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Teachers' personal experiences of sexual initiation motivating their sexuality education messages in secondary schools in Kampala, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about how teachers' personal sexual experiences influence their motivations and practices when teaching sexuality education. Cultural schema theory was used to explore teachers' personal experience of the onset of sexual activity and explain how sexuality education teaching is influenced by such experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted with 40 secondary school teachers in Kampala, Uganda. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using principles of grounded theory. Findings show that while teachers' personal experience of sexual initiation did not directly align with the content of their messages, due to the centrality and evocative function of these schemas these experiences strengthened teachers' motivation to teach sexuality education because they enabled them to empathise with students. The study concludes that teachers' personal experiences of sexual initiation provide intrinsic motivation for teaching sexuality education. The inclusion of dialogues and activities which encourage self-reflexivity in teacher education and training may improve the delivery of sex, sexuality and relationships education.

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Introduction

Sexuality education is critical for young people to exercise their sexual agency (Egan and Hawkes 2009). It enables young people to develop the knowledge and skills they need to understand themselves as sexual beings, and to make decisions that contribute to sexual and reproductive health (Robinson 2013; UNESCO et al. 2009). Internationally, many young people can be reached through school-based sexuality education (Kivela, Ketting, and Baltussen 2011; UNESCO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, and WHO 2009). This is the case in Uganda, where teachers play an important role in students' access to sexual and reproductive health information (Darabi et al. 2008).

Teachers in Uganda encounter institutional, religious and cultural barriers when teaching sexuality education, and may experience conflict between the content of the sexuality education curriculum and their professional and personal values and beliefs (Ngabaza and Shefer 2019; Williams and Jensen 2016; Rijdsdijk et al. 2014; Helleve et al. 2011; Ahmed et al.

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2009; Helleve et al. 2009). Such barriers and conflicts may result in abstinence-only, heteronormative, fear-based and inaccurate sexuality education messages, compromising, rather than supporting, the development of students' sexual agency, and increasing their risk and vulnerability (Ngabaza and Shefer 2019; de Haas, Hutter, and Timmerman 2017).

Although various studies have described the cultural and religious barriers teachers may encounter when teaching about sex and sexuality (e.g., de Haas and Hutter 2019; Helleve et al. 2009; Iyer and Aggleton 2013), less research has focused on the role of teachers' personal experiences. A few studies have linked personal experiences of receiving and teaching sexuality education to teaching style and content (e.g., Goldman and Coleman 2013; Kehily 2002; Timmerman 2009). Others have been more focused on the role of teachers' gender and sexual identities in their teaching of sexuality education, such as conflicts between the personal and professional identities of teachers identifying as transgender or same-sex attracted (e.g., Llewellyn and Reynolds 2020; Msibi 2019; Masinga 2014; Khau 2012).

However, only a few studies have addressed the question of how teachers' personal experiences of sexual practices may influence and motivate their teaching. For instance, Khau (2009) described how a pupil's experience of being betrayed by a teacher who forced her to have sex with another teacher motivated her to become a trustworthy teacher herself. Helleve and colleagues (2009) cite the case of a teacher who mentioned having difficulties explaining condoms to the students because he had never used a condom himself.

Such personal and emotional experiences directly shape teachers' beliefs about the subject, and these beliefs play a role in how teachers select and approach the curriculum content (Metz 2018; Depaepe et al. 2013). This may happen implicitly when teachers choose which components of the curriculum to teach and how, or explicitly when teachers draw on personal experiences (Metz 2018; Francis and DePalma 2015). As such, teaching sexuality education is not only a cognitive, but also an emotional and affective effort (Saville Young, Moodley, and Macleod 2019; Masinga 2009). This is especially the case in contexts where teachers face a lack of training, content knowledge, or appropriate curricula for teaching sexuality education (e.g., Francis and DePalma 2015; Goldman and Coleman 2013).

Informed by these insights, this study aimed to explore Ugandan teachers' personal experiences of sex and relationships and, in particular, sexual initiation, in order to understand how this motivated the content of their sexuality education messages.

Sexuality education in Uganda

Traditionally, young people in Uganda are taught about sexuality by their family members. This changed in the early 2000s, when the HIV epidemic turned sexuality education into a public matter (Tamale 2006; Parikh 2015). Programmes were designed and implemented with international funding, and many such programmes had content requirements, such as a focus on 'ABC': abstinence, being faithful and condom use (Santelli, Speizer, and Edelstein 2013; Kinsman 2008).

Until 2016, school-based sexuality education in Uganda was fragmented, as it was taught using a variety of curricula and approaches. The Ugandan government was

implementing the Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to Youth (PIASCY), which was an abstinence-only HIV prevention programme funded by the USA. Meanwhile, teachers addressed the topic in various subjects, such as biology and Christian religious education; and non-governmental organisations implemented both abstinence-only and more comprehensive approaches to sexuality education in extra-curricular school clubs (de Haas, Hutter, and Timmerman 2017; Santelli, Speizer, and Edelstein 2013).

In 2016, the media reported that comprehensive sexuality education programmes in schools had been teaching about homosexuality, which is illegal in Uganda. In response, the Ugandan government decided to standardise all school-based sexuality education programmes via a National Sexuality Education Framework, which was launched in 2018 (Ahimbisibwe 2016; Republic of Uganda 2018). This framework prescribes the religious, ethical and cultural values that programmes should meet, such as promoting age-appropriate behaviour, morality and virginity. Thus, the main approach to preventing pregnancy and HIV in Uganda has been to teach sexual abstinence, even though this approach has been criticised for being ineffective and not meeting the needs and realities of young people (Cohen and Tate 2006).

The framework aims to integrate sexuality education into both the core subjects of the school curriculum and extra-curricular activities, and to train teachers to teach these programmes (Republic of Uganda 2018).

Theoretical underpinnings

Cognitive-anthropological cultural schema theory was used to study teachers' personal experiences, and how these motivate them when teaching sexuality education. This theory assumes that individual behaviour is motivated by both personal and cultural knowledge and experiences. Recognising the role of culture and religion in Ugandan teachers' motivations to teach sexuality education, this theory helps to explain and contextualise their experiences and behaviour.

Cultural schema theory defines schemas as internal conceptual structures that allow people to identify objects and events (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Holland and Cole 1995). D'Andrade (1984) described four functions of schemas, which are to some degree always present: (1) they represent the world, or have a representational function; (2) they create cultural entities through their constructive function; (3) they direct one to do certain things via their directive function; and (4) they evoke certain feelings through their evocative function.

Schemas are organised in a hierarchy of lower-level, middle-level and higher-level schemas. This structure enables schemas to act as goals that have motivational force (D'Andrade 1992; Bailey and Hutter 2006). For instance, a low-level goal to teach sexuality education in class may link to a higher-level goal to contribute to the sexual and reproductive well-being of students. Thus, goals at the different levels may motivate behaviour (see also de Haas and Hutter 2019).

As discussed in de Haas and Hutter (2019), some schemas, such as personal experiences, are individual to a person; while others, such as cultural norms and values, are shared by a group of people based on shared experiences and knowledge. Schemas develop throughout the life course as individuals constantly reconstruct their past experiences and knowledge based on new information. In the same way as they may

reconstruct past experiences, individuals may internalise cultural schemas differently, depending on prior knowledge and experience (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Garro 2000).

The internalisation of schemas can help to explain how cultural schemas and personal experiences inform teachers' motivations. Individuals internalise cultural schemas to varying degrees: (1) they may be indifferent to or even reject the schema, so that it has no motivational force for them; (2) they may acquire it as a cliché; (3) they may acquire it as a personal belief; or, (4) at the highest level of internalisation, they may see a schema as highly salient to them. At the highest level, a schema has an evocative function that engages not only teachers' minds, but their emotions. The greater the internalisation of a cultural schema, the greater its motivational force (D'Andrade and Strauss 1992; Spiro 1987).

The social psychologist Rokeach (1968) examined the internalisation of schemas by examining their centrality. The more central a schema is to a person, the more connected the schema is to other schemas – and, therefore, the more difficult it is to change. Rokeach (1968, 5) provided the following criteria to determine the centrality of schemas:

- existential versus non-existential beliefs;
- shared versus unshared beliefs;
- derived versus underived beliefs; and
- beliefs concerning and not concerning matters of taste.

According to these criteria, cultural schemas shared with others and personal experiences which are underived schemas are more central to a person, or are more connected to other schemas, than individual schemas or schemas that are unshared or derived; i.e., are learned from others (Pajares 1992). Based on these criteria, it might be expected that teachers' cultural schemas and personal experiences are highly internalised, and therefore have considerable motivational force, are difficult to change and have implications for other connected schemas.

Methods

Participant recruitment and background

The first author was introduced to teachers in 13 different secondary schools by three Ugandan non-governmental organisations implementing sexuality education in secondary schools in Kampala, the capital city and its surrounding districts. After school authorities had given permission, participant recruitment started with introductions to colleagues by teacher contact persons and the distribution of a recruitment flyer in staffrooms. After the first interviews, a number of teachers, regardless of whether they had participated in the research, introduced the researcher via snowball technique to colleagues in the same school or in neighbouring schools.

Participants in this study were 40 sexuality education teachers (18 men and 22 women) aged 22–53 years from 16 secondary schools. Many participants were born in rural areas, and some still commuted on weekends and holidays between their workplace in and around Kampala and their home in a rural area. Participants' religious affiliation included Pentecostal ($n = 12$), Protestant ($n = 11$), Catholic ($n = 10$), Muslim ($n = 4$) and Seventh Day Adventist ($n = 3$).

Most participants taught sexuality education as part of lessons for the government's HIV prevention programme, PIASCY; biology; or Christian religious education. There were also participants who taught sexuality education in extra-curricular clubs or as counsellors or wardens in the school. Participating schools varied and included boarding and day schools, co-educational and single-sex schools, public and private schools, and secular and religious schools.

Data generation

The study used qualitative methods and was informed by an interpretivist paradigm. Data were collected by in-depth interviews conducted between September and December 2011. The semi-structured interview guide focused on cultural schemas and personal experiences of relationships, sexual practices, HIV and AIDS, contraception, receiving sexuality education and teaching sexuality education to secondary school students, as these topics could potentially be relevant to identifying schemas informing the teaching of sexuality education.¹

Interviews lasted just over two hours on average. Most of them took place in private spaces chosen by the participants, such as secluded classrooms or under a tree. The interviews were conducted in English, the official language of Uganda, and were digitally audio-recorded. Participant observation in the school compound and in sexuality education lessons taught by the participating teachers improved the first author's insight into, and understanding of, the data generated in the in-depth interviews.

Data analysis

After the in-depth interviews had been transcribed verbatim, they were analysed using Max Qualitative Data Analysis (MAXQDA) version 10 software. Principles of grounded theory, as described by Corbin and Strauss (2008), were utilised during the analytical process.

The analysis started with open coding, and included many in vivo codes. Then, the content of teachers' sexuality education messages in relation to students and their sexual agency was identified. These messages appeared to be mainly embedded within the discourses of the Ugandan ABC strategy, while family planning was described by the participants as contraception that should be used within marriage to space children. As such, the participants' messages were grouped into whether they wanted to teach: (1) abstinence only; (2) condom use 'as a last resort'; or (3) both abstinence and contraception.

The second part of the analysis identified the teachers' personal experiences that they themselves considered motivating for teaching sexuality education. Previous steps in the analysis had shown that the teachers' approaches to students' sexual agency when teaching sexuality education were largely based on their cultural schemas of students' sexual activity. Therefore, we decided to focus on the teachers' personal experiences of sexual initiation. These personal experiences were stratified by: (1) sexual initiation; (2) male/female; (3) age; and (4) emotion, e.g. positive/negative experiences. Sexual initiation was categorised as: (1) is a virgin and intends to abstain until marriage; (2) abstained until marriage; (3) had premarital sex with the marriage partner only; or (4) had premarital sex.

To understand to what extent these personal experiences directed the content of the teachers' sexuality education, the third part of the analysis compared the teachers' personal experiences with the messages they wanted to teach. The last part of the analysis applied psychological and cultural schema theory to interpret how the teachers' personal experiences and their evocative function related to the cultural schemas they used to support their reasoning for the content of their sexuality education messages.

Ethics and data validation

The Uganda National Council for Science and Technology approved the study (Reference: SS 2626). Ethical review was undertaken by the Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Spatial Sciences at the University of Groningen. Participating school administrations and teachers provided written informed consent for participation in the study after they had been informed about its aims. Pseudonyms were used in this paper to ensure participants' anonymity.

In February 2013, the first author shared preliminary findings and individual interview transcripts with the participants. Seventeen of the initial participants participated in an individual follow-up session in which the collected and analysed data were validated to prevent potential gaps and misinterpretations. At the same time, the first author also disseminated a report detailing preliminary findings to school administrators, Ugandan non-governmental organisations and an employee of the National Curriculum Development Centre.

Findings

Teachers' personal experiences of sexual initiation

Table 1 provides an overview of the experiences of 37 of the 40 participants who described their sexual initiation during the interviews. The overview shows that a majority of the teachers had had premarital sex.

A few male and female teachers said that they became sexually active at around the age of 17. Most of the other teachers reported that they did not become sexually active until after finishing secondary school or reaching the age of majority:

Ey, I kept myself safe to a reasonable age. I was 17. Yeah. I was 17. Reasonably, I was old. Only one year I was left with a few months to turn 18. But even with a setting of ours, you may turn 18 but still be considered young [for] as long as you put on a uniform [go to school]. (Jamal, age 30)

Some participants said that they abstained from sex until marriage because of their religion, while others indicated that their religion helped them to postpone sexual

Table 1. Participants' experiences of sexual initiation (shared by 37 participants in total).

Personal experience	Virgin (wants to abstain until marriage)	Abstinence until marriage	Premarital sex with marriage partner only	Has had premarital sex
Male	3	1		14
Female	3	3	3	10

initiation or control their sexual activity before marriage. Some teachers mentioned the cultural value of virginity and societal disapproval of premarital sex as reasons for abstaining. For instance, one teacher observed that being known as a virgin can bring respect from society: 'I am young, but they do respect me a lot. [...] They have never heard anything ill, bad about me, like [...] I've gone out with this one, so they do respect me because I also respect myself' (Aisha, age 26). Women teachers in particular mentioned that their reputation is important to them. For instance, one said that she received respect from her husband because she had abstained until marriage: 'He tells me: "I respect you; I found you a virgin"' (Doreen, age 40).

Fear of HIV infection was another reason cited by teachers for abstaining. Others recalled how the strictness of their school, parents or other caregivers prevented them from having sex at an earlier age.

Among the reasons for abstaining mentioned specifically by female teachers was the fear of becoming pregnant while still in school and/or the fear of being abandoned or 'used' by their sexual partner, and the shame that would be attached to it.

Maybe the urge comes, but the mind . . . is like . . . you are going to have sex now. One can [be] having sex, this boy is going to dump you. Now after breaking your virginity, what next? [chuckles a bit] I could hold me all the time. (Ritah, age 23)

Some male teachers mentioned their fear of making a partner pregnant, disappointment in relationships after being cheated on by previous girlfriends, and the importance of being in a good financial position before starting a family.

One reason for starting to have sexual intercourse that was mentioned often by both male and female participants was sexual desire. The following quote comes from a female teacher who had had premarital sex with her future husband:

Both of us had the feelings . . . for each other. [...] Yes, my body wanted, definitely. But I didn't want, just because of education, sex [...] before marriage. But . . . [...] the feelings outweighed. That's it. [...] I was thinking with my heart now. (Maggie, age 40)

Another reason teachers cited for becoming sexually active was feeling mature enough at a certain point, such as when they had reached the age of majority, when they had been dating someone for a while, or when they were at university. These teachers recalled that after reaching these milestones, they considered themselves capable of making conscious, objective decisions and were sufficiently knowledgeable about 'what was going on in the world' (Flavia, age 23).

Even though these teachers indicated that they felt old enough to have sexual intercourse and they were aware of the risks of having unprotected sexual intercourse, many recalled that their first sexual intercourse had been unprotected:

For the first time, I didn't have [protection]. [...] I just rushed into the whole thing. [...] Actually, even if I had the time I wouldn't use it. Because there is a lot that has been said about having it live [without a condom], [...] like out of curiosity, I hurriedly, I started condomising after, after finding out the other side of life. [...] I told myself: for the worries I've gone through, I'll never do it again. (Jamal, age 30)

Jamal acknowledged that having been exposed to sexuality education probably would not have prevented him from having unprotected sex. He continued by saying that he would have used a condom only if his sexual partner had insisted:

[Sexuality education could have helped] maybe to that extent [...] I would have moved with [...] the condoms. But ... To the extent that I was the desperate party, erm ... [chuckles] I don't think ... [...] So I imagine if she would have ... told me, without it ... it's over for now ... then perhaps I would have rushed ... to get it. [...] But in this situation ... uh-uh, I decline to believe so easily that it would have worked for me. (Jamal, age 30)

Other male participants mentioned 'peer pressure', 'losing [their] sense' because of their sexual urges and 'curiosity' about sex – and especially about 'live' sex (i.e. without a condom) – as the reasons for their sexual initiation. One male participant and several female participants reported that older or more experienced sexual partners had 'seduced' or 'pushed' them to have sex. They indicated that they had trusted these partners because they took them to be more sexually experienced.

Personal experience and the content of teachers' sexuality education messages

Findings revealed a correspondence between teachers' recollections of their own sexual initiation and their reasoning about students' sexual practices. For instance, most teachers said that they became sexually active after they had reached the age of majority, and that they would prefer their students to wait until they are 18 or older.

However, a comparison between participants' sexual initiation and the content they were motivated to teach indicates that these did not necessarily correspond (Table 2). For example, some teachers said that they abstained from sex before marriage because of their religion, but felt motivated to teach students about contraception; other teachers described being sexually active in secondary school but teaching their students about abstinence only.

Independent of when their first sex had taken place, participants described both positive and negative feelings about abstinence and sexual intercourse. Some teachers described remaining abstinent as a positive experience because they had seen others who were sexually active drop out of school after becoming pregnant. These teachers were thankful that they had not been exposed to such risks.

Absolutely, the right decision [to abstain until age 18]. Yeah, because I've kept myself straight. Hm, I have not like messed [up] any girl's future, nor have I messed [up] my life in any way,

Table 2. Participants' personal experiences of sexual initiation and the content of their sexuality education messages by gender and age (shared by 37 participants in total).

Personal experience	Gender	Motivated to teach		
		Abstinence only	Condom as last resort	Abstinence and contraception
Virgin (wants to abstain until marriage)	male	1		2
	female	1	1	1
Abstained until marriage	male	1		
	female	2	1	
Premarital sex with marriage partner only	male			
	female	1	2	
Had premarital sex	male	4	4	6
	female	2	5	3
Age range of interviewed teachers:		23–43	22–53	23–36

especially as far as early sex is concerned. [...] there are many others [...] who messed up, [...] maybe you got pregnant, fall out of school and ... So, I feel like maybe if somehow those messages are reached to them, [...] that can help. (Kesh, age 31)

Similar early positive experiences may have motivated teachers to promote abstinence because they cared about the well-being of their students, and did not want them to be exposed to such risks either:

I've seen the good things [...] that come from abstinence and at least I would like to share them with my students because apart from mending my students, they are my friends. So, I would like to tell them that erm ... if one abstains, [...] you're free like a bird, [...] you do anything you want. (Sandra, age 22)

Other teachers described negative experiences of premarital intercourse: some when they were still in secondary school and others when they were at university. One male participant expressed regret that he had made a girl pregnant, forcing her to drop out of school and miss out on a career. After finding out his girlfriend was pregnant, he had feared being punished by his parents, imprisoned for having defiled her and/or being obliged to marry her. He said: 'So, it is not easy, and I wouldn't like anyone to go through that experience' (Michael, age 42). This particular experience motivated him to teach sexuality education because he believed that had he received more sexuality education in school, the negative events would not have happened. On the other hand, other teachers reported that their sexual urges had led them to have unprotected sex despite having received sexuality education. The linked schemas of 'sexual urges', 'the enjoyment of 'live' sex' and 'students not being able to make good decisions' may help to explain why some teachers, based on their own negative experiences of unprotected sex, preferred to teach abstinence only, rather than about contraception.

Many teachers who mentioned negative experiences with premarital sex expressed regrets about it, and some even called it a 'mistake'. Several said they felt 'lucky' to have made a mistake but not had to suffer the negative consequences. One woman teacher said she was motivated to teach abstinence only because she had become pregnant before marriage. She felt lucky because the father of the baby had married her. However, she also said it was possible that her husband had been forced to marry her, and she wondered whether they would have married had she not become pregnant:

I think I made a mistake, I shouldn't have got ... gotten into a relationship at the university. [...] Perhaps if I had waited ... I would not have married the person I married [...]. Because I acted out of ... emotions, not out of ... reasoning, [...], it was too early for me to do that. Hmm ... I believe [...] if I had got the information, I should have acted differently. So, in most of the times my ... my information I give to the students is out of my own experience to stop them from ... going through with my experience, so even making worse mistakes. Yeah ... Because me, I was lucky, [...] I believe ... he married me because I got pregnant. [...] That means I married for wrong reasons. So, I believe I talk out of my own experience to the children so that they don't make the same mistake. (Vivienne, age 43)

Another female participant recalled having had unprotected sexual intercourse because she was ignorant about contraception: 'By God's luck, as much as I had sex with the boy, it was unprotected sex, I did not get the [HIV] infection. But we [students] may not have the same chance! Like me' (Precious, age 31). This negative experience motivated her to

provide students with extensive information about contraception, even though her main advice to students was to abstain.

Both of these cases illustrate how teachers' negative experiences of premarital sex directed the content of the sexuality education they provided, with the goal of preventing students going through the same experience. However, while some teachers recalled negative experiences that had motivated them to teach about abstinence only, while others recounted negative events that motivated them to include information about contraception in their teaching. These findings indicate that although teachers' recollections of personal experiences may have motivated their involvement in sexuality education, the experiences did not determine the content of the messages they conveyed. Rather, the content of teachers' messages was mostly informed by cultural schemas concerning expectations about their own behaviour in the school setting and of their students' sexual agency (for more details, see de Haas and Hutter 2019; de Haas, Hutter, and Timmerman 2017).

Reconstructed experiences that motivated the content of sexuality education

Although the content of the teachers' sexuality education messages was mostly informed by their cultural schemas, some teachers used or reconstructed their personal experience of sexual initiation to support their reasoning for how they approached the students' sexual agency when teaching sexuality education. This reconstruction of past experiences is perhaps best illustrated by the following example from a woman teacher, who recalled her first experience of premarital sex as positive. She first had sex during the school holidays at age 17. She said that at that time, she had felt grown up, there was no pressure to study for school, and she had been dating her boyfriend for quite a long time. She recalled that they had gone for an HIV test together, and that they used condoms. Although her first time had been planned and protected, she worried that her students might experience negative consequences from having sex.

I never thought of it being bad [premarital sex], because I did not have any ... negative impact ... [...] I feel I did it at the right time, although a little bit still young. Hm. But eh, the problem with many students today, [...] when they begin being active so early, they're usually ... disturbed, [...] much of their time, they think about their boyfriends and girlfriends. And because [...] they lack the guidance of the people concerned, they may not know what to do and how to do it so ... they are likely to mess up. (Beatrice, age 35)

Here, she linked the schema of 'negative consequences of premarital sex' to other schemas such as 'students being easily disturbed' and 'not being able to make good decisions'. Together, these motivated her to teach abstinence only despite her own positive experience. In so doing, she 'reconstructed' her own positive experience of sexual intercourse to fit within her cultural schemas of teaching abstinence only by reasoning that the conditions her students were growing up in nowadays differ from those that she encountered.

Even though interviewed teachers indicated that their personal experiences were important sources of motivation for their decision to teach sexuality education, cultural schemas of professional identity – and especially of 'being a role model to students' – led them to avoid sharing these experiences with their students. For instance, some teachers

said they feel hesitant to share any of the 'mistakes' they had made when young with their students, because they feared that students would interpret the experience as an encouragement to be sexually active:

Whenever I want to say something [I] mind myself about it and I say but: I did this also at such an age so ... But I know it was wrong, right now, I tell them what is supposed to be right. [...] if I told them that you see for me when I was in Senior 4 ... [...] I impregnated a girl, [...] she didn't even go for any further education. So they will start doubting me, maybe they will say. eh, this man, now why is he refusing us to do this? If he also did it. And [...] he is a teacher now? [...] So ... I feel at times I don't want to give that testimony. (Michael, age 42)

Some teachers also expressed ambivalence about sharing their current virginity status with their students, because they feared that students might question their knowledge of sexuality due to a lack of experience: 'I will not prefer telling them that I'm, I'm a virgin, but you try to tell them how good it is to abstain' (Allan, age 24). In contrast, other teachers said that they were proud of being a virgin, and that they did share this information with their students: 'Actually, I'm proud to tell them that I abstain. [...] and it [my virginity] gives me ... encouragement to keep on advising them to abstain' (Sylvia, age 31).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand how teachers' personal experiences of sexual initiation motivated and influenced their approach to understanding students' agency and teaching sexuality education. Findings showed that teachers relied on cultural schemas, such as cultural and religious values and beliefs, to inform the content of their sexuality education messages, which in most cases consisted of abstinence-only and sex-discouraging messages. As such, the cultural schemas shared by the participants reflect the principles and values of Uganda's National Sexuality Education Framework, introduced in 2018. Similar findings have been reported by Iyer and Aggleton (2013) in Uganda and in some other sub-Saharan African countries (Gudyanga, de Lange, and Khau 2019; Khau 2012; Adonis and Baxen 2009; Helleve et al. 2009). Of the participants who were motivated to teach both abstinence and contraception, most were younger, male and reported having had premarital sex.

In line with assumptions concerning the internalisation and motivational force of schemas, the findings show how teachers recalled personal experiences to support their reasoning for their approach to students' sexual agency when teaching sexuality education, such as negative personal experiences of premarital sex or positive personal experiences of abstinence. In this respect, teachers' personal experiences may have been important sources of motivation for them, even when they did not mention these experiences to students because of influence of schemas of professionalism and professional identity, which directed them to be role models to students. These findings align with those of Msibi (2019), who reported that teachers engaging in same-sex relations addressed same-sex issues in school without disclosing their sexual identities; and of Helleve et al. (2009), who found that teachers may justify their teaching in terms of its alignment with cultural norms to mask their personal motivations.

The use of cultural schema theory in the analysis of the findings helped understand that while teachers' personal experiences do not necessarily direct the content of their

sexuality education messages, they can serve as an important motivation for teaching sexuality education. Moreover, because of the evocative function of schemas, the feelings evoked by teachers' personal experiences enabled them to empathise with their students.

A number of studies have argued that in order to increase the effectiveness of sexuality education, teacher training should focus not just on content knowledge, but also on the affective dimensions of teaching through activities that promote dialogue and self-reflexivity. These activities might centre on teachers' personal experiences, identities, emotions and motivations, and on the implications of these for how they teach about sexuality education – and, in turn, for the opportunities students have to learn about sexuality (Young, Lisa, and Macleod 2019; Gudyanga, Naydene, and Khau 2019; Metz 2018; Francis and DePalma 2015; Depaepe et al. 2013). Ott (2017) in particular has argued that such awareness may enable teachers to develop a better sense of empathy for students' needs in sexuality education, without feeling restrained by their own cultural and religious values and beliefs. Furthermore, dialogue between teachers to find joint solutions to the challenges they experience may increase teachers' agency to teach sexuality education (Gudyanga, Naydene, and Khau 2019).

This literature and the findings from this study imply that teacher training programmes could benefit from including dialogue and self-reflexivity training with the aim of increasing teachers' empathy for students' needs and reinforcing teachers' agency to teach sexuality education. Even within the boundaries set by Uganda's national abstinence-only framework, such measures can help to make school-based sexuality education more effective. Simultaneously, however, ongoing advocacy is needed to create a more supportive environment at both local and national levels for more comprehensive approaches to sexuality education (Skovdal and Campbell 2015; McLaughlin et al. 2015).

Note

1. A copy of the interview guide is available from the first author upon request.

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