at one time well-known venues for gay sex. The first was a "sex oasis," near the northern end of the beach strip, that was the accepted place to "cruise" and to which some prostitutes were attracted to service men who had not found other partners. These commercial sex workers were from all racial groups, a significant proportion African. The clients were white. This venue lost currency after a number of assaults and one killing in the near vicinity; its clientele moved to recognized bars, some in the Point area. In contrast, South Beach has long been, and continues to be, a site of regular male commercial sex trade in central Durban. It is dominated by white male prostitutes, who congregate on a large and prominent traffic island in the broad avenue above the beach area. Their number is not large; neither, however, is the demand for their services, a fact that creates competition and inclines these men to protect their "territory" from "blacks."

Male sex work is not well paid. Some of our informants claimed to make only around R 100 (U.S.\$25) a night, sometimes less if they found only a single client. It is a measure of their desperation that the men remain on watch each night. Indeed, this was how informants represented themselves, and their life histories corroborate this with graphic descriptions of highly mobile and literally "homeless" people. Most had been in prison or reformatories, where they had been introduced to sex with men. Some had come to Durban from Johannesburg and the Cape, and said they would probably "move off" again once the seasonal tourist invasion of Durban was over. They had, for the most part, no fixed abode in Durban and worked "from the street." Their clients picked them up in motorcars, and sex occurred in a place usually designated by the client—often in his vehicle, on the beach, or in some other dark and deserted place. This means the

sex worker was very much at the client's mercy. The following general description provides the flavor of these interactions.

Male sex workers displaying themselves on the prominent traffic island make eye contact with likely clients who drive by. They indicate to the client a convenient parking area, then go over to speak to him. The first move is to ascertain if the driver of the car is really after sex. A favorite opening line is "Looking for company?" The sex worker then initiates a discussion of terms—price and service expected. The majority of sex workers try to provide masturbation only, although they may allow themselves to be masturbated by clients. They claim they will accept anal sex only if they are the insertive partner. It is, however, difficult to get payment "up front" (that is, before the sex act), or to refuse compliance if the client is determined not to be cooperative. After the act, the sex worker is dependent on the client's willingness to return him to the beach front. Some men reported being thrown out of the car in some deserted spot and left to find their way back.

It is a lonely life that Beachfront male prostitutes live. There is little of the camaraderie of the bars and clubs of the Point area, and none of the support their women counterparts receive from colleagues. The only saving grace appears the strong likelihood that condoms will be acceptable to the clients, who are likely to be members of the local gay community. Our impression is the men we interviewed did not regard their activities as in any sense a "profession." They were "in it for the money" and would have preferred virtually any other occupation. But sex work provided an income, if a relatively small one. They were well aware of the dangers of HIV, and used condoms with most clients—indeed, it was often the clients who insisted on this. The male sex workers did not, however, carry this caution through into their own heterosexual relationships with partners.

Female sex workers were, and are, to be found not on the open beach or parking lots, but in the bars of beachfront hotels immediately behind the beach zone. Here are street upon street of mixed accommodations, from five-star international hotels to small, run-down blocks of flats. Known as "the Point"—for the headland surrounding the bay and dock area—this vicinity is often called the "red-light" district of central Durban. The Point stretches from the relatively "up-market" beachfront to mixed-service, semi-industrial port and bay areas. In the Point are escort agencies offering massage "services" on

the premises and also arranging female "escorts" for an hour or two. Interspersed between agencies are sex shops, with mildly erotic displays in their windows, and the neon-lit entrances of bars and clubs. Sex workers often stand in the doorways of these places, or hang around in the "foyers" or in front of run-down holiday hotels and blocks of flats. After about 9 A.M. or 10 A.M. the women frequent the bars opening onto the street or situated in tourist hotels.

Both the women and their clients are racially mixed. Indian and Coloured women have joined the white women who once dominated the area's commercial sex scene. The major change currently is the large number of African women moving in, as residents or as part of the "trade." Many tourists and holiday-makers are from East African countries, and these African, as well as local Indian and Coloured, clients mix with local African residents in approaching the women. A few white commercial sex workers stated that they did not accept black (African) clients, but it is clear that most women have a mixed clientele. Given the proximity to the harbor and the beachfront hotels, the clientele is also of mixed social class, language, and income. Some clients are sailors, some businessmen, and some simply male Durbanites who have frequented the area bars for years.

Apart from the sex trade, the locale is characterized by pawn shops, second-hand furniture and clothing dealers, and cheap fast-food and video stores. In the daytime, tourists as well as shopkeepers, shoppers, and prostitutes rub shoulders, and the Point is fairly safe except for the activities of ubiquitous pickpockets. At night, however, the scene changes dramatically. Neon lights flash continuously and the bars and all-night clubs come into their own. This is the haunt of a tough crowd, seeking nighttime amusement in drink, often in drugs, and in risqué floor and sex shows accompanied by loud disco music. *Dagga* (*cannabis*) and *mandrax* are readily available for purchase, and some sex workers use these drugs regularly; one told us she usually needed "a buzz" before going out to solicit. The relative absence of injection drug use in the area is noticeable, and makes the problems of HIV-spread less, at present, than in many other tourist and dock areas of the world. This may not, however, remain the case; police are anticipating and watching for a push toward hard drugs.

On the whole, the Point is generally threatening enough that local women prostitutes look out for each other. Many establish a base in one of the so-called "accommodation lodges," three- and four-story

buildings in which rooms are rented, often by the day. In effect, these rooms are the women's homes, and they may share them with other women or with male friends. The latter do not fill the role of "traditional" pimps (in the European sense), but provide some protection for the women. If, for instance, a man's girl friend is out of the bar for longer than seems necessary, he will investigate and, if appropriate, assist her. He may also be her accomplice in "slicking clients"—that is, stealing their money.

The heterosexual sex on sale is fairly stereotypical and, on the whole, conservative. The women interviewed denied being willing to provide "kinky sex" and, in general, said they confined their services to vaginal intercourse and oral sex. Some commented that a few clients asked for anal sex, which they, for the most part, claimed to refuse; still other clients "just wanted to talk."

In this area, women sex workers operate from, and to some extent move between, escort agencies, massage parlors, bars, clubs, and the street. While the escort and massage services offered by agencies and parlors are legal, sex acts with clients are illegal. Many older female sex workers who have been working and living in the area for some years have been arrested, prosecuted, and fined. They are known to the police and, indeed, know the local police just as well. They are reputedly subject to some violence and even sexual exploitation at the hands of police, but, on the other hand, can rely on the police to attempt to assist and protect them when necessary. Suspected drug offences are often the cause of police harassment, although "slicking" also can bring prosecution.

Compared with the situation in the other areas studied, commercial sex work in the Point is predictable and well organized, and newcomers are soon integrated into "the system." What can only be described as a "contract" is negotiated before a woman goes with a client or invites him to her room. Although the black women are not all proficient in English or Afrikaans, they know enough to state their fee, and are supported in this by colleagues. Payment must be made before sex takes place, and, for their own safety, women prefer that sex occur in their rooms. This allows male friends or other women to gauge how long has elapsed and to investigate if necessary. In cases where women accompany men in their cars, their fellows take the registration number. Some women who operate on the streets have established territories, over which disputes may arise should another

move in. More often, personal animosities flare up, especially when the individuals have been drinking heavily.

Significant differences occur in age and experience between the white prostitutes and their African counterparts. The former are older; many interviewed were in their late twenties and thirties, very few under twenty. None of the white women we interviewed were new to prostitution or to the Point; they knew their clientele and were "streetwise" and "at home." In contrast, many of the black women were very young, and some had been working in the Point area for only a month or so. In the bars, the younger and less experienced women tended to cluster around the dance floors, actively seeking to attract clients, while the older women sat at the bar counters. Some of the latter had regular customers—in time, most women would come to operate from particular bars. The population of prostitutes in the bars and on the streets changed fairly rapidly, and there was room for considerable individuality. A feature of white prostitutes in the area was their language background; all were Afrikaans-speaking, and although they might speak English with clients, Afrikaans was the primary language of interaction between them and their personal partners. (Much the same may be said of male sex workers on South Beach.) The African women spoke either Zulu or Xhosa as their home language, but had some knowledge of English—less frequently, of Afrikaans, although most communication with clients was conducted in the latter. Most of the African women had completed four or more years of school; and in keeping with white educational norms, most of the white women had three or four more years' schooling.

Over time, we have been struck by the rapid changes in the demographic composition of the women operating in the Point area. The life histories we have collected show strikingly that both white and black women are themselves highly mobile. The former take off to visit other towns; the latter move in and out of commercial sex work. Some white women claimed to be seeking other jobs. What often draws women back is the relatively high income possible from commercial sex work in the Point. A reasonable average is between R 100 and R 300 per night (U.S.\$25-75), for either a white or a black woman.

In the Point, one dimension of "formality" is the general acceptance of condom use by both commercial sex workers and clients. The women openly discuss AIDS and STDs, and most stated they would

not accept a client who would not wear a condom. In more intimate discussions, the temptation was acknowledged to let this rule slip for "big money," but most women pointed out that the majority of white clients were as insistent as they on "safe sex." Where the women were most vulnerable was in being unaware that particular lubricants could cause the condom to split. Those women reporting cases of condom splitting seemed fairly fatalistic about it. None were using condoms with their partners, and some acknowledged that, with long-standing clients, too, they "sometimes forgot"; the almost universal tendency of sex workers to separate professional and private lives was only too apparent in the Point area. In addition, while most of these women had had an STD, they had received treatment; there is easy access to hospital and clinic treatment for all area residents, and women were heard encouraging friends to use these facilities.

The general impression is that commercial sex workers in the Point are reasonably satisfied with their lives. Sex work there pays well, and the black women in particular appreciate that the money and social environment are far better than in other areas of Durban. Indeed, some have migrated from areas like Industria or very like Suburbia. The contrast between the Point and the latter areas could hardly be more stark.

All the women interviewed were open about their "job." They acknowledged being sex workers, and the white women described themselves as "prostitutes" with no apparent hesitation. African women referred to each other as "isipunta," a local word for "prostitute." At one time, a woman who had worked in the Point for many years attempted to start a union. This was reported in the press and on television, and although it faded fairly soon, it is remembered by both sex workers and their "clients," in the bars, and is given as an example of the camaraderie and, perhaps, "respectability" of sex work in the area. Certainly, long-term clients and bar and hotel owners and managers agree that prostitutes are part of the economic life of the Point. They acknowledge the women bring people to the area and are even a tourist attraction.

While in the above respects female sex workers in the Point area form a single category, there is little doubt they are divided by racial history. The black women are relative newcomers—at least, only fairly recently have they been accepted in the bars and clubs in large numbers. Not only are most younger than the majority of the white

women, they experience problems their white counterparts do not. All commented that black (African) clients were often loath to pay for sex, a tendency that presented difficulties and sometimes led to fights. This theme runs, in fact, through all our data on black heterosexual sex work in Durban.

Industria

Situated some six kilometers from the center of Durban and from the Point, Industria is part of Durban's urban sprawl. It was formerly an Indian residential area, but its population has become mixed as Africans have settled or rented rooms in the suburb to be close to the city and to the abutting light industrial and factory areas. Starting as a "strip" development along a large main road leading out of Durban, Industria has become a mixed residential and business area. Family businesses exist side-by-side with small factories and shops, and many residents live above or behind their establishments. There are tea-rooms selling food items and refreshments and keeping long business hours, a few "nightclubs," and at least one seedy hotel, outside which female sex workers congregate to attract clients and to pass the time. Relatively few of these women live in the area. Here, in contrast to the Point, sex is mostly sold by African women who live in adjacent suburbs or travel into Industria from nearby shack settlements—or even more distant rural areas. The majority are very young, but know a visit to Industria is a way to make some cash. The women soon become streetwise but, in the process, they experience harassment and violence both from clients and from the area's ubiquitous gangs.

Industria is rough and poverty-stricken; it has a high crime rate and little police presence or protection. The gangs roaming the streets impose their will on residents and transients alike. There are at least three large truck depots, and the presence of many truck drivers passing through attracts commercial sex workers. Some women enter into long- or short-term relationships with truckers; this may entail not only arranging to be available when the trucker visits Durban, but, on occasion, traveling with him in the cab of his truck. This gives some sex workers opportunity to visit other truck stops, even to work briefly in other parts of the country.

In addition to the truckers' ready call on their services, prostitutes have good and fairly regular opportunities for "one-off" commercial

Truckers

sex encounters with Indian and African men living in, or on the fringes of, the area or coming there in search of sex. The chance for these encounters, as much as anything else, attracts women to Industria and keeps them working there despite the dangers. A number of women described being forced to undergo an "initiation" when they began working there; this consisted of being raped by one or more local toughs (tsotsis) who "patrol" the local streets. All in all, Industria is an unpleasant and dangerous environment, particularly for women, and it is a measure of their desperation that the female sex workers we interviewed work there. In a real sense, they are at equal or greater risk of abuse from local criminal elements than from clients.

Given this setting, the conditions under which the women offer sex in Industria are bad. Since many have no base in the area, they have little protection from clients, from criminals, from the elements, or from extremes of climate. When approached for sex, they have no alternative but to enter a client's vehicle, after which they have no protection from abuse and no means of enforcement if the client refuses to pay. Moreover, few women manage to negotiate any sort of understanding on payment or kind of service expected, before entering the client's car—and, in so doing, his power. Industria sex workers reported far higher levels of abuse (rape, robbery, and general violence) from clients than did women working at the Point.

The women are vulnerable too, because commercial sex is much less organized and formalized than in the Point area, and they do not have the protection of male partners living with them. Many begin sex work out of desperation when, having traveled to Durban as itinerant traders and found no market for their goods, they are forced to find some way to make money. Many, despite their youth, are providing the main income for a family. Those who live relatively close to Durban travel to Industria each afternoon and return home late at night or in the early morning.

On the whole, this is a highly mobile sex-worker community, with individuals appearing and disappearing as need drives them. There are similar areas nearby where sex work is readily available, and, if unsuccessful in Industria, the women move off to try their luck elsewhere. Most are thus essentially street prostitutes, although a relatively small, slightly more stable group of women work out of the small local hotel and two nightclubs in the area. Most of the women have a good deal of experience in walking the streets, usually in threes

and fours for protection and, to some degree, for company; beyond this, there is seldom much mutual support. After some time working the area, most women explore the truck stops, and some establish long-term relationships with one or a series of truckers; their place in the open streets is taken by new and younger recruits from the country or the shack regions.

In general, life at the truck stops is less hard than on the streets. The truckers are often tired and make few demands beyond rapid sex. Some "just want company" and allow the women to rest and even sleep in the cabs of their vehicles. Few drink to excess, as they must not drive under the influence of liquor, so fights are at a minimum. In comparison with the street scene, the truck depot is almost orderly. Once women establish longer relationships with truckers, they have protectors—unless the visits of two "boyfriends" coincide. Even then, the men usually appear understanding of the nature of the prostitute's life.

As at the Point, the women working in Industria see themselves as commercial sex workers, but it is important that they do not view prostitution as their primary "profession." Even the older women and those working from the hotel and bars say they have been temporarily forced into sex work and wish to leave it eventually. For most, it is only one of a wide range of small-scale money-making strategies for survival. The young traders from the rural areas most exemplify this combination of sex work and selling goods, but most of the women at some point had goods for sale, and the truckers often brought goods acquired on their travels for their "girl friends" to sell.

Few women we interviewed are heavy drinkers or smokers, and even those working from the hotel and bars are far less sophisticated than their counterparts in the Point. Because so many are young and inexperienced, they have difficulty negotiating—let alone enforcing—any agreement they may manage to make with a client. Part of their naiveté comes from low educational achievement. None matriculated, and the average claim school attendance only through sixth or seventh standard. This also limits their ability to obtain formal employment and makes them dependent on itinerant money-making strategies. Their rural background, too, often renders them naive, at least at first, and financially desperate. Since many work to support extended families at home, they cannot return empty-handed. They often accept very low payments; the young girls from shack areas near Industria sometimes give sex for the equivalent of "bus fare home," particularly late at night

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and in the early morning. Although most would like, they say, to insist on condom use, realistically they cannot negotiate this, and may have to accept as little as R 20 (U.S.\$5) for their services, and this invariably means without a condom. On a "good day," these street prostitutes net about R 125 (U.S.\$25) for a night's work; usually their total is less.

One aspect of sex work in Industria needs further comment; a woman who gravitates to the truck depots often develops, with a particular man, an ongoing relationship of a fairly complex and subtle nature. While she will solicit other clients, such a sex worker will, as noted previously, make herself available for the trucker when he is in Durban. In some cases he does not pay after each exchange of sex; instead, he provides a monthly allowance and sometimes also buys clothes, food, and soap for her. Sometimes she only receives "gifts," blurring the nature of the contractual relationship with the trucker; he is both client and personal partner, or "boyfriend." Several truckers reported "falling in love" with a beautiful young sex worker at the depot and deciding to seek her company whenever in Durban. When a relationship of this sort develops, it can prove problematic, as the man, soon feeling he does not have to pay for sex each time, may give the woman relatively small "gifts" but claim that he is supporting her by giving money "each month." She may then begin to feel "out of pocket," and complain, "black men won't pay . . . they just want us to be their sweethearts." The trucker may feel, however, that he has established a different sort of relationship than he would have with a prostitute—his gifts are "just to please the girl," not to pay her as a "street woman." (Here, the relationship of Industria women with truckers merges with the type of protective relationship observed in the area we call "Suburbia.") It is also possible—probable—that women who develop these relationships with truckers may be replicating relationships with lovers at home. In such cases, it becomes difficult to speak of "commercial sex" in the Western sense, and the term "survival sex" becomes appropriate.

As noted, most women working on the streets in Industria reported that the black men they serviced did not want to pay for sex from black women. This attitude can easily lead to fights and violence against sex workers demanding to be paid. It is our impression that many younger women working in Industria accept this situation, or are too naive and afraid to insist on payment; operating in lonely areas away from the open streets, they seldom have support, and prefer to

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escape open violence rather than press a claim. This links to inability to insist on—even, in most cases, to suggest—the use of condoms. Most of the women, however, are well aware of the possible dangers of HIV/AIDS; they discussed this openly with us, some recounting how sex workers they had known had died of AIDS. Their general attitude was one of fatalism. AIDS is seen as a “job hazard” but, as one woman said, “What can we do?” And where a trucker is becoming a “boyfriend,” there is less possibility than ever of insisting on a condom. All the women interviewed reacted negatively to the suggestion of using condoms with “boyfriends” or husbands, and trucker “boyfriends” were said to be especially uncomfortable about condom use.

Although young and mostly single, all the women already had, or expected to have, lovers at home. Thus they were, and are, providing a continuously changing sexual link between urban Durban, the shack settlements, and the rural areas. With truckers (and some sex-worker partners) moving continuously through rural areas to conurbations north, south, and west of Durban, the network of potential HIV infection spreads and grows ever denser.

Suburbia

In contrast to the Point and Industria, “Suburbia” was established as an African area and has remained effectively uniracial. It is situated about fifteen kilometers from Durban and was built in the early 1960s as a formal “township” to house Africans and so keep them to the outskirts of the white apartheid city. Today, Suburbia forms part of a populous conurbation totaling approximately 45,000 persons, and has the general character of a settled, if poor and predominantly working-class, suburb.

Suburbia was designed on a typical “township” plan, with sites set aside for three schools (estimated sufficient to serve its targeted population), community center, small business center, light-industrial complex, two primary-health clinics, and a migrant workers hostel. The latter, still operational, reputedly provides a focus for what we term informal sex work; we have not yet investigated this, but some of our research participants say they went to the hostel to “meet men.”

Our work in Suburbia has concentrated on how local women between roughly the ages of eighteen and thirty use sex to survive—in a very particular way. By and large, the women are single, have one

or more small children, and live with parents or other kin in the suburb. They need more financial support than their parents are able or willing to provide but have little hope of finding a job. They also want a “good time,” which they seek through having a number of lovers. Their relationships with men are best described as “exchange relationships” and, if we would use the term “sex worker,” we must term them “informal sex workers.” The exchange relationships may be short- or long-term, and revolve around the man’s provision of some material security in return for sexual relations. Material support ranges from food, clothing, shelter (usually fairly temporary, the women generally living with their extended kin and with their children, if any), money, and limited, temporary physical protection.

The women are pragmatic about their motives. One commented, “We live this way in order to survive”; another explained that she, like many others, fostered several exchange relationships simultaneously; and still another claimed that up to six such relationships at a time was not unusual for her. The women spend a few nights with a man, then “mysteriously” disappear to the next. They list their expectations as “money, clothes, soap, and so on.” However, any reference or question as to the amount or regularity of this is not welcomed; similarly, any suggestion that there is a direct trade of sex for cash is denied—and usually brings the interview to an abrupt close. These women deny being prostitutes and do not see themselves in the same light as they see women sex workers of the Point or Industria. It is important that, while women we interviewed in both other areas saw themselves as sex workers, Suburbia women did not for a moment so categorize themselves—nor did the men with whom they had relationships or, for that matter, the community at large. However, few women had formed long-standing relationships with their men, but seemed to move easily from one to another.

The Suburbia women we interviewed have not yet reached the point in their lives of needing to be concerned about “settling down” or establishing their own homes. This will come when their parents and older kin begin to age and die, leaving fewer and fewer homes where they can find shelter for their growing children. At such time, they may seriously think about additional ways to earn money. With an education through the sixth standard or so, they are likely to be limited to domestic work—poorly paid and unpopular—trading, or running shack shops and shebeens. Surviving will then take on a new

and more serious meaning, and may dictate a different sexual strategy. Which women are drawn into full commercial sex work, and which follow other routes to survive, needs further investigation.

What are the downsides of the "exchange" type of relationship and life? First, the woman is at the sole mercy of the man or men with whom she has relationships. They meet on the man's terms and in his (or a friend's) room. (Signs of physical violence such as bruises and cuts are often present, and having a number of lovers at once clearly risks jealousy and misunderstanding.) There is, of course, no formal contract, not even a formal verbal agreement, between the parties. The relationship begins and takes its course with the man essentially in the more powerful position. Some of the women drink and smoke fairly heavily, and so do their men. If the women frequent shebeens to meet men, they may become embroiled in fights. Some women seek attachments with local taxi drivers, and this is currently a dangerous occupation, due to taxi feuds. The women choose men who appear prosperous, but these men often believe their wealth confers exclusive rights. Since the men may also cultivate many women friends, the "girl friends" may eventually come to blows.

However, the real danger for these Suburbia women lies in that they rarely, if ever, use condoms. In fact, discussion of condoms in Suburbia has proved very difficult and sensitive. As in much of the general black community, condoms are associated with promiscuity, disease, and uncleanness. Most women in Suburbia are loath to be associated with condoms; they say that, if found in possession of a condom, they will be branded "disease-ridden whores." The very notion of using a condom with a husband or lover, or in an exchange relationship, is unthinkable. It would, the women say, jeopardize the relationship. In any case, they argue, they cannot set the terms of the sex act and, if they try, will be branded a "prostitute." The prevalence of such notions gives cause for grave concern, the more so as associations of condoms and condom use with being "dirty" or having "diseases such as AIDS" appears a developing social construction. As the HIV epidemic spreads and is publicized, the beliefs and fears associated with it grow, concretize, become entrenched. What we are being told in Suburbia is an important indicator of this process. It is ironic that this particular construction should turn on notions of sex for "commercial" purposes—the very concept not seen as a component of the nonmarital sexual relationships prevalent in Suburbia.

To give point to the above, most women we have been working with in Suburbia have never used a condom. Although they, like women in the other areas studied, are relatively well informed about STDs and HIV/AIDS, and do believe that HIV/AIDS exists, they are essentially fatalistic. Their attitude is that they have other pressing problems to consider; hence our initial quotation, from a Suburbia woman, "It's better to die in fifteen years' time of AIDS than to die in five days' time of hunger."

Survival Sex and the Informal Sector

The Suburbia woman's words have an all-too-familiar ring for any researcher steeped in the literature and experience of the "informal sector" in Durban. Leaving aside the specific reference to AIDS, much the same remarks are made by men and women engaged in many of the dangerous and illegal forms of informal money-making that abound in the city's poorer areas. Perhaps the closest and most apt parallel is found in descriptions of the early years of city history, when African women brewed beer and other illegal liquor for sale to the growing community of migrant men in the single-sex hostels and the shack areas surrounding the port and the growing town. The shebeens where the various brews were sold were places of social conviviality, and sex soon became an additional attraction. Durban was not unique. One of the earliest descriptions of women's involvement in informal money-making in South Africa comes from a paper on "beer brewing" in the Cape (Hunter, 1993); Hellmann's (1948) classic description of a "slum yard" in Johannesburg echoes the same points. In Durban, women still recall the days when their stills were regularly raided by municipal police and they had not only to pay fines but to begin their business anew. In field-notes made nearly twenty-five years ago, this quotation catches the spirit of the time: "It happens the police know we brew to live, but they have to chase us . . . We just pay the fines and begin again, and then they have to come again . . . but what can we do? . . . We have to take a chance . . . We women have no other jobs, and the money the men get is so small it can't feed our children." The *ongoing* structural relationship of poverty and risk is clear; all that has changed is that HIV has made the "chance" women take a matter not only of survival, but of death.

The brewer's remarks highlight a number of other important points.

For women with no or little education, there is very limited formal employment available. Even for the present generation, for whom education is relatively more common, jobs are hard to find. But, as elsewhere in the world, women's domestic skills—including sex—are in demand where men migrate and live in hostels or shacks. Making and selling food, selling fruit and vegetables, selling small items of cheap clothing—all complement selling liquor. Other authors have commented that women in the informal sector simply extend their existing capabilities—stereotyped generally as women's work—to serve the needs of their fellows but are seldom paid well for the effort (Moser, 1984). Writers on the informal economy often distinguish between businesses that generate enough profit to plough back into expanding the operation and those in which only enough is made to assist basic survival (Dewar and Watson, 1981). By far the majority of women working in the informal sector fall into the latter category, and their participation in the informal economy is characterized by low returns for long hours and poor working conditions. Although "shebeen queens" are romanticized in the popular imagination as larger (and more beautiful) than life, and are rumored to "make a packet," success stories are the exception (Edwards, 1988). Most liquor sellers, like other informal sector operators, exist, if not literally at a "survivalist" level, at least near it. Our data suggests this is also the case with sex workers. There may be women who service wealthy men and consortia, working out of exclusive nightspots, but they are not the run-of-the-mill women working in escort agencies or frequenting the seedy bars and back streets of Durban. It is the latter who are in the majority and whose work we liken to other, often highly exploitative, forms of informal sector money-making engaged in from necessity rather than choice. Theirs are the "desperation" strategies. (See, on such strategies in other contexts, Cross and Preston-Whyte, 1983.)

Conclusions: Survival Sex and HIV/AIDS in Durban

In concluding, let us review what our research has so far revealed about the field of "survival sex" in Durban. First, this terrain is broad; it stretches from what is clearly perceived and accepted by prostitutes and most clients as "commercial sex work" in the usual Western sense to, at the far extreme, a much more informal and essentially ambig-

uous category of action for which the term "commercial" is not appropriate, and for which such a description is, certainly, contested by the "actors." These poles are represented concretely in our ethnographies, but they could be seen as ideal types set along an arc, with the Beachfront and Suburbia forming the two extremes. Between, Industria stands, a point in what may be a complex gradation of situations and contexts. In Industria we also encounter, in the case of truckers, a situation in which sex workers and clients interpret the nature of their interaction differently; while the women seek to be paid for services, as might any commercial sex worker, the men see the interaction as a "relationship" closer to that prevailing in Suburbia.

Indeed, since Durban is still made up of relatively discrete suburbs based on race, it is likely that further exploration will find other, possibly even more complex, sex "arenas," including some exploited by Indian, Coloured, and white women—and men. Class and language may be contextual variables and pointers, as may education and differential employment opportunities, as well as opportunities for informal money-making. Our model, however, is almost infinitely extendible, of use for a variety of descriptive or analytical purposes (Varga, 1996a).

Second, while the nodes in the social field are likely, at one level, to be characterized by fairly discrete and dense social networks, the evidence so far is that some individuals move between and among the nodes, at least over time. In doing so, they carry their sexual histories with them—and if they are HIV-infected, render their new clients and personal partners vulnerable. We need to get a handle on the magnitude of this movement very soon; as yet, our work has been purely qualitative and exploratory.

Third, the simple model we have developed, we believe, allows us not only to visualize the social field but to target particular nodes or areas for appropriate intervention. Because of its simplicity, this model will, we believe, appeal to policy and decision makers in the health field. In South Africa, the notion of "sexual networks" has already entered the discourse of health professionals in the HIV/AIDS field, although it has yet to be either fully understood or operationalized in research or intervention.

Fourth, on issues of race and gender, our model allows us to map the influence of, and—critically, in the fast-changing present political milieu—the changes in, these arenas. This information, and especially

public awareness of it, is critical at a time a new constitution is under negotiation. Cultural assumptions about sexual behavior and HIV need to be opened for debate; traditional stereotypes and "silences" must be confronted. And it is here that good research can help—both to demystify and to end those silences, at present probably life-threatening for much of the population in general, and for women in particular. Sex workers, as our research clearly shows, are vulnerable even if they use condoms with clients, since they do not carry this protection into sexual relations with personal partners; vulnerability is greater still among those women who do not perceive themselves as sex workers and who cannot negotiate condom use with potentially numerous partners. And any research findings that indicate resistance to condom use, and especially those that point to the development of negative associations, as is clearly occurring in Suburbia, must be speedily fed into intervention programs.

Using the brief and selective ethnographies presented above, we can begin to compare areas and nodes, within the total social field of sex work in Durban, in terms of characteristic "risk factors." Our ethnographies, for instance, immediately present stark area-wide differences in condom use with clients and in the associated ability of women sex workers to negotiate a "contract" including condom use. The amount netted from individual clients for a particular period of time (usually conceptualized by "the night") is also rendered comparable, and reflects the need ("desperation," in some areas) of the women (and men) concerned. The features of the social background producing this vulnerability can then be mapped, providing indications of possible areas for support and intervention.

We suggest, finally—and strongly—that successful intervention in the HIV/AIDS field will need a broad-based approach not only targeting the HIV and health arenas, but developing strategies to remove such structural barriers to survival as inability to find alternative income sources. In the literature on HIV intervention, much is made of the need to empower people, women in particular, to take control of their own lives and sexual decisions. Academic education and economic self-sufficiency go together, and would seem critical in this. If we accept the notion that sex work is but one part of the informal sector—allied, furthermore, to the poorest, most exploited part of this sector—we must acknowledge the extreme vulnerability of its participants, a vulnerability that can only be ameliorated as those concerned

are able to find employment sufficiently well paid; alternatively, their informal money-making activities must transcend the survivalist or desperation level. Only in such a way will they be able to move out of sex work and the survivalist section of the informal economy.

Notes

1. "Survival sex" is a term coined, in a related context, by Muir (1991).

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Chapter Nine

Cultural Regulation, Self-Regulation, and Sexuality

A Psycho-Cultural Model of HIV Risk
in Latino Gay Men

Rafael M. Diaz

Quantitative studies of Latino gay/bisexual men in the U.S. have revealed a positive, statistically significant correlation between individuals' intentions to practice safer sex and their reported condom use in sexual encounters (Diaz, 1995). The correlation suggests, as expected, that individuals who consistently use protection tend to report stronger intentions and commitments to practice safer sex than do individuals who engage in sexual risk behavior. Yet, although the relationship is statistically significant, stated intention to practice safer sex is only a weak predictor of safer sex behavior in this population, explaining only about 3 percent of the variance in reported condom use. A substantial number of study participants who had not protected themselves also reported personal plans, strong intentions, and explicit commitments to use condoms for HIV prevention. The finding that a relatively strong personal intention to practice safer sex may coexist with the practice of unprotected or unsafe sexual behavior is not only psychologically puzzling but in need of further explanation.

Crucial to the task of HIV prevention is to understand the variables, factors, and contexts that compete with enactment of personal intentions of safer sex. Even with relatively strong intentions, an individual may encounter situations that undermine their enactment. Our task is to understand the nature of such situations, as well as the processes and mechanisms by which individuals may, or may not, overcome the obstacles to safer sex practices. Those obstacles or barriers might be personal (psychological or subjective), contextual (cultural, social, interpersonal), or both (psycho-cultural)—as when cultural guidelines