

# Boaz as 'Sugar Daddy': Re-Reading Ruth in the Context of HIV

Gerald O. West and Beverley G. Haddad

## ABSTRACT

---

Research has shown that young African women are one of the key populations that is most at risk to HIV infection. Indications are that these young women are increasingly engaging in age-disparate 'sugar daddy' relationships which is increasing their vulnerability. This article follows the See-Judge-Act methodology, beginning with an analysis of these age-disparate sexual relationships in southern Africa in the context of HIV. The article then analyses a religious resource, Contextual Bible Study, which has the capacity to provide resources for engagement with age-disparate sexual relationships by young African women. A narrative analysis of the biblical book of Ruth is used as a part of this religious resource. The third part of the article considers how this religious resource might contribute to social change in the context of HIV vulnerability.

---

## Introduction

In the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, newspapers, both formal and informal, carry advertisements, every day, for 'sugar daddy' relationships:

### Serious Sugar Daddy

Mature (56) Sugar Daddy (White, wealthy, fit, presentable, professional businessman) living in the Upper Highway area in Durban, looking for a permanent & regular sex companion who should be slim, attractive, intelligent and very broad-minded. Must be ultra hygienic, discreet, independent and have a wicked sense of humour and most importantly understand that quality sex is a lot more than just intercourse. The right person should understand that any relationship that develops will take on a long term view and the sugar will be provided in many different forms. I am not into sleeze, don't enjoy money grabbing wham bam quickie ladies. If you are desperate for money, I sympathise, but please don't contact me—I will reply to all messages

### Sugar daddy seeking sugar baby to spoil!

42 year old div prof male finding myself somewhat at a loose end seeks a sexy young sugar baby to spoil!! Who will of course spoil me in return. I am healthy, D/D free and

---

**Gerald West** teaches Biblical Studies and African Biblical Hermeneutics in the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. <west@ukzn.ac.za>. **Beverley Haddad** is a Senior Research Associate at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. <haddad@ukzn.ac.za>.

will make it more than worth your while in every way possible. Contact me and lets go from there!

Looking 4 slim sexy DUT [Durban University of Technology] female student..to help U with your fees

Are you a slim sexy female student at DUT? Want some help with paying off your fees or other expenses. Well look no further. Slim, sexy sugar daddy available to help you out. All you need to do is help me out in kind. The requirements are you must be a slim, sexy female student at DUT. Race is not important. So don't stress anymore, write to me and you will be taken care off.

SEXY SUGAR DADDY...HALLA AT ME

I'm a single 24yr old law student looking for a discrete, wealthy, intelligent, good looking black/coloured or white NSA (pref a bachelor) who holds a professional career. Must be sweet, gentle and charming, neat no more than size 36 waist (Im a 28waist, with a beautiful body). between 25-40yrs. Some who can wine and dine me, have fun, expect a lot of tlc and love, if you are that special debonair, that gentleman, halla at me, don't have time for something serious right now, so u will be the only ne Im seeing and kicking it with, let me treat you like the king that you are. NOTE: Im not looking for a mere sexmate!

looking for a stable sugar Daddy

Looking for a man preferably Indian but not restricted.

Must be between 40-50. Age will be checked using your license when we meet.

Must be able to host and have time during weekdays.

Sometimes on weekends there may be meetings but not many.

No sleeping over will be taking place.

Can be married or not.

Must be able to be a gentleman when we aren't busy.

Must provide a safe environment.

Must not be sleeping around with any other woman except your wife if you have one .

Looking between 7k -10k a month. Can be negotiated. Some sort of bank statement or salary slip will be required to check if you can provide.

Preferably in the Umhlanga or durban north area. I have my own transport

No time wasters.

Be my Sugar Daddy

I'm a young sexy-23yr old, I'm hoping to connect with a mature man 39 yrs & aboven need him to be well established, groomed& true gentle man, sophisticated in his own right, should be willing to spend time & see to all my needs as a daddy would to her baby girl..forward details & please add pictures (no time wasters)<sup>1</sup>

Such 'advertisements' are a common feature of newspapers in the KwaZulu-Natal region of South Africa (and across South Africa more generally). This article begins with this reality and reflects, using a religious resource, on how this reality

1 These advertisements were taken from the following website (grammar, punctuation and spelling is kept as is): <[http://kwazulu-natal.locanto.co.za/Personals/P/?query=sugar+daddy&geo\\_cid=13&dist=0](http://kwazulu-natal.locanto.co.za/Personals/P/?query=sugar+daddy&geo_cid=13&dist=0)> (Accessed 4 June 2015.) Other similar advertisements are to be found in local newspapers.

affects young African women. The religious resource is the Contextual Bible Study (CBS) methodology of the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research, located within the School of Religion, Philosophy, and Classics of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.<sup>2</sup> The young women are those within various kinds of support groups with which the Ujamaa Centre has worked over many years on a range of contextual issues, including gender-based violence and HIV.

Within the overall cycle of praxis, Contextual Bible Study (as a particular methodology within liberation hermeneutics) operates within the See-Judge-Act framework. See-Judge-Act is a process formed in the worker-priest movement in Europe in the 1930-40s,<sup>3</sup> which was taken up and elaborated in the liberation struggles of South Africa, Latin America, and the Philippines (among other contexts of struggle). The 'See' moment of this process focuses on social analysis, drawing both on the knowledge of the marginalised sector/s concerned and on the social sciences.<sup>4</sup> In this article we analyse or 'See' the reality of age-disparate sexual relationships in the context of HIV. We then go on to 'Judge' or engage with this reality from the prophetic trajectories of the Bible, using the biblical book of Ruth as a resource. And finally we formulate preliminary forms of action ('Act') that emerge from the 'See' and 'Judge' moments.

This article also follows the See-Judge-Act format. We begin with South Africa's HIV reality.

## HIV in South Africa

In 2013 South Africa accounted for 18% of the 35 million people living with HIV globally, the highest number in any one single country.<sup>5</sup> Statistics show that AIDS deaths continue largely as a result of tuberculosis.<sup>6</sup> This remains true for South Africa even though it has one of the largest treatment programmes in the world.

2 Gerald O. West, "Do Two Walk Together? Walking with the Other through Contextual Bible Study", *Anglican Theological Review* 93, no. 3 (2011), 431-449; Gerald O. West, "Newsprint Theology: Bible in the Context of HIV and AIDS," in *Out of Place: Doing Theology on the Crosscultural Brink*, ed. Jione Havea and Clive Pearson, 161-186 (London: Equinox Publishing, 2011).

3 James R. Cochrane, "Questioning Contextual Theology," in *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in Honour of Albert Nolan*, ed. McGlory T. Speckman and Larry T. Kaufmann, 67-86 (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 76-77; Gerald O. West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Second Edition ed. (Maryknoll and Pietermaritzburg: Orbis Books and Cluster Publications, 1995), 188-193.

4 Per Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa: A First World Interpretation* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1988), 6-9.

5 UNAIDS, *The Gap Report* (2014). <[http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/UNAIDS\\_Gap\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_Gap_report_en.pdf)>. Accessed 26 December 2015.

6 UNAIDS, *The Gap Report*, 20.

While new infections have declined across all age groups by 33% since 2001, there were 2.1 million new infections worldwide with South Africa yet again showing the highest number and accounting for 16% of these new infections.<sup>7</sup> UNAIDS has indicated that young women and adolescent girls are disproportionately vulnerable to HIV. 'There are almost 380 000 [340 000-440 000] new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women (10-24 years old) around the world every year. Globally, 15% of all women living with HIV aged 15 years or older are young women 15-24 years old. Of these, 80% live in sub-Saharan Africa. In this region, women acquire HIV infection at least 5-7 years earlier than men'.<sup>8</sup>

Since the onset of the HIV epidemic in Sub-Saharan Africa, data from antenatal records and population surveys have shown high levels of HIV incidence in teenage women while infection rates remain low in men until their mid-to-late 20s.<sup>9</sup> As early as 2003, research in South Africa indicated that young women were four times more likely to be infected with HIV than young men (15.5% versus 4.8%).<sup>10</sup> Research at this time in other parts of Africa indicated a similar trend.<sup>11</sup> As indicated earlier, despite a decline in new HIV infections in the general population, young women remain particularly vulnerable. HIV prevalence trends in South Africa monitored by the Department of Health through their ante-natal clinics as well as research carried out by the Centre for AIDS Research in South Africa (CAPRISA) in rural Vulindlela, KwaZulu-Natal, the province in which we live and work, reveal an increase in prevalence among young women below the age of 20.<sup>12</sup> 'The overall HIV prevalence in this age group increased from 16.6% in 2006 to 20.8% in 2008'.<sup>13</sup>

A study conducted by CAPRISA researchers between 2010 and 2011 amongst high school learners showed consistently higher prevalence rates amongst the adolescent girls as compared to adolescent boys.<sup>14</sup> Adolescent girls in the 15-19 age group 'acquire HIV at least 5-7 years earlier than their male peers and have

---

7 UNAIDS, *The Gap Report*, 18.

8 UNAIDS, *The Gap Report*, 20.

9 Simon Gregson et al., "Sexual Mixing Patterns and Sex-Differentials in Teenage Exposure to HIV Infection in Rural Zimbabwe," *The Lancet* 359 (2002), 1896-1903: 1896.

10 Audrey Pettifor et al., "Young People's Sexual Health in South Africa: HIV Prevalence and Sexual Behaviours from a Nationally Representative Household Survey", *AIDS* 19 (2005), 1525-1534: 1531.

11 Pettifor et al., "Young People's Sexual Health in South Africa"; Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa: The Dynamics of Hypervulnerability," *AIDS* 22, no. Supplement 4 (2008), S17-S25.

12 Ayesha B.M. Kharsany et al., "HIV Prevalence among High School Learners - Opportunities for Schools-Based HIV Testing Programmes and Sexual Reproductive Health Services", *BMC Public Health* 12: 231 (2012), 1-6: 1.

13 Kharsany et al., "HIV Prevalence among High School Learners", 1.

14 Kharsany et al., "HIV Prevalence among High School Learners", 4.

a 3-to 4- fold higher incidence rate'.<sup>15</sup>

These recent statistics of increasing new infections amongst young women are mirrored across the continent. For example, in Mozambique adolescent girls 'had an HIV prevalence of 7%, which doubled to 15% by the time they were 25 years of age while in Lesotho, an HIV prevalence of 4% was recorded among adolescent girls, which increased to 24% among young women aged 20-24 years'.<sup>16</sup>

In trying to understand the higher rate of infection in young women as compared to their male peers, studies have increasingly confirmed that age-disparate relationships play an important role in HIV vulnerability. Age-disparate relationships, argues Leclerc-Madlala, 'generally refer to those in which the age gap between partners is 5 years or more. Intergenerational or cross-generation relationships usually refer to relationships with a 10-year or more age disparity between the partners'.<sup>17</sup>

## Age-Disparate Relationships

In a landmark study conducted by Gregson et al. in Zimbabwe, researchers concluded that younger women having relationships with older men contribute to the spread of HIV infection.<sup>18</sup> While this had long been suspected, this study was the first to empirically show this to be the case. Since then, the evidence has continued to mount across sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>19</sup> The 2003 South African study on the sexual behaviour of young people similarly identified the fact that while the age difference of sexual partners for boys was one year or younger, for girls

15 Ayesha B.M. Kharsany et al., "HIV Infection in High School Students in Rural South Africa: Role of Transmissions among Students," *AIDS Research and Human Retroviruses* 30, no. 10 (2014), 956-965: 957.

16 UNAIDS, *The Gap Report*, 32.

17 Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa", S18.

18 Gregson et al., "Sexual Mixing Patterns and Sex-Differentials". The focus of this article is older men/younger women; though less prevalent, older women/younger men and age-disparate same-sex relationships also deserve research attention.

19 Nancy Luke, "Confronting the 'Sugar Daddy' Stereotype: Age and Economic Asymmetries and Risky Sexual Behaviour in Urban Kenya", *International Family Planning Perspectives* 31, no. 1 (2005), 6-14; Josephine Nkosana and Doreen Rosenthal, "The Dynamics of Intergenerational Sexual Relationships: The Experience of Schoolgirls in Botswana", *Sexual Health* 4, no. 3 (2007), 181-187; Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa"; K. Hawkings, N. Price, and F. Mussá, "Milking the Cow: Young Women's Construction of Identity and Risk in Age-Disparate Transactional Sexual Relationships in Maputo, Mozambique", *Global Public Health* 4, no. 2 (2009), 169-182; Ann-Maree Nobelius et al., "Sexual Partner Types and Related Sexual Health Risk among out-of-School Adolescents in Rural South-West Uganda", *AIDS Care* 23, no. 2 (2011), 252-259.

the age of sexual partners was at least four years older.<sup>20</sup> Given the ‘aggregating prevalence of HIV with increasing age ... a young girl engaging in a sexual relationship with an older man is at much higher risk of HIV acquisition compared to a young girl engaging with a male peer’.<sup>21</sup>

Research over the past decade has consistently shown that age-disparate relationships increase the risk of HIV infection among young women.<sup>22</sup> The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa conducts a National HIV Survey every three to four years and has been tracking HIV prevalence in relation to age-disparate relationships amongst adolescents. The report of the latest National Survey (2012) asserts: ‘The percentages of young females who have had sex with partners who are 5 years and older than them has increased over the period of the [past] four surveys, reaching a high rate of one-third (33.6%) of young females aged 15-19 years in 2012. At the same time low percentages of young males (4.1%) engaged in similar behaviour’.<sup>23</sup>

This is confirmed by the study conducted by CAPRISA amongst high school students in the Vulindlela region of KwaZulu-Natal. Their research shows that there is a substantial discrepancy in prevalence levels between male and female high school students, particularly from the age of 16 years upwards. There is ‘an almost three times greater HIV risk in adolescent girls compared to their male peers’.<sup>24</sup>

These observed differences in age-stratified HIV prevalence between men and women is not fully understood but ‘it is thought that a complex interplay of biological, socio-behavioural, and epidemiological factors is responsible for the observed differences in age-stratified HIV prevalence between men and women’.<sup>25</sup> Age-disparate relationships play a large part in the greater vulnerability of young

20 Pettifor et al., “Young People’s Sexual Health in South Africa”, 1528.

21 Rachel Dellar, Sarah Dlamini, and Quarraisha Abdool Karim, “Adolescent Girls and Young Women: Key Populations for HIV Epidemic Control”, *Journal of the International AIDS Society* 18, Supplement 1 (2015), 64-70: 66.

22 The findings of a recent study conducted by researchers of the Africa Centre, Hlabisa, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa has disputed this, arguing that age-disparate relationships pose no additional risk of infection. However, this study is regarded as contentious in some scholarly circles and still needs to be verified by the wider scientific community; Guy Harling et al., “Do Age-Disparate Relationships Drive HIV Incidence in Young Women? Evidence from a Population Cohort in Rural Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa”, *Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes* 66, no. 4 (2014), 443-451.

23 HSRC, “South African National HIV Incidence, Prevalence and Behaviour Survey, 2012”, (Pretoria: HSRC, 2012), 116.

24 Kharsany et al., “HIV Infection in High School Students in Rural South Africa”, 962.

25 Roxanne Beauclair and Wim Delva, “Is Younger Really Safer? A Qualitative Study of Perceived Risks and Benefits of Age Disparate Relationships among Women in Cape Town, South Africa”, *PLoS One* 8, no. 11 (2013), e81748: 1.

women to HIV infection.<sup>26</sup>

The vulnerability in these relationships is related to a number of factors. Studies have shown that there is decreased condom use in age-disparate relationships.<sup>27</sup> Men who are making an economic investment in the relationship 'wish to avoid extra expense, and feel there is less need because young women are free of HIV'. Young women are not in a position to insist on the use of condoms 'as they stand to lose the economic benefits'.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, research indicates that early sexual debut increases HIV vulnerability.<sup>29</sup> Young women whose first partner was an older man 'are more likely than their peers to have had first sex at an early age' thus increasing their vulnerability.<sup>30</sup> Given the biological vulnerability of young girls to HIV, violent sex increases this vulnerability. Again, studies have shown that young girls in relationships with older men are limited in their ability to negotiate the nature of the sexual act, often leading to coerced and forced sex.<sup>31</sup>

Yet young girls seek out relationships with older men, often referred to as 'sugar daddies' as the advertisements at the beginning of the article suggest, and there are many older men willing to oblige. While there is no standard definition of a 'sugar daddy', 'most agree that sugar daddy relationships entail large age and economic asymmetries between partners'.<sup>32</sup> However, just how widespread these relationships are in areas of high HIV prevalence in adolescent girls is contested. Nancy Luke conducted a study in Kisumu, Kenya, among nearly 3000 men and found that age-disparate relationships were common. However, she argues that the term 'sugar daddy' is misleading and has limited scientific usefulness as relatively poor men also play the role of sugar daddy.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, South African research also suggested that the 'sugar daddy' phenomenon was not as widespread as was expected amongst South African young women.<sup>34</sup>

26 Pettifor et al., "Young People's Sexual Health in South Africa".

27 Gregson et al., "Sexual Mixing Patterns and Sex-Differentials"; Luke, "Confronting the 'Sugar Daddy' Stereotype"; Audrey Pettifor et al., "Early Coital Debut and Associated HIV Risk Factors among Young Women and Men in South Africa", *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 35, no. 2 (2009), 82-89.

28 Gregson et al., "Sexual Mixing Patterns and Sex-Differentials", 1900.

29 Early sexual debut is defined as "having had vaginal sex for the first time at age 14 years or younger"; Pettifor et al., "Early Coital Debut and Associated HIV Risk Factors", 83.

30 Pettifor et al., "Early Coital Debut and Associated HIV Risk Factors," 86.

31 Pettifor et al., "Early Coital Debut and Associated HIV Risk Factors." Though not the focus of this article, the very terminology of 'sugar daddy' should be interrogated for ways in which such terminology participates in age-disparate sexual abuse and incest.

32 Luke, "Confronting the 'Sugar Daddy' Stereotype", 8.

33 Quoted in Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa", S18.

34 Pettifor et al., "Early Coital Debut and Associated HIV Risk Factors".

But clearly more recent studies are identifying distinct patterns of transactional sex between young women and older men.<sup>35</sup> This led to the KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Government launching an 'Anti-Sugar Daddy Campaign' in 2012 and placing more than 89 billboards across the Province warning against the dangers of cross-generational sex.<sup>36</sup> The campaign used radio and visual media to promote awareness and discussion about cross-generational sex and its impact in the Province. In the same year, a women's empowerment organisation, ZAZI,<sup>37</sup> launched a similar campaign urging young women to stay away from sugar daddies through national television advertisements.

In trying to understand why young women get involved in relationships with older men, Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala has suggested that there are large differences between urban and rural settings. Through a systematic review of the literature, she argues that in poor rural settings 'the lack of access to education, health services, employment and a weak economy, associated with poverty, often pushed women and girls into age disparate sexual partnerships with potential economic benefits'.<sup>38</sup> The money obtained was used to 'pay for education as well as to buy clothes and simple luxuries such as soaps, body lotions and snacks'.<sup>39</sup> Some studies revealed that in these poor settings, there was sometimes pressure on young girl children from parents to have a relationship with an older employed man, 'both as a means for getting money and household necessities, as well as to marry and bring in bridewealth'.<sup>40</sup>

Studies conducted by the HSRC have shown that 'at times some mothers turn a blind eye to sugar daddies or actively encourage their daughters to go out *'bayophanda'* [seek rich partners and exchange sex for survival]'.<sup>41</sup> These studies, as well as that conducted by CAPRISA,<sup>42</sup> indicate that young girls growing up without a father are particularly vulnerable to HIV as they engage in transactional sex for survival. This also accounts for the higher HIV prevalence amongst orphans.<sup>43</sup>

35 HSRC, "South African National HIV Incidence, Prevalence and Behaviour Survey, 2012"; Kharsany et al., "HIV Infection in High School Students in Rural South Africa".

36 KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health 2001, "Sugar Daddy Campaign", Web. <<http://www.kznhealth.gov.za/sugardaddy.htm>> (Accessed 27 May 2015.)

37 An isiZulu word meaning "know yourself". <<http://www.zazi.org.za>> (Accessed 27 May 2015.)

38 Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa," S19.

39 Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa", 19.

40 Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa", 19.

41 HSRC, "South African National HIV Incidence, Prevalence and Behaviour Survey, 2012", 120.

42 Kharsany et al., "HIV Prevalence among High School Learners"; Kharsany et al., "HIV Infection in High School Students in Rural South Africa."

43 HSRC, "South African National HIV Incidence, Prevalence and Behaviour Survey, 2012," 120.



Leclerc-Madlala also suggests that studies across Africa (in both rural and urban settings) indicate that socio-economic security was often associated with marriage and subsequent motherhood: '[O]lder men played an important role in providing resources that helped young women to attract and maintain relationships with younger men with the hope that this might lead to marriage'. Furthermore, studies have shown that in rural settings, young women were 'more directly subjected to traditional rules that guided relations between men and women. Young women were often expected to be obedient, dutiful, and otherwise act in ways that demonstrated "respect" towards older men'. This results in these young women being especially vulnerable 'to coercive attempts by older men such as teachers to engage in sex'.<sup>44</sup>

Within the urban setting, material gain also played a large part in the reason why young girls entered into relationships with older men. However, the focus is not so much on meeting subsistence needs as is the case in the rural setting, but rather to boost their status in the eyes of their peers. Urban young women were interested in the 'fun' associated with the glamour of the lifestyle brought about by material goods.<sup>45</sup>

But in addition to material gain brought about through the transactional sex, studies have also revealed that there are other symbolic and emotional reasons why young women enter into sexual relations with older men. In the urban setting, young women are not necessarily victims, but active agents in these relationships. Studies in Mozambique, Botswana and South Africa indicate that young women 'are mindful of the factors constraining future goals (i.e. lack of employment opportunities and access to education, corruption, low wages), and so they see relationships with older men as the easiest and natural way to acquire a better life'.<sup>46</sup> While they are often powerless regarding safer sex negotiations in relationships with older men, 'they often have a high degree of control over partnership formation and choosing the number and types of partners with whom they become involved'.<sup>47</sup>

A recent qualitative study conducted in Cape Town, South Africa, has shown that many young women choose a relationship with an older man because they believe that gender violence is less likely to take place. Respondents in this study

---

44 Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa," S19.

45 Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa," S19.

46 Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa," S19.

47 Leclerc-Madlala, "Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa," S23.

viewed same age relationships or those with younger men as being “disrespectful and abusive”.<sup>48</sup> While financial and material gain was the overwhelming motivation for relationships with older men, young women envisaged that older men potentially provided psycho-social support through protection from abuse and violence.

Furthermore, a related finding of this study indicated that women participants ‘did not perceive age disparate relationships to pose risks of any kind’. The few women who did perceive some risk in having sexual relations with older men ‘did not necessarily make the connection between those risks and HIV/STI acquisition’. Indeed, the study results seem to suggest quite the opposite. Young women associate risk with same age partnerships which are deemed likely to be more abusive.<sup>49</sup>

As already indicated, various studies have shown that women in violent relationships are more afraid to insist on condom use or to ask their partners to refrain from concurrent relationships. However, it is unclear if the women in this Cape Town study were aware of the connection between HIV and gender violence. But it does seem that “the immediate threat of [intimate partner violence] has a stronger influence on relationship decisions among these women than inconspicuous and more distant risk of HIV infection and other STIs”.<sup>50</sup>

Leclerc-Madlala points to studies that show that even when knowledge of HIV is high, ‘the benefits from these relationships often outweigh the cost of contracting HIV’.<sup>51</sup> Against the considerable material as well as psycho-social and emotional benefits, ‘any perceived risk of HIV is often pushed aside in an effort to add meaning to often (but not always) difficult and uncertain lives and to create at least the illusion of romance’.<sup>52</sup>

As Leclerc-Madlala goes on to argue, there are also cultural antecedents that lie behind the practice. Leclerc-Madlala has argued that in southern Africa there is no historic or ethnographic evidence to suggest that social taboos against age-disparate relationships existed. In fact, to the contrary, young girls have been encouraged to seek out older men for greater marital stability and thus same-age marital relationships are discouraged. Furthermore, men favour marrying younger, presumably more fertile, women. As he says:

Older accounts of courtship and marriage alert us to the idea that what we refer to now as age-disparate relationships as well as transactional sex and multiple concurrent

---

48 Beauclair and Delva, “Is Younger Really Safer?” 1.

49 Beauclair and Delva, “Is Younger Really Safer?” 6.

50 Beauclair and Delva, “Is Younger Really Safer?” 6.

51 Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa”, S20.

52 Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa,” S21-S22.

partnerships, all have antecedents in older practices that have long played a part in defining the nature of social life and the particular values and norms associated with sexuality.<sup>53</sup>

Leclerc-Madlala goes on to argue that age-disparate sex that assumes a “reciprocal/transactional” element is maintained by two interlinked enduring cultural prescriptions:

One prescribes for men to redistribute wealth on a scale appropriate to their standing and demonstrate love, commitment or appreciation for sex through material giving. The other prescribes for women to expect and receive a material compensation for sexual favours as a validation of their worth and as a sign of a partner's love, commitment or appreciation.<sup>54</sup>

The benefits (both real and perceived) derived from engaging in sexual relations with older men in a context of poverty and survival as well as these enduring cultural prescriptions pose a huge challenge in mitigating the incidence of HIV in young women. In the next section of our article we reflect on a religious resource that demonstrates signs of enabling deeper discussion among those affected.

## Heterotopic Religious Resources

This analysis of age-disparate sex from a range of social sciences includes, in some of the studies, the voices of African young women themselves. It is this vulnerable sector that is the focus of our Contextual Bible Study. CBS is a religious resource that enables the voices of this vulnerable sector to become even more evident. Alongside the social scientific analysis, the processes of CBS offer a potential safe socio-religious space in which young African woman—initially and foundationally—might construct their own discourse, including a theological component, concerning age-disparate sexual relationships.

Contextual Bible Study offers a heterotopic space in which organised groups of young women can construct their own discourse about age-disparate sexual relationships. Michel Foucault identifies a heterotopia as a ‘counter-site’, but in an unusual sense. For Foucault a heterotopic site is ‘counter’ to a utopian site. ‘Utopias’, argues Foucault, reflecting perhaps on notions of ‘utopia’ prevalent in liberation theologies in the 1970s,<sup>55</sup> ‘are sites with no real place’.<sup>56</sup> But, continues Foucault, there are also ‘real places—places that do exist ...—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites,

---

53 Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa,” 22.

54 Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa,” 23.

55 Jose Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 132-153.

56 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias,” Web. <<http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>>. Accessed 26 January 2016.

all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'.<sup>57</sup> Contextual Bible Study participates in and contributes to the construction of such heterotopic sites.<sup>58</sup>

The Ujamaa Centre's theory of knowledge production and change is founded on the foundational tenet of liberation theology: the epistemological privilege of the poor.<sup>59</sup> The knowledge of the poor is vital to any project of social transformation. Faith, and faith-based resources like the Bible, are potential assets which marginalised sectors can deploy in projects of social transformation. So in engaging with age-disparate sexual relationships, it is the presence and participation and knowledge of young African women that provides the starting point of social transformation. Their epistemology is fundamental to an analysis of age-disparate sexual relationships and their epistemology provides the necessary 'logic' for the forms of action that they might choose to take as part of a transformative project.

For these reasons the Ujamaa Centre privileges organised groups of young African women. The use of the term 'organised' is deliberate. By being 'organised' groups have already constructed their own safe and sequestered sites, and have already begun to assemble their own discourse concerning their realities. They have already forged a vocabulary for talking about their realities (including their bodies), and they are in (partial) control of their own space.

Here the Ujamaa Centre's praxis is informed by the work of James Scott. The organised marginalised have 'a shared interest in jointly creating a discourse of dignity, of negation, and of justice'. 'They have, in addition', Scott continues, 'a shared interest in concealing a social site apart from domination where such a hidden transcript can be elaborated in comparative safety'.<sup>60</sup> As Scott indicates, a safe social site enables an articulation. Put differently, the question posed by Gayatri Spivak, of whether or not the subaltern *can* speak,<sup>61</sup> should be recast as a question that takes space seriously. A more appropriate question would be: 'Where can the subaltern speak?' For as Scott so eloquently argues, subordinate classes are less constrained at the level of thought and ideology than they are at the level of political action and struggle 'since they can in secluded settings speak with comparative safety'.<sup>62</sup> Human dignity, even in the most damaged and denigrated

57 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", 4.

58 Gerald O. West, "The Biblical Text as a Heterotopic Intercultural Site: In Search of Redemptive Masculinities," in *Bible and Transformation: The Promise of Intercultural Bible Reading*, ed. Hans De Wit and Janet Dyk, *Semeia Studies*, 241-257 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015).

59 Frostin, *Liberation Theology in Tanzania and South Africa*, 6.

60 James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), 114.

61 Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Gary Nelson and L. Grossberg, 271-313 (London: Macmillan, 1988).

62 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 91.

subaltern, demands some form of 'speaking'.<sup>63</sup> How the subaltern speaks depends almost entirely on local 'sectoral' control of space.

This is why women's faith-based support groups are significant sites for engaging with age-disparate sexual relationships. These are sites that have already been established by women in the face of patriarchy, with particular faith-based symbols and rituals playing a significant role in securing these sites.<sup>64</sup> CBS work only takes place in such sites when and if the Ujamaa Centre is invited by those who control particular sites to enter their site and to collaborate with them.

CBS processes<sup>65</sup> are part of the infrastructure of such heterotopic space. CBS processes provide the scaffolding within which a common embodied vocabulary can be constructed, drawing both on the embodied knowledge of those participating and resonances between these local knowledges and a particular biblical narrative. James Scott offers us a useful account of how marginalised sectors construct their own discourse among themselves, describing how the first articulation by a member of the group has the potential to set in motion a 'crystallization' whereby the other members of the group recognise 'close relatives' of their own experience, connecting them to a 'single power grid'.<sup>66</sup> James Cochrane makes a similar argument, but uses theological language, when he describes the 'incipient theology' of marginalised sectors as residing in the continuum between the conscious and the unconscious, 'the realm of partial recognition, of inchoate awareness, of ambiguous perception, and, sometimes of creative tension: that liminal space of human experience in which people discern acts and facts but cannot or do not order them into narrative descriptions or even into articulate conceptions of the world'.<sup>67</sup> 'Through a long process of self-constitution that depends upon a history of growing consciousness through communicative action', Cochrane goes on to argue, organised groups have the capacity to develop 'a foregrounded subjectivity', with the capacity both to speak to one another and to speak to others outside the community.<sup>68</sup>

What we will address in the next section of this article, as we move from 'See' to 'Judge', is the capacity of a biblical narrative like the book of Ruth to offer

63 West, "Newsprint Theology: Bible in the Context of HIV and AIDS".

64 Beverley G. Haddad, "The Manyano Movement in South Africa: Site of Struggle, Survival, and Resistance", *Agenda* 61 (2004), 4-13.

65 For a fuller discussion see Gerald O. West, "Reading the Bible with the Marginalised: The Value/s of Contextual Bible Reading," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015), 235-261.

66 Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 223-224.

67 James R. Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 88; citing Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*, 2 vols., vol. One (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 29.

68 Cochrane, *Circles of Dignity: Community Wisdom and Theological Reflection*, 111.

resources within such heterotopic sites—to offer an extended vocabulary with which to articulate embodied knowledge and the potential to provide a narrative shape with which to voice and validate such embodied knowledge.

## Re-reading (Once Again) Ruth

For many African readers of the Bible, and we suspect for (faithful) readers of the Bible in general, there is an immediacy of encounter with the Bible. CBS works with this interpretive immediacy but places alongside it a more critically ‘distanced’ engagement with the biblical text. Alongside the ‘community consciousness’ that already inhabits a heterotopic site, CBS offers forms of ‘critical consciousness’ with respect to the biblical text. CBS does this by asking literary-type questions of the biblical text, facilitating a re-reading of the text, and slowing down the process of engagement with the text.<sup>69</sup> Through distanciation (to use Paul Ricoeur’s term for ‘critical’)<sup>70</sup> the text becomes (more) ‘other’, and therefore has the potential to become a heterotopic site in its own terms. Slow re-readings of biblical narrative open up the heterotopic potential of the biblical text. As Foucault observes, heterotopias have the capacity to connect sites across both time and space (though he is less sure about the former).<sup>71</sup> The biblical text as sacred text has the capacity to sanctify both time and space, enabling believing readers of the Bible to connect their contexts with biblical narrative contexts, across both time and space, finding and forging lines of connection between their own contexts and the narrative world of the biblical text.

In this case we chose the biblical book of Ruth. African biblical scholarship, particularly work done by African women,<sup>72</sup> has regularly turned and returned to

---

69 See Gerald O. West, “Deploying the Literary Detail of a Biblical Text (2 Samuel 13:1-22) in Search of Redemptive Masculinities”, in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J.A. Clines*, ed. James K. Aitken, Jeremy M.S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier, (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013) 297-312; John Riches et al., *What Is Contextual Bible Study? A Practical Guide with Group Studies for Advent and Lent* (London: SPCK, 2010), 41.

70 Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation”, *Philosophy Today* 17, no. 2 (1973), 129-141.

71 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias”, 3, 8.

72 The examples which follow focus on Africans living and working on the African continent. There is, of course, a vast range of biblical scholarship on the book of Ruth, including work by other Africans, but the focus of our article is the African context. For resonances between the work done in this article and work within African American contexts see the work of Cheryl Anderson; for example, Cheryl B. Anderson, *Ancient Laws and Contemporary Controversies: The Need for Inclusive Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); “The Song of Songs: Redeeming Gender Constructions in the Age of AIDS”, in *Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting* (Buenos Aires 2015).

the biblical book of Ruth. The socio-geographical setting of the book,<sup>73</sup> as well as a range of African context-resonant themes, such as communal notions of marriage,<sup>74</sup> ethnicity,<sup>75</sup> economic vulnerability,<sup>76</sup> women's agency,<sup>77</sup> the limits on women's agency,<sup>78</sup> post-colonial relationships,<sup>79</sup> HIV,<sup>80</sup> resistance to patriarchy,<sup>81</sup> the vulnerability of women's bodies,<sup>82</sup> alternative constructions of female space,<sup>83</sup> singleness,<sup>84</sup> have generated many African re-readings.

So it was not strange that we turned to the book of Ruth in the context of age-disparate sexual relationships, recognising its 'surplus of meaning'<sup>85</sup> in African contexts and drawing on a literary analysis of the narrative, both in terms of the 'constructive' and 'deconstructive' dimensions of literary analysis.<sup>86</sup> The narrative

73 Gerald O. West, "Ruth", in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D.G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson, 208-212 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

74 Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, "Biblical Hermeneutics: Ancient Palestine and the Contemporary World", *Review and Expositor: A Quarterly Baptist Theological Journal* 94, no. 3 (1997), 363-378.

75 Musa W. Dube, "The Unpublished Letters of Orpah to Ruth", in *Ruth and Esther: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner, 145-150 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

76 Beverley G. Haddad, "African Women's Theologies of Survival: Intersecting Faith, Feminisms, and Development" (PhD, University of Natal, 2000), 311-312.

77 Sarojini Nadar, "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth", in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube, 159-175 (Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001).

78 Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "African 'Ruths', Ruthless Africas: Reflections of an African 'Mordecai'", in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube, 237-251 (Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001).

79 Musa W. Dube, "Divining Ruth for International Relations", in *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible*, ed. Musa W. Dube, 179-195 (Atlanta and Geneva: Society of Biblical Literature and WCC Publications, 2001).

80 Alta C. van Dyk and Peet J. van Dyk, "HIV/AIDS in Africa: Suffering Women and the Theology of the Book of Ruth", *Old Testament Essays* 15, no. 1 (2002), 209-224; Madipoane J. Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), "Seeking Security through Marriage: Ruth 1:6-18 Placed under an African Woman's HIV and AIDS Lens", *Journal of Constructive Theology* 13, no. 2 (2007), 57-70; Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), "Impoverished on Harvesting Ground: Ruth 3 and African Women in an HIV-Positive South Africa", in *Another World Is Possible: Spiritualities and Religions of Global Darker Peoples*, ed. D.N Hopkins and M. Lewis (Equinox Publishing, 2009).

81 "Ruth", in Daniel Patte, Ed., *Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 86.

82 "Struggling with Poverty/Emptiness: Rereading the Naomi-Ruth Story in African-South Africa", *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 120 (2004), 46-59.

83 "Is Ruth the 'Eset Hayil for Real? An Exploration of Womanhood from African Proverbs to the Threshing Floor (Ruth 3:1-13)", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXVI, Supplement (2010), 253-272.

84 "Engaging with the Book of Ruth as Single, African Christian Women: One African Woman's Reflection", *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013), 1-9.

85 Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

86 Dennis T. Olson, "Literary and Rhetorical Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, 13-54 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

features of the text that invited our re-reading included the foregrounding of Boaz's identity as 'a prominent rich man' (2:1), the initiative of Boaz in identifying Ruth as a foreigner who 'belongs' not to a man but to a woman (2:4-6), and the initiative of Boaz in offering Ruth his resources and advising her to remain within his fields (2:8-9).<sup>87</sup> Was Boaz, we wondered, advertising himself as a potential 'sugar daddy'?

We used this provocative question in an Ujamaa Centre training workshop (in February 2015), inviting the participants, who were from a number of Southern African contexts, to work together in small groups through the See-Judge-Act process with respect to 'sugar-daddies' and how the book of Ruth might be used to construct a safe heterotopic site in which to talk about age-disparate sexual relationships. We encouraged participants to transgress the bounds of 'decent' theology and to enter the terrain of what Marcella Althaus-Reid refers to as "indecent theology".<sup>88</sup> What follows draws on the work done at this workshop.

We envisaged an opening question—for CBS is driven by a series of directed questions that move the process from 'See' to 'Judge' to 'Act'—that enabled a re-telling of the narrative as a whole, based on African art images or a participant led drama. So, the first CBS question took the following forms, both opening up space for forms of community knowledge ('community consciousness'):

1. Question 1: Having watched the drama on the book of Ruth, what do you think are the most important themes emerging from the book?

Question 1: Using the African art images of the story of Ruth, re-tell the story in your small groups. What 'scenes' are missing? Draw your own picture of one missing scene.

Moving into 'critical consciousness' the interpretive process then slows down as the narrative detail of the text is probed for the resources it may bring, on its own terms, to the CBS. There is much in the story that resonates with African contexts, which is why this biblical book has had such a rich reception history in those same contexts. But because our focus in this CBS was on age-disparate sexual relationships, and assuming that economic struggle is an element in the risks young African woman take in entering into age-disparate sexual relationships, we chose to re-read Ruth 2:1-16 more carefully and slowly, probing the economic realities of Ruth and her initial encounter with Boaz.

2. Question 2: Re-read Ruth 2:1-16 in small groups. What is the first thing Ruth does when she arrives in her mother-in-laws' context, and why does she make this her first priority?

<sup>87</sup> The references throughout are to the New Revised Standard Version (1989).

<sup>88</sup> Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).



3. Question 3: It seems that it is Boaz who first notices Ruth. What do we know about Boaz, and what questions does he ask about her? What do you think his motives are when he talks to her?
4. Question 4: How does Ruth respond to Boaz? What do you think her motives are when she talks to him?

Each of these questions assumes the generative contextual theme of age-disparate sexual relationships, but the questions remain focussed on the literary world of the text, inviting the participants to enter into this world, whether following the narrator's point of view or ignoring it and reading against the grain of the text (as it has been received in communities of faith). We envisaged that these questions could be done together as a set of questions, with each small group then reporting back to the others about their discussion, using their own 'newsprint'<sup>89</sup> summary as a resource to reflect the corporate responses to each question.

The narrative suggests that there is an age difference between Ruth and Boaz, though it is not clear what the age difference is.<sup>90</sup> The information in 1:4, that Naomi and her sons 'had lived there [in Moab] for about ten years', does not indicate clearly how long each of the sons had been married, nor does it explain the absence of children from these marriages. Ruth may be a very young woman at this time, recently married, or a slightly older young woman, having been married for some years. What is clear, later on in the narrative, is that Boaz emphasises their age difference, when he commends her, on her coming to him, on 'not going after young men' (3:10). At the outset of the narrative Boaz refers to her as 'this young woman' (2:5), and later twice as 'my daughter' (2:8; 3:10).

Though chapter 2 of the narrative begins with Boaz, we chose to begin with Ruth, recognising her agency in the task of survival, and giving the agency (by analogy) to the young African women participating in the CBS.

The next question, discussed on its own in small groups, shifts to the relationship between Ruth and Naomi, probing what participants in the Ujamaa Centre workshop believed was a growing trend of older women, often from within the family, 'grooming' younger women for sex with older men in order to secure resources for them both.<sup>91</sup>

---

89 West, "Newsprint Theology: Bible in the Context of HIV and AIDS".

90 Wendy Doniger argues that Naomi is the more appropriate age-mate for Boaz; see the discussion in Wendy Doniger, *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

91 For a similar argument see Wilda C. Gafney, "Mother Knows Best: Messianic Surrogacy and Sexploitation in Ruth", in *Mother Goose, Mother Jones, Mommie Dearest: Biblical Mothers and Their Children* ed. Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan and Tina Pippin, 23-36 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

5. Question 5: Re-read Ruth 2:17-3:18 in small groups. What is the role of Naomi in encouraging Ruth to have a sexual relationship with Boaz? What do you think are her motives?

This question is directive, avoiding any ambiguity in the interpretation of what happens on the threshing floor. There is strong biblical (Hosea 9:1) and scholarly support for sex on the threshing floor,<sup>92</sup> and this question enters this terrain directly, inviting talk about sex.

Questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 each focus ‘on-the-text’, facilitating regular re-readings of the narrative in some detail. Our experience with this and other CBS work is that participants will have already begun to bring their own contexts to bear on the biblical text as they engage with the textual questions.

The next set of questions therefore move from ‘critical consciousness’ back into ‘community consciousness’, while remaining within the ‘Judge’ moment, bringing context into direct dialogue with the detail of the biblical text.

6. Question 6: What kinds of concerns do you think Ruth has as she enters into a sexual relationship with Boaz?
7. Question 7: In what ways is the relationship between Boaz and Ruth a ‘sugar daddy’ relationship?
8. Question 8: What are the characteristics of a ‘sugar daddy’ relationship in your context?
9. Question 9: What are the risks and what are the benefits for a young woman in a ‘sugar daddy’ relationship?

Question 6 is a useful transitional question, bridging as it does the world of the text and world of the participants. Questions 7, 8 and 9 invoke directly the complex realities that are incorporated in the notion of ‘sugar daddy’. This is deliberate, as we do not presume to understand the realities young women are traversing. Indeed, the major purpose of this CBS is to enable a safe space in which young African women can talk among themselves about these realities, perhaps even doing indecent theology together.<sup>93</sup>

Question 9 is another transitional question, moving the CBS towards the ‘Act’ moment. Parts of the biblical story of Ruth have been used thus far to ‘Judge’ or interrogate the lived reality of young African women. The final movement in CBS is towards some form of social transformation. We have decided, given

92 See Francis Landy, *Beauty and the Enigma: And Other Essays on the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 232; André LaCocque, *Ruth: A Continental Commentary*, trans. K.C. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 94-95.

93 See for example Avaren Ipsen, *Sex Working and the Bible* (London: Equinox, 2009).

the complexity of age-disparate sexual relationships, to offer an open final 'Act' question:

10. Question 10: What social and theological structures must we engage with in order to address the 'sugar daddy' situation? What from your perspective needs to change?

The emphasis on social and theological 'structures' is an emphasis from liberation theology, recognising that structures require transformation if individuals are to participate in transformation.<sup>94</sup>

## After Act

This Contextual Bible Study is a work in progress, as part of the Ujamaa Centre's liberatory praxis as we continue to work with young African women as a key marginalised sector in our context. As we work with and reformulate this particular CBS through 'work with' this marginalised sector, we would be open to returning to the book of Ruth to explore other literary or socio-historical elements that might offer other resources with which to work within the context of 'sugar daddy' realities.

Social science research has indicated a range of possible areas of intervention. For example, research has shown that there are a number of HIV prevention programmes that target young people in schools throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Those that are most successful include those that are context specific, integrate HIV prevention and sexual and reproductive health into the curriculum, and are facilitated by trained facilitators. 'In contrast, abstinence-only and peer-led interventions tend to be ineffective'.<sup>95</sup>

A recent strategy that has emerged includes conditional cash transfers to young people to 'incentivise safer behaviour'.<sup>96</sup> Studies have employed different incentives ranging from school attendance and school completion to HIV testing and negative pregnancy tests.<sup>97</sup> Results from these studies are limited but promising.<sup>98</sup> In the current South African context where there is a system of social grants, a longitudinal study was conducted between 2009 and 2012 to ascertain whether the grant system reduces the risk of HIV infection amongst teenagers. It was concluded that in households that received a child care grant or foster care

94 Gerald O. West, "Liberation Hermeneutics", in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie, 507-515 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

95 Dellar, Dlamini, and Abdool Karim, "Adolescent Girls and Young Women", 67.

96 Dellar et al., "Adolescent Girls and Young Women", 67.

97 Audrey Pettifor et al., "Can Money Prevent the Spread of HIV? A Review of Cash Payments for HIV Prevention", *AIDS Behaviour* 16, no. 7 (2012), 1729-1738: 1731.

98 Dellar et al., "Adolescent Girls and Young Women", 67.

grant, there was a reduced likelihood that resident teenage girls would engage in their first transactional sexual relationship or have sex with a boyfriend that was five or more years older than them.<sup>99</sup> All of the above suggests that material interventions play a role in reducing HIV incidence in young women by mitigating the need to engage in transactional sexual relationships.

But it seems that there is also a role for community-level interventions, and this may be where Contextual Bible Study could play an ongoing role. Social science research has suggested that evaluations of such interventions have had a ‘largely positive impact on knowledge and attitudes to HIV’, though the effectiveness of these community-level interventions on reducing HIV incidence is still to be ascertained.<sup>100</sup>

Contextual Bible Study could be used programmatically to address a number of the issues of vulnerability already raised. Questions of culture, issues of sexual and reproductive health, delaying sexual debut and empowerment through the completion of high school education can all be addressed contextually through the CBS process. Furthermore, as Leclerc-Madlala has argued, little work has been done with men as active partners on the issue of age-disparate relationships,<sup>101</sup> so the Ujamaa Centre could make older men an overt part of the process, as it has done with gender-based violence.

It has been recognised that older peers as mentors are potentially useful in discouraging younger women from engaging in sexual relations with older men as well as in other risky sexual behaviours.<sup>102</sup> CBS heterotopic sites provide the places and CBS provides the processes within which such mentoring might take place, enabling young women to share their experiences with as well as to invite other older women (and men) to participate in their space.

## Conclusion

Which of these further areas of work we might engage in depends on our work with young African women, our primary dialogue partners, whose epistemology will guide us. What is clear at present is that the Contextual Bible Study outlined above is making a significant impact in southern African contexts. There is no hesitation at all in re-reading Ruth as a story about ‘sugar daddies’. More importantly, the Contextual Bible Study generates a wide-ranging discourse on age-disparate sexual relationships, within a sacred and safe heterotopic site.

99 Lucie Cluver et al., “Child-Focused State Cash Transfers and Adolescent Risk of HIV Infection in South Africa: A Propensity-Score-Matched Case-Control Study”, *The Lancet* 1 (2013), e362-e370: e366.

100 Dellar, et al., “Adolescent Girls and Young Women”, 67.

101 Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa”, S24.

102 Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate Relationship and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa”, S24.