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UCT research has important implications for HIV intervention in Southern Africa

Nompumelelo Precious Zungu, one of 83 PhD students who graduated from the University of Cape Town last week, explores the meaning of AIDS and risk among Xhosa men in two Cape Town townships. Her thesis contributes to ways of thinking through risk, masculinity and culture, and has important implications for HIV intervention in Southern Africa.

Her research, which is at the intersection of a range of complex and competing bodies of knowledge about risk, masculinity, culture and HIV/AIDS, has found that risk management relies on socio-cultural representations such as "isimilo" (good character) and "imbeko" (respect).

Zungu's thesis, *Social representations of AIDS and narratives of risk among Xhosa men*, documents how groups affected by AIDS deal with stigma through representing AIDS as "isigulo sabantu" - a disease affecting Africans and/or caused by supernatural forces. Her work shows that the representation of AIDS as "isigulo sabantu" involves collective identity construction processes which, on the one hand, protect in-group identity and, on the other, are used to normalise HIV infection and justify fatalistic attitudes and risk-taking behaviour.

Zungu obtained her Masters degree in Research Psychology from UCT. She then joined the Human Sciences Research Council in 2002 and is currently a chief research specialist in the HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Infections and Tuberculosis Research programme.

ENDS

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