Men and Masculinities
Volume 12 Number 1
October 2009 73-89

10.1177/1097184X07309503
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Male Promiscuity

The Negotiation of Masculinities by Motorbike Taxi-Riders in Masaka, Uganda

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Understanding contemporary sociocultural constructions of masculinity and sexuality is crucial in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. This article discusses lay conceptualizations and enactments of manhood, in interaction with emic interpretations and practices of promiscuity. Data were collected from motorbike taxi-riders in southwest Uganda using ethnographic participant observation, a semi-structured questionnaire (n = 221), focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, case studies, and interactive workshops. Meanings and interpretations of masculinity are deeply imbued with sociocultural symbols drawn from the traditional, ritualistic, political, economic, and contemporary contexts. Social scripts and expectations are for males to engage in sexual activity as evidence of maturation. Higher social status, economic well-being, power, and "more manhood" are associated with multiple sexual partners. This male ideology perpetuates patriarchy and the commoditization of women, disparages messages of anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns, and supports risky sexual behavior. Sexual and reproductive health interventions should widen contemporary local perceptions and understandings of manhood to include safe sexual behavior.

Keywords: *masculinity; sexuality; Uganda; Africa; manhood; qualitative research; promiscuity*

Introduction

Understanding contemporary sociocultural constructions of masculinity and the diverse notions of male sexuality is crucial to the success of the struggle against HIV/AIDS (Uganda AIDS Commission 2000). Men's sexual behavior, values, and attitudes toward gender roles, sexuality, and health are deeply rooted within their

Authors' Note: The authors are grateful to the *bodabodamen* for their enthusiastic participation. We are also grateful to Prof. J. Whitworth and Dr. R. Pool for administrative support for this study.

understandings of masculinity, as well as directly linked to HIV transmission and women's vulnerability in heterosexual contexts (Campbell 1995; Vitellone 2000; Green et al. 2001). Central to unpacking these issues is contextually answering the multilayered questions, "What is a man?" (see, for example, Garlick 2003) and "What is masculinity?" (Stern 1997). Scholars within men's studies (Jones 2006; Morrell 2001; Connell 1987, 1995) highlight the plurality of meanings of masculinities depending on context—time and space—and the question, who is defining and to what end?

Content analysis of the abstracts of the International AIDS Conference series indicates a gender bias. Women's issues are comparatively more documented, hence more researched. Various gendered research studies in sub-Saharan Africa focus on female inequality and inequity, female subordination, customs, and practices that subjugate women to a subservient position in society (Okojie 1994; Oruboloye, Caldwell, and Caldwell 1993). Thus, related interventions emphasize such topics as empowering women and reducing their vulnerability. However, enactments of hegemonic masculinity—defined as "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell and Messserschmidt 2005, 282)—will have implications for these interventions in the sexual and reproductive health of women.

Fewer studies[1] (for example, Morrell 2001; Ouzgane and Morrell 2005; Lindsay and Miescher 2003) explore the individual, cultural, sociopolitical, and the psychosocial constructions of masculinity, male ideologies in sexual relationships, socially proscribed and prescribed male gender attitudes, values, and behaviors in sub-Saharan Africa (see also Luyt 2005). We pursued these themes as part of an exploratory study (Nyanzi et al. 2004; Nyanzi, Nyanzi, and Kalina 2005a, b) of the sexual and reproductive health needs of private motorbike taxi-riders, locally known as *bodabodamen*, in East Africa. This is an exclusively male employment group that particularly evolved in response to development reforms and structural changes in Uganda's social economic scene.[2] This article discusses the social construction of masculinity and describes the bodabodamen's conceptualizations and enactments of manhood. It also presents the sexualization processes and the different attitudes, knowledge, and practice of the notion of promiscuity in this sociocultural context of bodabodamen in southwestern Uganda. Lastly, the article examines the implications of the above constructions for sexual health and HIV/AIDS prevention programs.

Methodology

Since Margaret Mead, symbolic anthropologists have focused on gender and sexuality as cultural or symbolic constructs, and thus have inquired into the sources, processes, and consequences of their construction and organization. In this paradigm, "gender, sexuality and reproduction are treated as symbols, invested with meaning by the society in question, as all symbols are. The approach to the problem of sex and gender is thus a

matter of symbolic analysis and interpretation, a matter of relating such symbols to other cultural symbols and meanings on the one hand, and to the forms of social life and social experience on the other" (Ortner and Whitehead 1981, 1-2). Gender and sexuality are meaningful symbolic forms that require interpretation before explanation. Our study investigated contemporary values and local meanings buried in the symbols of *masculinity*, *manhood*, and *promiscuity*, and reported practices among bodabodamen.

The Study

The study was conducted by the Social Science Department of the Medical Research Council Programme on AIDS in Uganda, Uganda Virus Research Institute.[3] The organization has been conducting multi-disciplinary research about HIV/AIDS in Uganda since 1989. Fieldwork for this cross-sectional study was conducted between 2000 and 2002. After piloting to explore feasibility and pretest research instruments, we conducted an exploratory study (Nyanzi et al. 2004; Nyanzi, Nyanzi, and Kalina 2005a, b) to investigate the sexual behavior, mobility patterns, sexual networks, knowledge, and attitudes toward sexually transmitted infections (STDs), including HIV/AIDS. We also conducted participatory workshops to address participants' felt and expressed needs.

Study Sites

The study was located at two sites: Nyendo and Masaka Municipality in southwestern Uganda. Nyendo is a peri-urban peripheral, located along the east and central African Coastal–hinterland Highway. It comprises several over-crowded slum dwellings, shanty structures, a relatively flourishing economic center with several markets for agricultural produce, fish, secondhand clothes, building materials, and household wares. It also has a buoyant nightlife. Masaka Municipal Council, on the other hand, is a small urban setting with the administrative organs of the district. It has a relatively good infrastructure.

Methods

Rather than beginning with elaborate *grand-man* theories, we chose the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to research with the intention of adopting a framework that encouraged the emergence of emic theorizations located within the lay narratives of study participants. Triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative methods acted as a check on validity and reliability. Data were collected in the local language—Luganda, in prearranged venues that were chosen because they could facilitate privacy and foster confidentiality. A standard amount of money commensurate to the possible transport fares lost during the time spent participating in research activities was given to study participants.

Every working day between 2000 and 2002, the first two authors traveled on a motorbike taxi to and from work, as well as when making social or domestic trips. This way they were able to establish client–rider relationships with a particular set of bodabodamen. These relationships aided access to the study communities. Ethnographic participant observation (Spradley 1980) among these bodabodamen, their colleagues at the parking stages, their families, and other clients—all generated rich emic data. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 221 bodabodamen who were found at the stages, available and willing to participate in the study. This was convenient sampling. Thereafter 148 men participated in focus group discussions (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990; Kreuger 1988). Then a select group of forty men (twenty from each location) took part in in-depth interviews in which themes developed in the focus group discussions were further investigated. At this stage we did purposive sampling based on ability to articulate ideas in a group format. Ten men were followed up as case studies, generating life-history narratives. Lastly, we conducted two interactive workshops based on the felt needs of participants, expressed in earlier data collection stages. Workshop activities included dissemination of information, distribution of condoms, and discussion about voluntary counseling and testing.[4]

Qualitative data were tape recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated from Luganda into English texts. Textual data were entered into computer and analyzed thematically with the help of Atlas.ti (Scientific Software Development, Berlin) —a software program based on the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Quantitative data analysis employed Epi Info 6 (Epidemiology Program Office, Center for Disease Control, CDC, Atlanta). Names of participants have been altered to protect their identity. Translations of Luganda expressions in this text are provided by the authors, unless otherwise indicated.

Study Population Demographics From Questionnaire Data

Mean age was twenty-three years old (range seventeen to forty), although many men did not know when they were actually born. Predominant ethnic groups were Baganda (76 percent), Banyankore (8 percent) and Nyarwanda (5 percent). Roman Catholics were the major religious denomination (56 percent), followed by Muslims (31 percent) and Protestants (10 percent). Education level was mostly low: 69 percent stopped at primary school level, 28 percent attained some O'-level education and only three participants had post-O'-level training.[5] The majority (79 percent) had the *bodaboda* job as their only source of income, while 21 percent had other manual jobs including digging, animal husbandry, tailoring, bricklaying, and petty trade. A discussion of the complexities within the marital demographic statistics is presented in Nyanzi et al. 2004.

Masculinity and Development Stages

From the qualitative data analysis, it is possible to chronologically arrange the various phases marked by both physical and social processes through which a male human metamorphoses within this sociocultural context.

Male infant (*muwere)* → boy (*mulenzi*) → youth (*muvubuka*) → grown-up (*mukulu*), manhood (*asajjakudde*) → real man (*musajja ddala*) → old man (*mukadde/mzee*) → dead (*mufu/mugenzi*)

There were apparent tensions in the definitions of development stages of masculinity. Several explanations are offered for this conflict in definitions. This was partly because of the fluidity of boundaries of each stage. For example the distinction between neighboring stages depends on the subjective interpretation of the concerned individual, the observer(s), and society. Thus participants emphasized that while parents may refer to one as a boy, his peers might see him as a youth, and his sexual partner may regard him a "real man." These definitions were mostly made on the basis of shared common experiences within particular circles of interaction. Therefore these men were often playing out diverse "masculine" roles depending on who their audience was. Second, since entry into many of these stages depends on social processes that do not follow lineal progression, individuals can move into different phases without necessarily going through preceding ones. For example a boy (mulenzi) of seventeen who fathers a child joins the ranks of manhood (asajjakudde) even though he has not yet undergone some of the preceding phases. Likewise, no matter what age one died physically, he would always be referred to as dead (mufu). Third, some of the phases of masculine development are not mutually exclusive to others as exemplified by study participants who claimed to be youths, grown-ups, men, and real men at the same time. Last, even when advanced in masculine development, involvement in one social act or having a quality that belongs to preceding stages qualifies an individual to belong within those particular stages. For example, a father who is irresponsible can be called *muto mubilowozo*—an infant in thought.

Social Construction of Masculinity

The nature versus nurture argument was evident in the various discussions and interviews. Participants reported that biological determinism was commonly used to identify the sex of an infant at birth. When a child is born with a penis, he is a baby boy—male. Patriarchy dictates that parents tend to prefer having sons over daughters, participants variously stated. However, many participants said that there are traditional cultural mechanisms that can facilitate a woman to either conceive a male child, or even change the predetermined sex of an embryo from male to female.

Mukasa: Some women get charms from traditional healers. These charms can make the thing in the womb become a boy.

Simon: Eh, but do charms work?

Mukasa: Yes, they do. Charms can even give barren women babies.

Iga: For me, when my wife was pregnant, she went to see an old woman in the village. At that time we had three daughters. I badly wanted a boy. The woman gave her local herbs to bathe in and drink during the pregnancy. And they worked. We got a son, Sozi.

The need for such techniques that ascertain a male embryo is relevant to Buganda because it is a patrilineal society in which male children are highly valued. This continuity follows from traditional Buganda society where sons propagate the clan, initiate marriage, lead the community and, even presently, are the main heirs and owners of socially valued property. These bodabodamen explained that the naming system within this society is based on the father's clan. Buganda's kinship system is agnatic. Therefore kinship and lineage are traced through the male line; all children belong to and thus are named into their male genitor's clan. It is the son's duty to propagate continuity of his lineage. Participants repeatedly stressed the importance of this male role in the different data.

From the day of labor, society begins to mould the males differently from the females—effectively shaping the masculine as distinct from the feminine. The bodabodamen said that the initiation rites of the male babies are different from those of their female counterparts. Contents of the prophylactic traditional herbs in which infants are bathed are different by gender. Participants also identified the difference in playthings that male children have as opposed to females. Girls were reported to play with dolls made from banana fibers or old rags, play at cooking meals or being mothers who look after the home, or play roles as brides who adorn themselves with pretty flowers from the fields. Boys on the other hand were said to play with hunting tools like catapults (*butida*), blocks of wood for pistols, kick balls, toy cars made from banana stems or wires and rubber tires. In addition, participants said that boys play at "getting drunk," "robbing banks," or "competitive fighting for fun," or as a "working father who has to make money to provide for his family."

Narratives about socially prescribed and proscribed values, customs, and norms further reveal that the different sexes are variously socialized into specific gender roles. In their discussions about what constitutes socially acceptable maleness—or masculinity, there was a tendency to define what is masculine by discussing what is socially proscribed against for females. This generated a rich discourse on female taboo practices, male social norms, accepted masculine values, and practices. Bodabodamen boasted that females are socially denied several male privileges. It is taboo for girls to "whistle for it brings in snakes," "sit on a drum for they will become barren," "sit a-straddle anything because this will kill the life within what is sat on, and it will reduce the girl's sweet scent," "squat in public," "climb trees lest there will be no more fruit on that tree." Unlike males, girls must kneel down when serving, greeting, or addressing elders and male peers. Girls must not look a man or an elder in the face when speaking and must not answer back when spoken to. Furthermore, girls are not allowed to leave the home apart from when authorized to fetch wood, water, go to the market, school, or church. They wake up early and do chores in the home such as cooking, cleaning, looking after children, washing, and digging. When a girl breaks any of these rules, she is punished. These activities socially distinguished young males from females, fashioning them each into their respective masculine or feminine roles.

The boys, on the other hand, are taught to graze the live stock—sheep, cattle, goats—in the fields where they interact with other boys. Boys also fetch water and firewood (chiefly as escorts for the girls). Parents are not strict about the boys' hours of departure from and arrival at home. In fact participants said that with the onset of youth, parents encouraged young men to go out and socialize, even giving them money for their spending. However parents were reported to severely restrict girls at this age within the home, question their late evening or night returns—associating them with getting spoiled. Participants were quick to point out how the same action—returning home late—was socially interpreted differently for the young males and females. While it meant that a boy was becoming mature and responsible, it also meant that the girl was possibly becoming loose and getting spoiled. This reveals the local association made between masculinity and the public arena, while femininity is tied down to domesticity and the private arena. In this traditionally patriarchal society, all these practices that are socially sanctioned against for females are allowed for the males. The male child is socially prepared for the public domain in which he is an active initiator of social processes, and the female child for the private (home) domain where she is a passive recipient. Thus men who take on feminine qualities are often ostracized. Such feminine men were described in the data as "weak-willed," "indecisive," "timid like a woman," "enjoys domestic chores," "not interested in buying personal possessions," "sexually inactive." And women who are perceived to be masculine in character are referred to as *Ssebo* meaning *sir* and characterized as those who initiate their own sexual relationships, own property, pay or employ men, build houses, or speak strongly in public. Amid laughter, participants reported that women who portrayed masculine tendencies were often given ostracizing masculine labels including *kiwagi, kyakula kisajja*—it grew like a man*, Nakapakyu.*

Manhood: Contemporary Conceptualizations, Inherent Tensions, and Stereotypes

Sociologists often see stereotyping as part of the process by which children are socialized into sex roles and by which adults and children are denied opportunities for more individually varied development. Analysis of our data presents four major concepts related to manhood, inherent within these bodabodamen's narrative. In the raw data, there are no clear-cut boundaries between the different concepts. Instead they are merged, obscure, and overlapping. In the focus group discussions, consensus was not always reached about what manhood actually meant, thus generating rich debate that produced the diverse range of meanings and values within this sociocultural context. We further pursued this theme during the individual interviews.

All Beards But No Man!

Petero: He is just with many beards, but he is no man at all! He has not yet become a man. He is just grown up!

Ssejaka: Before you show a woman to your parents, you are still counted among the children.

Kayizza: Thank you for stating it. Even if you grow beards, have a broad chest and a deep voice, you will still be regarded as a child.

Mike: Even if you were caught stealing in someone's banana plantation, they would let you go because you are not yet counted among men.

In narratives about manhood, bodabodamen distinguished between the verbs *okukula* (to grow up) and *okusajjakula* (to become a man). There was agreement that physical maturity does not equate to manhood, although the latter concept frequently arose in the discussions about manhood. Signs of physical maturity (okukula) that were specifically mentioned include "growing beards," "breaking of the voice," "youthful body odor—*akassu k'obuvubuka'*, "balding," "wider chest," "new hairs in hidden body parts." There was debate about whether these factors signify manhood. Many participants believed that physical maturity on its own does not make one a man. While some bodabodamen argued that it is not a prerequisite for manhood because "there are some undeveloped youths who became men before some grown-ups," others countered this argument by saying that physical maturity sets the stage for okusajjakula because only a grown-up—a physically mature person—can perform the functions of a man. They claimed, "*Ekitanaba tekyengera*!" (that which is not yet ready does not ripen).

Independence From the Family of Orientation

According to these bodabodamen, the need for independence from the parental home is a very significant concept in defining manhood.

Mutebi: My personal reason that makes me say that I have grown up enough and must leave my parents' home is this. I may be staying at my parents' home and then I start developing interest in loving girls. When I begin loving my girls, there is no way I can wake my parent up in the night after I have been at my lover's place. It is rude to knock and ask my parents to open the door. "Knock, knock, Mzee open the door for me." [Laughter from the others.]

Respondents: That is not good at all.

Mutebi: That is why I go up to my father and say, "Mzee, I am now grown." And he may say to me, "There is a house at the back for the courtyard. That is now your own

house." As an adult he understands immediately that when you say you are grown, it means you have begun loving women.

David: I also left home because when I got a girl, I would return home late. I could not even bring her to the house. So I decided to leave and get my own place. I was becoming a man.

Sonko: Eh, the minute your son begins talking of shifting from home, you know he has become a man. He wants his own place where he can take his lover at any time of the night. So he leaves home and begins renting a *muzigo* [one-roomed house].

There are various sociocultural factors that result in the desire to physically break away from the home into which they were born or brought up. Social connections are usually never broken because participants stressed that they still bear responsibility of different social functions in these homes. While some participants had shifted long distances away from home, others were only a few meters away. What was significant is the physical separation from the parents' home to one's own.

These bodabodamen said they shifted from home because of a marked interest in sexual activity, acquiring one or more sexual partners, and thereby needing a place to take her or them. The need for privacy was a signifier for maturity into manhood. Lodges were often reported to be expensive. Culturally there is a taboo against taking a sexual partner into one's parents' home: *obuko* observances in Buganda proscribe against "in-laws" of opposite sex to operate within close proximity. As a result, bodabodamen said that they resort to having sex in either the bushes, at the well, at a friend's house, or in the outer-kitchen; as long as they are still in their parents' home. A few reported that they would either have sex at the partner's residence, although the general response to these participants was that women looked down on a man who could not afford to take them to a lodge or to his own place. Another reported reason for these men to shift from their parents' home was that manhood comes with the adoption of a new lifestyle that would facilitate their newly acquired sexual activity. Participants said that peers led them into the lifestyle of social entertainment, where sexual partners would be easier to get. Such venues include night dances, discos, drama shows, alcohol joints, eating out in restaurants, video halls, and gambling casinos. Many of these events occurred in the night hours, and bodabodamen said it was contentious and disrespectful to parents to return home late at night, more so if one returned drunk and with a newly acquired sexual partner. Leaving home is an important mark of attaining manhood and participants said that parents encourage their sons to leave home on realizing that they are "becoming men."

John: One can never attain manhood while leaving in his parents' home.
Interviewer: Isn't it possible to become a man while at your parents' home?

Respondents together: No! No way!

Interviewer: But can one be referred to as grown up when still living with his parents?

Respondents: True! True!

Swaibu: Manhood is attained when one has his own home, a plot of land and a house. If you cannot afford it . . . A man will rent his own place and leave the parents.

Fred: That is the difference between people who are just grown up and real men. A grown-up can have children but still live in his parents' home. That is why you hear parents telling their sons that have borne children to leave the home and start fending for themselves.

Seezi: They say, "Don't become a man (*tosajjakulira*) in my home! Go get your own place because I cannot have two men in this house."

However, leaving home on its own is not a mark of manhood. It is the other sociocultural processes associated with it that give it significance to realizing manhood.

Money Makes One a Man

The third concept associated with manhood among these bodabodamen is the pursuit of money and material achievement, which usually results in taking up gainful employment (in this case bodaboda). Participants said that the demands of manhood necessitate money. One needs money to support the new lifestyle, maintain a sexual partner, fish for other partners, look presentable, shift from home. However, all agreed that it does not matter how much money or material possessions one has, if he is not known to be sexually active he is not man at all. He is just a rich grown up. Participants believed that it is impossible to have money and yet get no sexual partner(s), unless of course the man was "knocked by a sheep" —a euphemism used to mean impotence. The more possessions men have, the more sexual partners they tend to acquire.

Sexual Activity and Manhood

Last, from the data the single most important concept that defines and distinguishes a grown-up from a real man is sexual activity. The more virile the man, the more man he is.

Vince: I became a man [nasajjakula].

Kadere: I also became a man.

Pepe: It is only when you have a woman that you are a man.
Interviewer: What is it that shows you that you have become a man?

Pepe: For me, I think that my manhood was attained when I got the guts to suggest sex to a girl.

Ssula: You cannot say that you have become a man when you do not have a woman in your home. It does not matter how many possessions are in your home. Without a woman, you are still a child.

Ali: If you feed and clothe yourself, but have no child, you are not yet a man. And you need a woman to get a child.

According to these participants, the rite of passage into manhood is the commencement of sexual activity. Participants said that this is the single factor that sets the men apart from the boys. They claimed that having multiple sexual partners made one a real man (*musajja wa ddala*) or very much of a man (*musajja nnyo*). In the questionnaire 138/221 men reported having simultaneous multiple sexual partners, although actual numbers ranged from two to over ten concurrent sexual partners. Individual in-depth interviews reveal that serial multiple partnerships are also widespread. Casual sexual partners are popular among these bodabodamen, with relationships lasting from a few hours to months before they are terminated. In fact participants said that if a man were able to initiate a sexual relationship with an attached woman, he was referred to as *musajja mekette,* meaning a man who is fearless, or *musajja muwanguli,* meaning a man who can try anything. They reported that it is common to "steal" each other's sexual partners, when fully aware that the woman belongs to another man. These bodabodamen said that if one is able to marry one wife and settle down with that one wife, he is a man. However, if he is able to settle down with more than one woman, he is a strong man—*musajja w'amannyi.* The more the wives, the more manly the man. Thus, the popularity of second, third, fourth, or more wives, and of outside wives (Karanja 1994).

Others stressed that being able to father a child and maintain it is the ultimate mark of manhood. Thus if one were able to father many children with many wives, and provide for all of them, he was a man among men—*musajja mubasajja.*

In the focus group discussions, participants were observed to joke, jeer, tease, or even mock their friends or colleagues who were known or admitted to abstain for various reasons. These bodabodamen relegated abstinence to the very old, the bewitched, the ill, the impotent, the mentally disturbed, and the very young children. They claimed that as a preventive measure, abstinence was unnatural and thus impossible.

Saku: Our friends who abstain will bury us when we die. They live peacefully without worrying because they know they have not got disease (HIV).

Atim: Hm! We shall all die! Even those who abstain can die from Ebola or motor-accidents.

> Kenny: If they want to abstain, it is up to them. With all the poverty around, what is the point of living long? Are they going to make timber out of me? No, I do not support abstinence!

A few participants countered the above. Some, on grounds of religion, judged promiscuity as sinful and irresponsible. Others reasoned that the current HIV/AIDS epidemic nullified the need for sexual activity to define a man. Some men argued for the urgent need for one partner, particularly because HIV is spread through unprotected sex with an infected person. Others reasoned that many women are "very expensive to maintain," resulting in debates about the fact that many men can make enough money to look after multiple stable partners. This was often emphasized as a mark of true manhood.

This logic of faithfully sticking to one partner, locally known as "zero-grazing," was refuted by many participants because they argued that "a man may stick to an unfaithful sexual partner or wife who will sleep around and catch HIV/AIDS, spreading it to the man." The reported folly of trusting one sexual partner was verified by statements such as "women are never, ever faithful," "women are easily tempted to cheat on their steady sexual partners." Thus, the futility of careful living. Furthermore, this line of thinking was strengthened by the fatalistic attitude toward HIV infection. Several participants claimed that death is the destiny of all humanity, and if they never caught HIV, they would die of other things like motor accidents, other diseases, or old age.

Significance of Promiscuity

As indicated in the foregoing discussion, sexuality plays a big role in defining the progression in the manhood metamorphosis of these men. According to the participants, not only is the initiation into manhood construed in relation to sexual activity, but retaining one's status as a "real man" (especially among peers), also depends on it. It is vital that his peers are aware that he is coupling with girls.

The basis for referring to one as either *musajja nnyo, musajja wa ddala, musajja muwanguli, or musajja mekette* largely revolves around a man's reputation regarding his expertise and boldness at suggesting sex to women, skills at playing around with different partners and not getting caught, and the number of sexual partners he is known to have.

This act of men having many sexual partners is a continuity from traditional Kiganda culture in which polygyny was an institutionalized social practice. Traditionally a man could legally have as many wives as he could economically support after paying their bride-price. The institutionalization of these wives is reflected in Kiganda nomenclature, which has several names for the different wives, including *Kaddulubaale* (the first wife), *Kabejja, Nasaza, Muyiiya, Mukuuma, Muteesa, Musanyusa, Muwanika.* Furthermore, the contemporary value attached to having more sexual partners as a

sign of greater manhood rhymes with the fact that social strata in traditional Buganda society directly corresponded to increased number of wives among other possessions. Buganda kingdom was stratified hierarchically, running from the *Kabaka* (king) who had access to all women in his sphere of rule, to the chiefs and clan leaders who had several wives, right down to the *mukopi* (common man) who often could only afford one wife. The more access to social influence, economic wealth, and political power one had, the greater the number of wives. This legacy of traditional cultural Buganda in which women were a status symbol, economic position marker, and identifier of political influence, was frequently referred to as justification for contemporary Baganda men's promiscuity.

> Miiro: Just leave Baganda men alone. From time past, Baganda men have always had many wives.
>
> Peter: Yes, we are what our grandfathers were. One man was allowed to marry here and there and there. And the wives would all stay in one homestead, peacefully. It is these women of today who are spoiled with envy and jealousy. In the past, the men were okay!

However some participants argued against sticking to old patterns of behavior simply because they were in line with custom. Modernity, education, exposure to the advantages of small families, the comparative hardships associated with economic development, and the more recent fear of HIV infection—all dictated that they practice "zero-grazing." To these men, maturity meant "knowing the difference between what other people want you to do and what you know is right to do," and "deciding not to jump from one woman to the next because other men are doing it."

Are Men Promiscuous Only to Prove Their Manhood?

In the discussions we probed the men to establish the significance of having many women. Their narratives revealed that there are different types of promiscuity, which run from having socially institutionalized multiple sexual partners (wives), to the hidden casual sexual partners, and the forbidden but appealing commercial sex workers. Sexual networks available to bodabodamen are discussed in Nyanzi et al. (2004).

Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews contain rich narratives about an emic physical condition locally called *akasagazi,* which participants believed is a disease leading to hyper-sexual activity. If detected during infancy, *akasagazi* can be treated with local herbs. Participants reported that a common telltale sign of an infant who may suffer from the condition in the future, is continuous fondling of the genitalia, or "a baby boy whose member [meaning penis] stands up all the time." However if the condition went undetected into adulthood, participants believed that the condition forced men to seek out several sexual partners because they were never satiated with sexual intercourse with one partner.

Another cause of promiscuity among men that was frequently mentioned is *okwakirira,* which literally means "on constant fire for something." This was described as a natural habit where one was in constant demand for sex with different partners. Some participants claimed that okwakirira runs in families; it is hereditary.

During in-depth interviews, a few participants with three or more casual sexual partners in the last month intimated that they were promiscuous because they did not know their HIV sero-status, but suspected that they were already infected with the virus. Others reported that they were already promiscuous before the advent of HIV. Therefore they saw no reason for reducing their number of new sexual partners. This was most common in Nyendo. Other reasons, unrelated to manhood, that influence bodabodamen to become promiscuous included group influence—by getting multiple sexual partners the individual fitted into his new occupational society and thus avoided name-calling—the desire to sexually experiment with different women, acquisition of money which goaded them into sex with new partners, attending pleasure places like bars or discos or pornographic video halls, high levels of mobility and migrations that meant that they often went to new areas and needed to acquire a new sexual partner while there, the urban lifestyle where traditional family support and network systems were weakened, and the social significance or value of promiscuity within their setting.

As local African social researchers involved in HIV/AIDS research in Uganda, we are often amazed, amused, embarrassed, or even frustrated by the over-sensitivity of Western researchers and scientist colleagues who tiptoe around the word *promiscuity* in relation to local African study participants. Of course we appreciate the historical baggage of accusations of ethnocentricity, voyeurism, racism, criminalization of the normal, and evolutionary academics leveled against earlier Western researchers of sexuality in Africa. However, the resultant fragility with which emic matters of sexuality are handled is at best an injustice to sexuality studies. As revealed in this case, *promiscuity* is a word employed by study participants themselves, and need not implicate (foreign) researchers in making value judgments about their African sample. In fact, *promiscuous* is a more contextually relevant term than the commonly assumed "better expression," namely "having multiple sexual partners." The latter is blatantly and culturally-unacceptable, particularly in reference to seniors. However, the ambivalent and loaded nature of the word *promiscuous* means that participants can either hide behind its vagaries or offer nuanced explanations of the notion as it is relevant to their particular context.

Further to Morrell's (2001) edited volume, even within this local sub-context, meanings of masculinity and manhood are not homogenous. Among this group of men, understandings and interpretations of masculinity, maleness, manhood, sexuality, and promiscuity are deeply imbued with sociocultural symbols drawn from the traditional, ritualistic, political, economic, and contemporary facets of this context. In fact masculinity is not necessarily tied to the male biological body, but can be enacted by people in female bodies who portray tendencies socially deciphered as masculine (cf

Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Notions of sexuality and manhood are intricately interwoven. The social scripts, ideals, and expectations for males to engage in sexual activity as evidence of maturation determine one's progress among peers, the kin group, and wider community. Neither physical maturation nor possession of material property including wealth, on their own, are significant marks of attaining manhood.

Sexual activity is prerequisite for passage into manhood. Although the sexual act is mostly private, sexual histories are public knowledge among the peer group, allowing members to rank each other. Independence from home signifies maturation and often denotes commencement of sexual activity. Higher social status, economic well-being, power, and "more manhood" are associated with multiple sexual partnerships, earning such men value-laden labels pointing to more manliness. These labels have been amalgamated into the vernacular. Traditionally, promiscuity is institutionalized through polygyny, although monogamy as espoused in Christian ethos raises ground for tension. The fear of possible HIV infection is contributing toward redefining and rescripting new meanings of manhood and masculinity that co-opt safe sex practices, and enhance less risky lifestyles. Anti-HIV/AIDS health education messages are also contesting and advocating against the need for unprotected sex with several sexual partners in this predominantly heterosexual context.

Therefore the dominant emic masculine ideology that combines manliness with sexuality is in disparity to safe sex messages enshrined in the anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns because it encourages sexual behavior that potentially exposes men and their partners to risk of HIV infection. Thus in the design and the implementation processes of behavioral interventions, there is need to move away from essentialism that presents ideas of the naturally given and instead move to social constructionism that questions the social and historical roots of phenomena—masculinity and manhood in this case. Specific attention must be given to widening local perceptions of masculinity and manhood to include safe sexual behavior. This could be done through re-socialization using critical health education that considers current constructions of masculinity and manliness.

Notes

1. For a recent review of masculinities in sub-Saharan Africa refer to Barker and Ricardo (2005).

2. In Nyanzi, Nyanzi, and Kalina (2003, 81-2), we discuss the evolution of *bodaboda* in Uganda. Briefly, there was massive dilapidation and breakdown of infrastructure in the traditional sectors of transport (including road, railway, water, and air networks) during the political civil wars in Uganda in the later 1970s and early 1980s. It was aggravated by prolonged lack of maintenance and rehabilitation because of national economic crises of the ensuing period. With high inflation, devaluation, and the absence of adequate price-fixing mechanisms, transportation costs soared. Parallel to this were trade sanctions and bans on Uganda's exports although production of cash crops continued. Traders invested in and established smuggling within and across the borders. Businessmen bought coffee from farmers and illegally ferried it on bicycles and motorbikes to neighboring countries where it fetched higher prices. The early name for motorbike-taxi was *mwannyi zaabala* meaning "a high yield of coffee-beans." To avoid customs and immigration officers, new commercial paths and stop points were created for these vehicles, which the

authorities mostly ignored by concentrating on larger automobiles such as trucks. Secretly, a new form of public transport was created, smuggling goods and passengers from one border to another. Thus the name *bodaboda* (border-to-border). With the lifting of the trade sanctions, bodaboda transport became less about smuggling and more of a micro-enterprise that spread from the borders into the mainland. After the privatization of the transport sector, bodaboda became an integral part of the mundane traveling landscape of Uganda. Refer to Nyanzi et al. (2004) for a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of bodaboda to the service-providers and users.

3. Our positioning within this predominantly biomedical research institute colored our approach to the study of sexuality to a large extent. Although we departed from the main epidemiological model of statistically analyzing social concepts, we were still limited in our association of sexuality with HIV/AIDS. In the design of this study, sexuality was mainly framed within its linkages to the epidemic (e.g., see Spronk 2005 for a critic of sexuality studies in Africa for premising their work on HIV/AIDS).

4. The multiple methods generated voluminous data. We chose to present the results in different articles (Nyanzi, Nyanzi, and Kalina 2003, 2005a, b; Nyanzi et al. 2004) differentiated thematically. This article focuses on the interactions between masculinity, sexuality, and sexual health.

5. *O'level*, also known as *ordinary level*, refers to the first four years of secondary school education, which come after seven years of primary school. It precedes A' level (advanced level), which is two more years of specialist study.

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