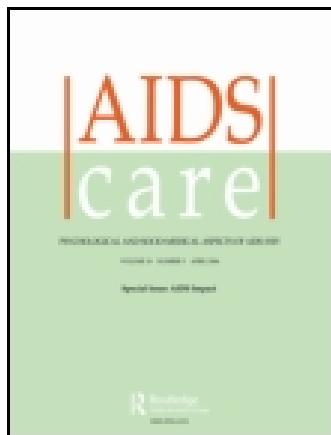


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The adventures of the Randy Professor and Angela the Sugar Mummy: Sex in fictional serials in Ugandan popular magazines

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Abstract

In 1996 newspaper vendors in Ugandan towns started selling a new kind of locally produced 'lifestyle' magazine. On the covers there were young, scantily dressed girls and inside news articles, fictional serials, lifestyle articles, agony aunt columns, etc. The new magazines gained an enormous popularity in a short space of time. Everywhere people were seen reading them and copies became brown and tattered from use. Using content analysis, we analyse the fictional serials which appeared in three of these magazines. We focus on these because they were the most sexually explicit type of content and, from a public health perspective, the most relevant with regard to HIV prevention. The stories were presented as simple entertainment, depicting the adventures of stereotypical characters. They provided people with explicit and unrestricted sexual fantasy which was, at the same time, devoid of any real risk. Although they could be interpreted as providing a discourse which challenged the main messages of HIV-prevention campaigns (sex is good for you, have as much of it as possible, and don't let condoms spoil the enjoyment), they also suggest that behaviour change may be more popular if sex and sexual health are not separated from sexual pleasure, and safe sex is promoted from a positive perspective (emphasis on sexual enjoyment) rather than a negative one (prevention of disease). The popularity of the magazines underscores the importance of entertainment value when discussing sex, and suggests alternative possibilities for disseminating health messages. Illustrated popular magazines such as those discussed here could be suitable as intervention, though they would need some adaptation to counter gender stereotypes and sexual violence.

Introduction

In 1996, newspaper vendors in Ugandan towns started selling a new kind of magazine. Written in English, and with names like *Spice*, *Chic*, *Trends*, *Secrets*, and *Bella*, they showed young, scantily dressed African girls on full-colour glossy covers. Inside news articles, fictional serials, lifestyle articles, agony aunt columns, and readers' letters were presented on poor quality newsprint. This was a new medium in Uganda: previously the only similar publication had been the popular Luganda language newspaper *Bukedde*, which reported gossip and sensational events, such as domestic violence and road accidents, often illustrated with detailed photographs. The new magazines gained an enormous popularity in a short space of time, and it seemed that everybody who could afford to, bought them. Everywhere people were seen reading them and copies became brown and tattered from use.

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Because these magazines were so popular, and because sex and sexual relationships were the central topics across almost all the different genres of content, it seemed important to examine how they portrayed sex, given the role of sexual behaviour change in the control of HIV/AIDS. A detailed analysis of the content was all the more important because the message tended to be ambiguous: on the one hand the magazines contained relatively responsible coverage of HIV related topics (reviews of AIDS conferences, information on the availability and cost of antiretrovirals, the advantages of condom use), while at the same time glorifying sexual promiscuity, high risk behaviour, and even sexual violence, as well as promoting the worst sexual stereotypes. In this paper we concentrate on the fictional serials, because they appeared to be the most popular genre in the magazines and to epitomise the glorification of unsafe sex, sexual stereotypes and sexual violence.

Methods

Between 1997 and 1998 we collected the following magazines: *Chic* from February to July 1997, and *Spice* from April 1997 to May 1998, *Trends* from September 1997 to May 1998, and *Secrets* from April 1997 to April 1998. We read the contents, summarized topics and themes in a database and carried out an interpretive content analysis (Ahuvia, 2001). Segments of text relating to particular topics and themes were identified and coded and related to each other thus generating higher order generalizations (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Results

The magazines

The Ugandan magazines were modelled on popular Western glossy magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*. They contained similar genres of content covering a variety of local and international topics:

- Practical/lifestyle articles (how to open a bottle of champagne; how to perform oral sex; bad breath and how to deal with it; making spaghetti bolognaise).
- Society gossip (Fergie claims she got warts after wearing Diana's shoes).
- Serious and less serious news/events (Persian art exhibition in Kampala; man has sex with python; coffin trade now a big employer in Uganda; university students discuss HIV; man suffering from diarrhoea on first date adopts yoga position and fools girl).
- Letters (reader asks about whereabouts of previous cover model; reader wants pen pal; plea for more AIDS education for youth).
- Fictional serials (the randy professor; Angela the sugar mommy¹).

They also contained horoscopes, advertisements, pictures and cartoons.

While the serials appeared to be Ugandan, with characters having Ugandan names and sometimes switching into the vernacular, some of the other fiction had obviously been taken from similar magazines in other countries, with events often occurring in a thinly disguised Johannesburg and characters having South African names. The illustrations were also often arbitrary, with a photo of a white, middle-aged woman illustrating a story of an African granny who lives in a mud hut in the village, for example. Generally the articles and stories were poorly written, with much repetition and whole paragraphs devoted to the reflections of minor characters that are totally irrelevant to the story line, and the organization and layout were often chaotic.

The magazines were relatively expensive, costing 1000 shillings (approximately US\$1 at the time).² But they were popular, initially appearing every month, then bi-weekly and, at the peak of their popularity, weekly. After 1998 they gradually started to decline, and disappeared one by one, until, by 2000 they could only be bought second-hand. Initially we thought that they might have been banned by the government due to the coarse and explicit descriptions of sex and the glorification of unsafe sex. We phoned the Ministry of Information. 'Banned?' the official said, laughing loudly. 'No, not banned. It's a pity they have disappeared, because they were good, weren't they?' He told us that his Ministry had collected them for their archive, but that there had never been any intention to ban them. Another possibility was that they might have declined in popularity because of the repetitive nature of much of the content, though this has never seemed to affect the popularity of tabloid publications in other countries, and had not affected the vernacular *Bukedde* newspaper. Informal enquiries suggested that this was not the case either, and when we spoke to former editors, journalists and managers, it became clear that the magazines' demise was largely due to mismanagement and conflicts about money.

The stories

The characters

The discussion that follows is based largely on the following serials: 'The Randy Professor' and 'Angela the Sugar Mommy' in *Trends*, 'Pam', 'Dodge', and 'My Best Friend and I' in *Chic* and later continued in *Spice*, and 'Doe's Love Diary' and 'J.B.' in *Secrets*. These recount the numerous sex adventures of the heroes and heroines. In 'Pam' and 'Angela the Sugar Mommy' the main characters are women; in 'Dodge', 'My Best Friend and I', 'The Randy Professor', 'Doe's Love Diary' and 'J.B.' they are men. Usually the action is viewed through the eyes of the main character, though 'The Randy Professor' is told in the third person and 'Angela the Sugar Mommy', though it is largely told from Angela's perspective, is also sometimes narrated in the third person or from the perspective of one of her partners.

Sex, the driving force

The characters all have one main goal in life: to find a sex partner for the night. Usually there is already someone around whom they want to seduce, but sometimes they have to go out in search of a partner. The stories usually start the moment the hero takes an interest in a potential sex partner and then follow a similar sequence of events, covering how they meet, the seduction, and finally the sexual act. The latter is described in minute detail, including foreplay, various 'rounds' of intercourse, and showers afterwards. These events are built into an enveloping story, but the main purpose is to describe the sex. It was not often that an episode did not include intercourse, and if there was no sex, it was only because the expectation was being built up for sex in the next episode. An episode might end: '... my partner meanwhile seemed to be seething with urge as she became very restless in bed tossing herself from side to side before eventually resting her thighs on me.' The next issue then announced: 'Last week we ended the story with Richard in bed with Viola. Unable to control herself she started to touch him all over. Would you like to know what happens next? Then you can't miss this episode ...'

The characters are not interested in long-term relationships, they only want to satisfy their immediate sexual lust. The Professor, for instance, is described as a sex maniac, and Pam is described as having 'an excessive sex urge' and her experience in bed is her best

asset. Angela's (The Sugar Mummy) main preoccupation is sex. She is a rich business woman in her forties and she is constantly on the outlook for men. 'What else can you use your money for when you have everything you wish?' The hero in 'My Best Friend and I' is characterized as 'not able to resist the chicks'.

Apart from the serials, the magazines were filled with articles carrying the message that sex is good for you: 'Sex can increase our life expectancy', 'Sex is like ice cream', 'The glory of lust, love and hormones', 'How kissing makes you fit', 'Why sex is good for you'. Sex was presented as a natural, healthy drive, a force stronger than oneself which should guide behaviour. The characters in the serials are depicted as not really having a choice. 'Doe's Love Diary', for example, has the hero going from one sex adventure to another, too weak to withstand the temptations. In 'Doe Loses Two Babes', for example, he explains: 'I have a big problem with concentrating on one woman, even for a day... every time I see a beautiful woman I melt'.

Sexual networking

The stories often involve complex sexual networking. For example, when J.B.'s wife Susan is 'not available' because she has just given birth, he looks for sexual satisfaction with Cynthia, his regular extramarital partner. But when he goes to visit her he finds that she has a male visitor who has just started kissing her, so he ends up going back home and seducing the house girl. Or in 'Angela, the Sugar Mummy', Richard has been dismissed from school because he was in possession of a bottle of whisky, which Angela had given him as a present. He goes to a bar for a drink so that he can think about what to do next. There he meets his girlfriend Viola whom he has not seen for a long time. While they have a drink together Richard spots Angela across the road. Richard neither wants her to see him in the company of another woman nor to show Viola that he knows Angela, so he runs to the toilet to hide himself. But not before noticing that Angela was with another man. Richard spends the night with Viola, but the next morning he decides to go to Angela. During the following days, between numerous rounds of sex, he continues worrying about school. Angela decides to do something about it and goes to see an old friend at the Ministry of Education. He agrees to provide Richard with a place at one of the best schools in return for sex with Angela. In the meantime Richard has his eye on the young house girl working at Angela's home and ends up seducing her.

A double standard

In spite of some of the serials having female heroines, the norm tends to be that of the man as breadwinner and the wife as homemaker, dependent on his income and his willingness to share it with her. The stories rarely have anything to say about the male hero's wife or their relationship together. She is simply there, somewhere in the background, at home with the kids and the housekeeping. In the stories about married men, they are always absent from home, busy with extra-marital affairs. For example, under the heading 'Why I love my wife', J.B. tells the reader 'I squander my wages on booze and women.' But he loves his wife for her tolerance: 'Susan tolerates me when I come home in the wee hours, drunk. For this too, I love her'.

In the context of the bars and the discotheques where men hang out, a man's prestige is determined by his ability to control his wife, to be able to go out when he wants and stay out for as long as he likes, and to have extramarital affairs. J.B. states: 'It's true, men – including me – very much like sleeping with 'modern' women. But it's for adventure, you know,

raising the count on the score sheet. 'This all enhances his male status. The typical image is of the cool hero, the tough guy, who does not need anybody or anything (only a 'tumble' every now and then) to survive. As J.B. describes himself: 'I have immense potential for wild womanising, for conning people in business, and for getting into trouble'.

In the stories in which women are the main characters, a completely different view of marriage is presented. Pam and Angela are the independent, carefree heroines, adopting an attitude towards sexual relationships much like the men. They maintain multiple relationships and use these opportunistically. Angela is single, and there is no mention of any previous long-term commitment. Pam is divorced from a marriage arranged by her parents in the village when she was young. Her view of marriage: 'An ideal marriage cannot exist in real life, but it might be experienced temporarily for a few days, weeks and maybe even a month.' These women have consciously chosen to stay single, they have liberated themselves from the traditional pressure for a woman to get married as soon as possible. Pam has realized that it is a mistake to be pushed into an arranged marriage at a young age.

At the same time, unmarried women above a certain age (late twenties) are stigmatized by the suggestion that they must be barren. This is something Pam is safeguarded from as she has a little daughter living with her from her previous marriage. Such single women are also prey to the moral double standard according to which men who are independent and promiscuous are cool, whereas women with the same behaviour are 'loose'. Pam goes to great lengths to hide her simultaneous affairs from the other partners involved and from the outside world. In the end she even decides to become a born-again Christian, not because she starts believing but because it protects her from social condemnation.

But this is ambiguous, because Pam and Angela are obviously promiscuous in the eyes of the reader, even if they keep this well-hidden from their fictional social environment, and it is in the readers' eyes that they must maintain their status as heroine. And to some extent they do maintain this status by rebelling against the double standard. For Pam and Angela, the risk of being considered loose is preferable to being tied to the adulterous and neglecting husbands who fill the pages of the stories. Pam is wary of men who show signs of developing more permanent relationships with her. She had taken Juma, the taxi driver, home with her to pay him in kind for the ride home. He returns for a second visit and she becomes alarmed when he tells her of his plan to bring some shirts and other clothing over to her place for the next time he spends the night. She thinks: 'I will show him that I am not going to be treated like his little kept wife, I will show him his place, that he was just a lover and not a husband. That business of bringing his clothes to my place bothered me.'

Sex and exchange

Women want sex not only out of bodily lust but because they receive a financial or material reward, and men use money directly and indirectly to seduce women and maintain sexual relationships. The Randy Professor picks up a girl and is keen to show her he is 'heavily loaded with cash'. Later she accompanies him to a hotel: 'The don and his new catch staggered to the car and drove back to the hotel. The money had worked magic, he had not even had to go through the painful process of seducing.' The next day she receives her money, and thinks:

Some men are really understanding, thirty thousand shillings! What did I do that warranted all this money? I wish he would come back soon, I'm sure he would help me out of my problems. He could even get me a job in the city, she said, as she once again counted the money.

But women can also play an active role in this, demanding compensation for their services, or bargaining with their partners to maximize gain in more or less explicit ways. Pam reflects:

With my new job, money was no longer a problem. But I had to make that bastard pay. He had been having a free ride till then. Yes, time had come for Masaba to pay a little token of appreciation, for the good service rendered. I did not care whether he would have to sell the mountains, but he had to pay.

She confides her strategy to the reader:

I always want to push a man against the wall or into a corner and make him beg for mercy. Most men lack the courage and words to answer back. Instead, once cornered and lost for words, a man will reach for his briefcase and give you a bundle of bank notes. What better answer does a woman need?

Sometimes it also sounds as if the money also signifies revenge for the woman's passive, subservient role: 'I had suffered at the hands of men, but I had also got my pound of flesh from them. And now it was time for this son of the mountains to pay his way.'

Modernity

The magazines are contemptuous of everything that is 'traditional', 'rural' or 'unsophisticated'. Pam goes to the home of her lover, Masaba, only to meet another woman there. She says: 'It was obvious that he only used her to satisfy his needs during weekdays, while feasting on me during the weekend.' Pam characterizes the rival as: 'this village woman . . . the cheap perfume . . . the slut'. She does not want to be seen in the area where Masaba is living: ' . . . somebody might wonder why a girl of my class would go to the slums to fight over a man like Masaba'. Pam is the cool, sophisticated, modern woman to whose lifestyle readers should aspire.

There is much emphasis on being 'modern', and in order to educate the reader into sophistication the magazines have advice sections on various aspects of modern life: how to drink champagne, with tips on opening the bottle; what tampons are for and how to use them; how to cook pasta. The magazines also promote 'modern' sex styles. There are practical guides to French kissing and oral sex. In the stories 'modern' sex styles are explored, in minute detail, and the underlying message is that if you do not try them out you are not modern and sophisticated. *Bella* has the slogan: 'The magazine for high society' and *Spice* describes itself as: 'For the bold and the beautiful.' The message is that modernity is liberating.

Segregated worlds

Under the surface of the magazines' ostensibly liberating stance, however, not very much has changed in the relationships between men and women. The segregated and unequal roles persist. Even though Pam is ostensibly modern and liberated, when Juma arrives at her home after a day's work, she takes his shirt to the bathroom to wash it for him so that it will be clean for the next day. It is always she who cooks, whether she receives men in her home or visits theirs. The sophisticated, independent heroine fulfils her domestic role as unquestioningly as any traditional rural housewife.

During sex, the women also perform their traditional duties, which is aimed largely at the man's satisfaction.

'Webale nmyo ssebo era kulika amayengo' I whispered into his ear in the vernacular. Translated, the words mean: 'Thank you sir and welcome back from the long trip'. These words were part of the instructions I received from my paternal aunt a few weeks before I got married to my husband. She implored me never to omit to encourage a man both during and after sex by thanking him for having done a good job, regardless of whether he had performed satisfactorily or not. I appreciated the importance of my aunt's instructions. A man's ego is so hurt if he detects the slightest indication he has failed to satisfy a woman, that it may stop him ever coming back to her.

Also, the women in the stories are still ultimately financially dependent on men. Pam's main reason (apart from lust) for having sex is financial. Angela is an exception, as she earns her own money, but this is noticed with suspicion. When she is staying in an expensive hotel during a business trip, a man she talks to is reluctant to continue their conversation as he suspects her of being a spy: 'This is not right, such an expensive lifestyle for a woman,' he thinks. Generally, the women in the stories receive their money from men, and none of them are professional or completely financially independent.

The effect of this is that men and women live in separate worlds, with little love and companionship between partners, even though they are in bed together most of the time. They only seek each other's company for sex, and are not really interested in each other as people. Angela brings a student home and complains that he does not start right away with what he is there for. Any social interaction or conversation that is not directly related to sex is 'boring'.

Ken was no exception, i.e. he had verbal diarrhoea . . . as soon as they entered the home, he started talking about himself, his family etc., etc. He went on with his boring conversation.' Richard also asks himself: 'Why anyway had I wasted all this time with these people who after all are so boring?'

Violence

There is also violence towards women, both by itself and in the form of forced sex, and the women undergo it silently. Richard forces the house girl to have sex with him: 'If she refused I would tell her boss (Angela) that she was luring me into sex. Angela is a very jealous woman, and if I told her this, she would fire her.' Pam, the liberated woman, is also the battered wife on at least two occasions. Bob hit and kicked her so that she was covered in bruises and could hardly walk. Allan also beat her badly, and when, in a later issue, she thinks over the incident, she justifies it as a 'manly' act: 'I remembered the day he found another man in my house. He was so furious that he actually beat me up. He was only a kid then but his action was manly. I suppose a boy is a "man" from the day he lays a woman.'

Given the brutality of these relationships, it is not surprising that the sexual act is often expressed in an idiom of warfare, the man's role being that of aggressor. Terms like 'punishment', 'attack' or 'revenge' are used to indicate the sexual act. Words like 'metal', 'one eyed periscope', 'weapon' are used for the penis.

The more I rubbed Masaba's thing, the more angry it became . . . Furiously he began to ride his long stiff rifle, he pounded away with a fury that surpassed our battle of the

previous night . . . His manhood started to struggle to be set free, so that he can get out and launch an attack on the enemy.

The place of AIDS in the magazines

AIDS is an undeniable reality in Uganda, and when sexual matters are discussed, thoughts of HIV are inevitably not far away. In the magazines HIV/AIDS was also present, and there were regular articles on the topic. Sometimes these were useful contributions to increasing public awareness of HIV, such as reviews of international HIV conferences and workshops (which sometimes even made it onto front covers), and information on the availability of antiretrovirals and the cost of the medicines. There was also a useful article under the heading 'Is there a life after AIDS', in which adolescents recounted personal histories of how they had contracted HIV and talked about the strategies they had employed to make the best of their lives. The most important message in this article was that these young people living with HIV were still able to have a normal life and (protected) sex with girl- and boyfriends.

But there was also a column on the latest 'cures' for HIV, and articles on the contribution of traditional medicine to curing HIV. In an article entitled 'Are women cheating as much as men?' a certain Dr Wilson stated:

Fear of AIDS acted as a passion-killer briefly in the 1980s, but didn't have a lasting impact. It stopped a certain amount of casual sex, but not for long. People soon realised AIDS wasn't a huge risk among the heterosexual population and that condoms provide good protection.

The fictional stories also sometimes showed an awareness of the risks involved in the sexual exploits of the main characters. Amidst all the seduction and sleeping around, there was occasionally a character for whom the fear of infection became too much and who decided to start using a condom. In 'Doe's Love Diary', for example, the main character reflects:

I promised never to go live [have sex without a condom] again. I swore that however beautiful a chic was, however innocent she looked or pleaded with me, my jacket [condom] would always be on. I was damn serious about my vow. I was not going to make a silly mistake and send myself to an early death. Condoms have come to be like my identity card.

In another story fear leads him to abstention.

But the stories also reflect on how difficult this kind of behaviour change is. Doe explains how peer pressure made him abandon abstention: 'My drought ended when a beautiful classmate found me discussing sex with a group of boys and publicly accused me of being a coward where women were concerned. I swore to prove to her I was not a coward. That's how I ended up sleeping with her.' And in another story Kim recounts: 'Before I knew what she was doing, she had pulled the condom off me and she had me inside her at a very high speed. There was no stopping us.'

The main underlying message in the fictional texts is that it is difficult to resist unsafe sex, that condoms are unreliable, and that sex is better without. In one story Doe describes having sex and thinking it is the best he has ever experienced. He attributes this to the girl he is with, until he realizes that the condom has burst. Later he reflects sadly: 'AIDS has

really robbed sex of a lot of pleasure. I am not surprised that many people are still dying of this ugly disease. Live sex [without a condom] simply has no substitute. Using a condom doesn't come near to going live, so let's stop pretending.'

Another common argument against condom use is that it implies distrust in regular relationships. In one story the woman demands that her partner uses a condom. He responds: 'Does it mean you no longer trust me? Those things are for people who do not trust one another, but I am like a husband to you, and therefore I don't need a condom.'

Discussion

The aim of this paper has been to examine the form and content of the fictional serials in the magazines rather than their reception. It is nonetheless clear that the magazines were popular. On a very basic level, the stories treated readers to simple comic entertainment depicting the adventures of stereotypical characters. They ridiculed the fate of exaggerated figures like the Randy Professor who, according to his status, was supposed to be a respectable professional man, but was in fact continually embarrassed through attempts to abuse his power and wealth in order to seduce women.

But the stories were also obviously popular because of the explicitness of the sex. Traditionally, it was not appropriate to discuss sexual matters openly and in public, but with the HIV/AIDS epidemic this has gradually changed, and it has become quite normal to talk about sex and interview people about their sexual behaviour, even in relatively conservative and 'traditional' rural areas. However, this talk is embedded in a very specific discourse: an ascetic public health discourse that emphasizes disease prevention and largely ignores pleasure. The magazines broke through both the traditional taboo on discussing sexual matters openly and the ascetic medicalized discourse on sex (*Secrets* was promoted as 'the light in a sea of darkness'). They provided people with explicit and detailed sexual fantasy, but devoid of risks. They created a world in which promiscuous and unrestrained sex was still possible and could be enjoyed without the fear of HIV infection. Awareness of the risk of infection is present in the stories, but the characters are cool and ignore this, unaffected within the bounds of the fictional realm. As such the stories could be seen simply as innocent entertainment completely compatible with safe sex behaviour in real life. However, more worryingly from a public health perspective, they could also be interpreted as providing a counter discourse which challenges, point by point, the main messages of HIV prevention campaigns. Against the public health message of abstain, stick to one partner, use a condom, the magazines posit a counter message: sex is good for you, have as much of it as possible, with as many partners as possible, and don't let condoms spoil the enjoyment, even though they might prevent disease.

Although this counter-message is clear, to condemn the stories out of hand as inaccurate and dangerous may be an over-reaction based on two questionable assumptions: first, that a health-promoting media ought to exclusively deliver messages about health risks and healthy behaviour and avoid anything that only has entertainment value, and second, that audiences are simply passive consumers of these messages.

Whether or not the magazines have had a negative effect on people's actual attitudes and behaviour is beyond the scope of this article, and would require further research on the reception of the magazines' messages, but research has demonstrated that consumers are far from being passively influenced by media messages and that they actively engage with and reinterpret messages (Liebes & Katz, 1990; Seale, 2002). Also, it is becoming increasingly clear that the unnatural absence of sexual pleasure in the sober public health messages

about sex (which tend to be couched in terms of reproduction), is not beneficial to promoting safe sex (Jewitt, 1997 cited in Seale, 2002, p. 5).

We reviewed 276 studies reporting the results of HIV prevention interventions, which shows that most interventions use more conventional approaches, such as peer education, outreach work, popular opinion leadership, community action and education in the classroom. These awareness-raising interventions were most successful when combined with the provision of condoms, treatment and health checks. However, knowledge about how HIV is transmitted and how it can be prevented is not sufficient for most people to change a behaviour they value. It has been argued that modifying risk perceptions needs to take cultural and normative aspects surrounding safer sex into account (Donovan & Ross, 2000). As a result, novel interventions using popular media forms such as television or radio soap operas have been used in an attempt to address issues of gender inequality and limited sexual negotiating power (Mohammed et al., 2001; Shapiro et al., 2003). Initiatives such as these have proven very effective in sexual health promotion, but remain underused (Bhattarai, 2000). Similarly, interventions which make use of celebrity self-disclosure of HIV status and which are based on the idea of engaging audiences with role model stories, have been shown to have substantial impact in influencing people's behaviour (Kalichman & Hunter, 1992).

The message to health educators from the magazine stories discussed here is that behaviour change may be more popular if sexual health is not separated from sexual pleasure, and safe sex is promoted in positive terms (emphasis on sexual enjoyment and adventure) rather than negative ones (avoidance of disease). This is supported by the increasing emphasis on edutainment, social marketing and media advocacy (Seale, 2002), and by studies looking at the acceptability of microbicidal gels and other products (Pool et al., 2000). The popularity of the magazines underscores the importance of the entertainment value of health education and the need to remember that sex is supposed to be enjoyable, and it suggests alternative possibilities for conferring such information.

Illustrated popular magazines such as those discussed here could be very suitable as HIV-prevention intervention. However, this would require some adaptation, for example to counter gender stereotypes and the way in which sexual violence against women is presented as a natural aspect of 'manly' behaviour. But this does not necessarily mean completely sanitizing them by removing all sexism, violence and risky behaviour, as that would just serve to divorce the stories from real life as well. Fictional stories could be developed which point to ways in which men and women can interact on more equal terms and which create fictional environments in which sexual violence and exploitation are considered unacceptable without explicitly taking issue with the 'cool' image of heroes and heroines and without reducing them to dull abstainers or eternally faithful spouses.

Initiatives along these lines have already been pursued to some extent in Uganda by the magazine 'Straight Talk' which disseminates HIV/AIDS education to schools. But this is not really a substitute for the more adventurous and sexually explicit reading that the magazines provided to the general public. This is clear from subsequent developments. After the demise of the magazines discussed in this paper, the vacuum in popular demand has been filled by 'Uganda's first tabloid' – *The Red Pepper*. With front page headlines like 'Hot Sex Attack! – He has been demanding my hot Kandahar since 2001', an expansion of the war idiom (based largely on the conflict in Afghanistan) and increasingly lurid images, *The Red Pepper* has all the sex of the older magazines, but largely without their 'educational' contributions. This suggests that there is an urgent need for the development of more adventurous packaging of sexual health messages before the rise of even more violent and

explicit sources of information leave health educators too far behind to be able to catch up, and even the Randy Professor is seen as a boring old prude.

Notes

- 1 A sugar mommy is a woman who provides support, gifts, or money in exchange for a sexual relationship with a younger man.
- 2 1,500 shillings was the official minimum daily wage.

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