Teachers' gendered identities, pedagogy and HIV/AIDS education in African settings within the ESAR

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> The play was to be about HIV/AIDS. I did not tell them the theme because I knew that, if I mentioned HIV/AIDS, no one was going to turn up. (. . .) When they arrived and realised what we were going to deal with, some left the place. (. . .) Whenever I came to teach them in Guidance and Counselling class, they would say, "she is coming again to teach us about AIDS". (. . .) They say, "you go to Moral Education there is HIV/AIDS, you go to Religious Education there is HIV/AIDS, in the Guidance classes there is HIV/AIDS, on radio, on television. . . we are tired".
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> <div align="right">Female teacher, Botswana</div>

Abstract

This article uses data selected from two studies in countries of the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR), namely, Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to explore how teachers used gender to construct their identities and those of their students. It demonstrates the role of perceived models of African masculinities and femininities in the lives of teachers and how these were contrived to sexualise girls and construct them, not only as inferior to boys but also, as objects of sexual ridicule. We see how female and male students negotiated gendered and sexual identities in the school and in HIV/AIDS classes in ways that often threatened teacher image and confidence, often undermining classroom participation. The article analyses the gendered dynamics of school and classroom life, highlighting educational implications, identifying gaps for further research and suggesting strategies that could help transform HIV/AIDS education classes, making them relatively more empowering for teachers and students.

Introduction

Theoretically and methodologically, post-structuralism and constructionist theorising guided the research processes whose outcomes inform discussions in this article. This framework facilitated the conceptual unravelling of the ways in which different categories of school actors – mainly teachers and students – discursively produced their identities as they functioned within what Maclure (1993) describes as the culturally and historically defined

biographical project. The biographical project usually comprises the "network of personal concerns, values and aspirations against which various procedures are judged and decisions made" as people converse and negotiate their identities in response to various gender positionings (see Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p.102). Within this context, schools emerge as key social sites for the construction of gender and the hierarchies in which material and symbolic power is developed and the dialectics of gender struggles are waged, producing systems of policing social boundaries in which teachers and students alike participate as gendered agents (Arnot, 2002; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bernstein, 1977).

While literature on the link between teacher identities and pedagogical choices shows that constructing identities is a process of negotiation that is strongly shaped by teacher expectations based on professional training, this article in addition demonstrates that teacher identities are also created through constant interaction with female and male colleagues as well as with female and male students. Such interactions appear to be deeply rooted in a complexity of cultural, historical as well as contemporary constructs of gender power relations (Danielewicz, 2004; Marsh, 2002; Arnot, 2002). Lisa Barty (2004) argues that while a single factor may influence a teacher's identity, it is also true that identity may also be influenced by the relationships between and among a variety of factors. These might range from individual notions of personal identity through to the wider discourse of collective teacher identity.

In this article, data from selected countries of the Eastern and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) is used to demonstrate how the reality of subjects engaging with generational and gendered cultures characterised the interaction between teachers and their students as they negotiated identities of Self and Other. The negotiation of identities revealed 'biographical conflicts' hinging not just on the need for teachers to apply learned pedagogical skills but also on the fact that being a teacher required navigation of teachers' cultural histories, the past, present and future expectations that were set in dynamic tensions within and outside the classroom (see Carson and Johnson, 2000). While there are some significant ethno-cultural differences between various ethnic communities within and across the ESAR countries, the studies upon which this article is generated reveal numerous points of cultural convergence and commonalities across the political borders, which confirm observations by Peil and Onyeneye (1998). These commonalities include, among others, social and linguistic histories, construction of gender and sexual identities, taboos around the sex discourse, ethnicities and construction of class (see Bahl, 1997), and the social

construction of age, which combine variously to support a reasonable level of shared identities among the African people in the region and their educational philosophies. Hence, the tendency to assume that African identities among communities of the ESAR are exclusively different is, largely, mistaken and inconsistent with the comparative histories and lived experiences of the communities involved (see Peil and Oyeneye, 1998). Indeed, the current national boundaries upon which such differences are inferred are the result of colonial impositions that effectively separated African communities, often with a total disregard for their ethno-cultural identities and familial links that blend across borders (see Zeleza, 1997). Evidence abounds to indicate that many African clans and families continue to live astride the political borders that separate their ancestral lands, alienating kith and kin, and curtailing cultural bonding.

The study context

This article draws on two data sets from two separate studies in the ESAR. The first study was conducted between 1998 and 1999 in two Kenya urban schools – one located in an affluent part of the city of Nairobi and the other in a more economically deprived city setting. The second study was cross-national in seven countries – Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe and was conducted between 2001 and 2002. The studies were designed within a qualitative research paradigm aimed at generating evidence-based knowledge regarding the complexities linked to identity formations within schools in the ESAR where education on HIV/AIDS prevention, reproductive health and sexuality tended to elicit teacher and learner anxiety. The common theme in both studies was the exploration of the construction of gendered and sexual identities and the role of teachers and young people in producing femininities and masculinities within the discourse of schooling. More precisely, the first study focussed on the role of gender in defining school success (socio-economic and human outcomes) and youth transitions to adulthood, while the second study focused on the role of gender and sexuality in the teaching and learning of HIV/AIDS education. With regard to teachers' identity formations, both studies yielded a wealth of data, part of which informs discussions in this article. Because of the broad nature and scope of the two studies, this article is limited to the interrogation of how teachers produced gendered identities of Self and Other in ways that influenced classroom dynamics in HIV/AIDS education classes.

The first study, which was my doctoral research, comprised 300 Kenyan primary school girls and boys from two city schools in Nairobi, with 40 of them participating in in-depth interviews (for convenience, the term 'student' and 'pupil' shall be used to refer to the children sample). Their average age was 13 years (see Chege, 2001). Part of democratising the research process involved the girls and boys negotiating their parents' participation, which resulted in ten mothers and two fathers consenting to being interviewed. In addition, the researchers deliberately provided children the space to participate as subjects working with friendly adults – a practice that is not common in research with children in Africa and in classroom interactions (see Davies, 1999). Further, all key-position teachers as well as the class teachers in both schools participated in interviews (group and individual) providing a sample of nine female and five male teachers. In the city schools, female teachers outnumbered their male colleagues with an average ratio of five females to one male teacher; yet male teachers occupied half of the key positions in the schools.

The second study was conducted in seven countries of the ESAR and was sponsored by the Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) of UNICEF in partnership with the corresponding national governments (see Pattman and Chege, 2003). The joint research sample comprised children aged between 0 and 18 years (UNICEF definition of children) with different countries exercising freedom to sample preferred age-groups using the life cycle approach (that is, 0–3/4 years, 5/6–9 years, 10–13 years and 14–18 years). In addition, teachers, parents (or guardians), and in some cases, student teachers were also selected. The research was designed on a range of agreed-upon themes such as, 'relations with people of the opposite sex', 'sugar daddies/mummies', 'spending leisure time', 'future success', tradition and modernity, among others. In exploring teacher identities in relation to HIV/AIDS and sexuality education, this article focuses only on upper primary and secondary schools.

To ensure subject-centredness and gender sensitivity, researchers were trained on how to conduct qualitative research using a variety of methods that include interviews, participant and non-participant observations, sketching and diary-keeping. They were encouraged to pay attention, not only to what the interviewees were saying, but also to what they were not saying – the unspoken data (see Brown and Gilligan, 1992; Taylor and Gilligan, 1997). The researchers recorded the subjects' body language, the emotional tone, subject interruptions on particular issues, as well as how much or how little was

spoken. The researchers followed up on the subjects' 'agenda' as they directed both the pace and course of the interviews as 'experts' of their own lives.

Teachers' professional lives: gendering and sexualising identities

Setting the stage for the gender divide

In most of the study sites, common stereotypes about how women and men were expected to perform gender emerged as basic material with which teachers constructed and negotiated their identities in relation to Other. Emergent teacher identities provided powerful models of femininities and masculinities which some of their female and male students appeared to emulate, contest or reject all together. For example, in one Kenyan primary school located in what is popularly referred to as 'slum area' (informal urban settlement), a mixed-sex group discussion with teachers in key positions revealed how male teachers used division of domestic work as the point of departure to construct versions of dominant masculinities. Notably, the male teachers dominated the discussions, talking in a 'matter-of-fact' way as they underscored their role as the custodians of African culture that presumably defined their positions as superior beings and as protectors of women. The dominant roles, that the male teachers assumed when they constructed femininity and masculinity, reflect views advanced by Flax (1997) that the processes of gendering identities are often directed by the interests of men from their position of control over women. In this context we see the women in the group discussion attempting to usher in a discourse of gender equality, which the men resisted.

> **FC:** I don't know what you would say about the division of work within the family (. . .)

> **Barasa (male deputy head-teacher):** (Promptly) Me. . . I'm. . . I'm for division (instant laughter from the other participants) with the belief that specialisation brings about efficiency (. . .) If I'm given defence (that is, the Ministry of Defence) and then somewhere . . . hehehe. . . (laughing) thieves break in, I'll now have to look. . . questions will have to be put, and I'll have to look for answers. And if somebody is in the ministry of agriculture then we go hungry, somebody has to explain.

> **Mrs King'ori (female deputy head-teacher):** I think we should not monopolise only one area. We should be ready to explore other areas. For example when I'm in the kitchen the whole week, my partner should come in and assist me the following week.

Mr Kiama (male senior teacher): I would. . . my comments I'd say, we are there to help one another. We marry so that one can assist one another when you are overburdened with problems. Not that it is like a duty; that 'cause I have done it this week. . . it is *only if* I see that my partner is loaded, she needs help, I come in. Or when she finds that I am overworked, she comes. . . not that we share that tomorrow or today, or this duty should be for who and who. If she can do it comfortably without my assistance, well and good. . . (shrugs his shoulders)

Mrs Okoth (female senior teacher): But you see, if you have not been doing it. How will you start for the first time?

As the female teachers engaged in a relatively transforming discourse, the male deputy head-teacher explicitly guarded his preferred identity as he passionately constructed himself around traditional models of masculinity that relegated women generally – not men – to the service of others. The importance of producing African masculinities in this way was apparent in Mr Barasa's utterances as he appealed to the purported 'African' way of doing gender. We see Mr Kiama, a relatively younger teacher, trying to remain culturally 'correct' within Mr Barasa's definition of African masculinity while at the same time constructing himself strategically as a progressive gender sensitive man who was also empathetic with the gender identities that his female colleagues were producing. Notably, when the female deputy head-teacher attempted to interpose, Mr Barasa cut her short, clearly silencing the female voice and effectively asserting his version of 'African' masculinity.

Mrs King'ori: Only when need arises. . .

Barasa: No. . . When need arises, even Africans will. . . will tell you. They. . . even before *you* people (pointing at me as an example of an educated woman, presumably modern) introduced Home Science to boys; those were not doing Home-Science. But go to these international hotels, the best cooks I think are men. Eh, these things (domestic work) can be done. Eeh, spreading them just because we want to be equal. . .

FC: What I'm not getting clearly is, who does what. . . at home, so that you say 'this is my specialised area' . . . For instance Mr Barasa, you are very clear. . . which area would you like to be in (. . .)

Barasa: For me. . . I'm ready to specialise in very many areas, but eeeh. . ., let's leave children and the kitchen to be assigned somebody else. . .

Throughout the discussion, Mr Barasa rejected any attempts to alter his construction of powerful masculinity (metaphorically, the Ministry of Defence) and continued to assert unwillingness to participate in disruptions of

the assumed gender order unless, as he put it, 'emergency' dictated so, and even then, his identity would not be domesticated around child-caring duties.

Boys to men? Teacher violence and masculinities

In all the research schools, girls and boys constructed teachers, particularly male teachers, as bullies who were violent, intimidating, impersonal and abusive to children. This was often in contrast to female teachers, whom, many of the young people – apart from girls in the affluent Nairobi school – presented as caring and 'motherly'. Apparently, none of the male teachers was presented as 'fatherly'. The male teacher identity was constructed negatively, particularly with regard to the gendering of corporal punishment as noted in Botswana's Bokamoso School where boys complained that male teachers, in particular, discriminated against boys. Allegedly, teachers beat boys harder than girls and that they responded leniently to girls for actions that boys would generally be punished for. One of the boys, Kgosi, said:

> Punishment is always harsher for boys than girls. . . we are beaten on buttocks and girls on hands. Girls are given more marks than boys. Girls are listened to and trusted. Boys are not listened and not trusted. If you are a boy, they beat you first, then ask you to explain later. Girls' mistakes are always seen as less.

The claim that girls did not have to study as hard as boys to earn the same grades and that boys were treated with mistrust has potential to elicit misogynistic tendencies. In some cases, boys who failed to outperform the girls were also, reportedly, punished severely. Spender (1982) explains this phenomenon in terms of teachers experiencing boys as more demanding than girls and, hence, tending to control them during classes by providing them more space and attention, more assignments, expecting them to perform better than girls and even punishing boys more for their failures. In some cases, this unequal expectation on boys' academic performance created feelings of superiority over the girls and a less critical attitude towards violence as indicated by one of the Kenyan boys:

> Boys do not care [about being beaten], and seem to enjoy the attention, and they feel masculine about it, and they feel girls should not be beaten, as they are weak.
>
> (Chege, 2001)

While some of the boys interpreted the harsh treatment as a means of making them 'men', the cyclic effect of transforming boys into violent abusive men,

reflecting the identities of their male teachers, cannot be ignored. Further, physical violence against boys seemed to define aggression as a masculine trait. Strikingly, many of the girls criticised the manner in which teachers used violence against their male classmates. They described the discrimination as unfair, not just because it humiliated and annoyed the boys but more so, because it produced girls in a negative light *vis-à-vis* the boys. In addition, some of the girls complained that gendered punishments pressured the boys to perform better in class than the girls.

Girls to women? Teachers sexualising girls

Underlying the girls' perceptions of gendered treatment is the fact that girls' punishments tended to harbour sexual undertones compared with those of the boys. Thus, the identification of male teachers with corporal punishment against boys and sexual harassment against girls made schooling highly problematic, not least because such identities mitigated against the possibility of non-violent, peaceful and friendly learning environments, which are essential for healthy gender relations and classroom interaction. Further, while physical and emotional violence elicited feelings of bitterness in boys against the powerful male teachers, sexual harassment constructed girls as sexual objects that had relatively little value in educational contexts.

Many of the girls theorised that male teachers were harsher on the boys than on girls because they had an agenda of compromising girls for sexual favours, thus investing the worth of girlhood in their being sexually available. Narratives about male teachers seeking sexual relationships with female students produced the male teacher identity as sexual in ways that many girls described as repulsive. The two narratives below provide a Kenyan girl's expression of such feelings whereby she refers to the offending teacher as a 'pollutant' – that is, a thing to be avoided – not a duty bearer to be trusted.

> Some teachers are understanding. . . some people are kind. . . some people are loving. I hate Mr Haro. He likes touching girls' breasts. I hate it since it is dirty and nobody cares. I hate the pollutant.
>
> <div align="right">Chege, 2001</div>

> I was coming to school and it was raining heavily. I then went to shelter myself within the school compound. Mr Rono came and told me "eeh leo umenyeshewa". I did not realise what he wanted to do. I could not be believe it he was touching, touching my private part

and my breasts pretending that he was wiping the rain water. From that day he winks at me. I really feel terrible. Please help me and please talk to him so that he does not do this to another person.

<div align="right">Chege, 2001</div>

In many of the schools, this construction of male teachers as sexual towards girls problematised the teaching of HIV/AIDS education lessons where some male teachers produced themselves as moralistic towards sex while at the same time pursuing sexual relations with the schoolgirls. The apparent contradiction in the teachers' identities prompted students to use HIV/AIDS education classes to ask teachers questions aimed at embarrassing them about their sexuality, thus destabilising their level of confidence in class. Further, the fact that many of the head teachers, who were exclusively male, tended to 'cover up' for the male colleagues implicated in sexualising the girls added to the difficulties experienced in teacher-learner relations.

For example, when confronted with the issue of male teachers sexually objectifying girls in class, Mr Khaemba, who was the head-teacher of the Kenyan affluent city school, explained casually that almost every term, students would slip complaint notes under the door of his office or in the school's suggestion box. However, it was apparent that his response to the girls' complaints regarding sexual harassment by male teachers tended to 'normalise' the situation in a way that resembles teachers' normalisation of bullying in schools (see Bright, 2005). Evidently, Mr Khaemba failed to investigate the girls' complaints and instead chose to liaise with the accused teacher to investigate the conduct of the girls. He explained:

> I sample that information and then find ways of approaching this teacher. I'll call the (accused) teacher in. I'll not even show those letters of complaint but I will give general complaints about what I may have read. By asking let's say 'catchy' questions, like "what do you think about this child. . . during your lesson. How does the child behave?" In that way, he'll come to know that the teacher may have had a problem with this kid and that's why this kid is bringing this complaint to you. (. . .) If there are many kids, then surely the teacher must be wrong because you cannot have four, five kids of different backgrounds complaining about the same teacher.

The response of the school administration towards reports of sexual harassment is critical for the social and psychological well-being of the students, more so the complainants, who rely on the school to protect them against harm. By making the girls anonymous through the 'Suggestion Box', the head-teacher managed to make their complaints 'faceless' and impersonal, thus, effectively depriving them of their personhood, agency and their right to

be heard. This kind of response was likely to expose the complainants to more harassment by the same or other teacher(s). Also, by acknowledging that action against offending teachers could only be taken when there were overwhelming accusations against one teacher was problematic because it invalidated incidences of sexual harassment against one girl by one, or more teacher(s). Notably, by putting the burden of proof upon girls who could neither stand up to the head-teacher nor confront the offending teacher, trivialised sexual offences and discourage girls from trusting people in authority for their protection. This also helped to nurture a culture of silence in the wake of sexual abuse. Scenarios such as these epitomise what Connell (1987, 1996) described as the "maintenance of practices that institutionalised men's dominance over women, giving them sexual entitlement to their bodies" (pp.185–186). The scenarios reveal the functions of hegemonic masculinities that embody a successful collective strategy of groups of males perceived to be superior to other males – in this case the male teachers *vis-à-vis* male students. Robinson (2005, p.27) explains this as a form of essentialising gender and sexuality within the biological determinist discourses, "which are often reinforced and reflected in some teachers' perceptions towards sexual harassment" against girls as constituting the things that men do to exercise powerful masculinities (see Connell, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). By ignoring the teacher code of conduct with regard to sexual behaviour, the head-teacher – himself a male in authority – was producing the form of identity, which according to Connell (1996), makes it difficult to see beyond individual acts of force or oppression to a structure of power and a set of social relations with scope and permanence.

As part of exploring teacher identities, I presented a hypothetical scenario to the head-teacher of the relatively deprived Nairobi city school, Mr Githinji, regarding teachers sexually harassing girls. His response was in sharp contrast to that of Mr Khaemba as he promptly constructed himself not only as a professional administrator who was caring and protective of students entrusted to him, but also as a parent and teacher who was concerned about maintaining good relationships with the school catchment community. According to Mr Githinji, any teacher who was accused of sexual misconduct needed to be put to his defence. He explained:

> These cases are normally very sensitive, particularly if they (girls) are complaining of being
> harassed sexually by a staff member. And what I would do is probably first of all try to get
> actual facts from them. Mainly I'd have to. . . before I even talk to my teacher, I'd have to
> call my council. Here I work with the council. I say my two deputies, my two senior
> teachers; I consider that as a council. Then I would tell them what is happening, what I have

gathered, and then we'd see how to approach as a group (. . .). We have got then to call the teacher here and reprimand him "This and that has been attributed to you. You have been doing it. We don't want you to say 'yes' or 'no' because you can never say 'yes'. But then, we are taking action on this line." Otherwise, it is an issue that is very sensitive because it is something that can affect the whole school. And at the same time it's also an issue that can make a teacher be killed, be lynched. Here. . . this community is so much together, they *are so much together*, and if something like that leaks to the village. . . (. . .) All these people know one another. All the parents know one another. So if it *leaks* (banging his desk to emphasise), and knowing how bitter it is to hear your child has been interfered with, then the teacher can be in a lot of problems.

When probed about the level of seriousness with which he would treat accusations of as a sexual nature against his teachers, Mr Githinji's reply was categorical that sexual harassment was potentially disruptive to the mission of schooling (see also Robinson, 2005). He replied:

> *Very, very serious*. Fortunately, I have not been in the school where I have had something like that and I won't like to because (. . .) because it is very distractive. . .. *it is very distractive*, *very immoral*. I don't know how I would react if somebody or a teacher did that to my daughter. Leave alone now here. . . to my daughter. I don't know how I would react; I would maybe not be able to face him. Maybe first of all beat him because he's not right (original verbalised emphasis).

Within the school, the classroom emerged as a significant space where teachers' identities were continually produced as gendered and sexual. This is mainly because classroom activities brought teachers and their students into closer contact than in any other social space.

Classroom learning and teachers' construction of gender and sexuality

Classrooms as sexually threatening spaces

Unanimously, girls and boys in all the schools constructed the classroom as a sexually threatening space, particularly for girls. They described male teachers talking to, and treating girls in sexually explicit ways during classes. This suggests that valuable teaching and learning time was wasted as some of the male teachers interrupted classes to sexually objectify the girls. For example, in a group discussion, girls accused one male teacher of routinely ordering them to parade back and forth in front of the class, while examining them from head to toe and locking his eyes into theirs in what they interpreted as sexual

innuendoes. If a girl protested, the teacher would refuse to mark her work while those who complied were rewarded with undeserved high marks. Thus, the construct of female sexuality was portrayed as overriding academic success, making girlhood a concrete object of sexual exploitation at the expense of school performance. According to Mwelu, a 13-year-old Kenyan girl, the teachers' behaviour often infuriated the boys.

> Even if the answer from the girls was wrong, he said that it was right. He annoys boys. Boys feel rejected and don't take their books for marking. He says arguing is part of life. He calls one girl, [saying] "Mwelu, Mwelu is a brown fat girl". If you talked to him badly, he won't mark your books. He wants to know where girls stay, wants to be their friend. He wants to see your home. He always asks "Where do you stay?" If he knows, he will come.

The fact that teachers went as far as refusing to mark girls' assignments based on non-educational reasons raises serious concerns about professional ethics, the role of teachers and the rights of girls to education. An interview with Mwelu revealed that sometimes the situation would deteriorate so much that the affected girls would seek the assistance of other teachers to have their work marked. Undoubtedly, the students had given up reporting their plight to the school authorities that were ineffective, anyway.

Of significance was the unequivocal mutual expression of empathy among some of the female and male students. Some of the girls empathised with the sidelining of the boys in class, as did some of the boys who felt that girls were being unfairly intimidated. Though such empathy was not often conspicuous, it emerged in some of the mixed-sex group discussions as exemplified in Zimbabwe where boys and girls explicitly supported each other's views and feelings regarding teacher behaviour towards girls.

> **Jane:** Sometimes you are afraid that if you refuse (sexual advances), the teacher will punish you or fail you, and sometimes you get teachers punishing you by pinching you on the thighs.
>
> **Innocent (Boy):** It is really bad because girls are sometimes afraid that teachers will fail them.

Zambian girls also echoed similar sentiments regarding the way male teachers used their power to intimidate girls and boys from establishing intimate relationships while at the same time demanding to have sexual relationships with the girls.

> **Kelita:** They [male teachers] discourage us. When they do find you with a boy, they tell you to stop but they are also interested in you. Here at school some teachers propose and, when you don't respond positively, they stop talking to you. . .

> **Charity:** Some teachers even give exam papers to finalists (leaking examinations) – even mock exam papers may be involved.

Clearly, classrooms were transformed into venues where male teacher identity was constructed in terms of sexual misconduct in ways that those of their female colleagues were not. The fact that male teachers made it difficult for boys to befriend the girls had an emasculating effect on the boys. It was also inconsistent with the mission of education as an empowering process through which girls and boys are expected to grow up cooperatively as equals and as strategic allies capable of confronting human challenges, including sexual ones such as HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Constructing teachers' identities in HIV/AIDS classes

In the context of the gender and sexual scripts that young people were exposed to in their schools and classrooms, coupled with apparent teacher unpreparedness to teach sexuality education, it may not be surprising that, many of the teachers who taught HIV/AIDS education claimed to have faced serious difficulties (Pattman and Chege, 2003). Further, the fact that some of the male teachers were implicated in sexualising female students during other lessons did not ease the challenges of teaching HIV/AIDS education, whose main content was heterosexual relations. All the teachers in the UNICEF study expressed feelings of embarrassment and vulnerability during the lessons, resulting in most of them adopting moralistic and authoritarian approaches that helped them to assert their authority and protect themselves from ridicule. It seemed that the teachers' problems were compounded by the fact that, as they attempted to be moralistic and distancing themselves from being perceived as sexual, the students insistently constructed them as sexual. In Botswana and Rwanda, for example, female and male teachers spoke about the discomfort they felt, as adults, being addressed as sexual beings by children in HIV/AIDS lessons where they were expected to provide personal testimonies of their sex life. Because of this, the teachers resorted to engaging the learners in question-answer didactic interaction whereby, only the teachers asked questions and the students answered, often reproducing factual knowledge. Many of the students confirmed these observations when they explained that in HIV/AIDS classes, "the teacher would ask questions and we would answer".

The few teachers who attempted to encourage participation and discussion during HIV/AIDS education expressed difficulties in dealing with what they described as 'embarrassing' questions from the students as shown in below.

> **Mr Fako:** They can ask whether we [teachers] have tested. They feel teachers are always talking about these things, while even they could be infected [HIV].

> **Ms Sechele:** I remember one student wanted to know if I have ever used a female condom, and how it feels. I told them that I have never used it and that they should not become personal when we talk about these things.

> **MrChilisa:** I remember there was a child at one point when we were discussing abstinence and withdrawal. The student was saying from experience he knows that withdrawal is impossible. And I was supposed to make a comment on that.
>
> <div align="right">(Group discussion, Botswana teachers)</div>

These teachers from a Botswana school produced themselves as quite defensive when their students assumed positions of agency and freely constructed them as sexual. Apparently the teachers felt 'ambushed' by this role reversal that deprived them of the monopoly of classroom control, which they were used to having. Notably, the fact that the students were able to pose such questions was precisely because these teachers had tried to make their classes participatory, democratic and discursive. However, when teachers portrayed themselves as being embarrassed by explicit talk about sex, sexuality and reproductive health issues, a strong message was delivered about such talk being shameful. Teacher embarrassment appeared to encourage learners to become disruptive in class and to talk deliberately in ways that they knew would embarrass their teachers and produce them as 'powerless' with regard to sexuality matters. Consequently, the students would succeed in constructing the teacher as being out of control of the classroom dynamics especially in co-education classes where male teachers were perceived to construct themselves as powerful and sexual towards female students.

Teachers blaming HIV/AIDS education

In almost all the schools in the UNICEF study, interviews with students as well as classroom observations revealed that didactic approaches were most common in HIV/AIDS education classes. There was little indication that students were allowed to set their agenda, ask questions, or encouraged to reflect on issues pertaining to sexuality that interested or concerned them.

Some of the female teachers interviewed explained that they found it difficult to discuss sexuality, especially in mixed-sex classes because girls tended to become timid and would not participate. One female teacher from Rwanda explained that, as boys 'discover girls' secrets' relating to sexuality, they become more 'active' and 'curious', asking questions with less embarrassment. In this context, it seems that the teachers themselves were responsible for constructing boys as active agents in sex matters and girls as objects in ways that gave boys space and voice on an unequal platform with girls. Also, boys may have participated more actively than girls, because girls had to be careful not to portray themselves as being knowledgeable or interested in sex for fear that they could easily be constructed as 'bad girls.'

Some teachers in Botswana found it difficult to conduct HIV/AIDS lessons because, they claimed, students were quite hostile to the subject and even displayed symptoms of what is sometimes called the 'HIV/AIDS fatigue'. This refers to a feeling of being so over bombarded with messages about the horror of HIV/AIDS and images of death and suffering that students did not want to hear anything more about it. Perhaps they wanted to hear more about living and enjoying intimate relationships. One of the teachers explained what teachers perceived as the problem:

> The students are always complaining that they are tired of HIV/AIDS because wherever they go there is HIV/AIDS – in the newspaper, on the television, is all HIV/AIDS. Some are saying we should not bother about HIV/AIDS because it is their business, not ours. Like last week, I called the drama group. The play was to be about HIV/AIDS. I did not tell them the theme, because I knew that if I mentioned HIV/AIDS, no one was going to turn up. I even told the teachers that they should not tell them that it was about HIV/AIDS. So they came. When they arrived and realised what we were going to deal with, some left the place. . . Whenever I came to teach them in Guidance and Counselling class, they would say, 'she is coming again to teach us about AIDS'. We normally go to them so that they choose topics that they want to learn about, in particular problems that affect them in school. But whenever we mention HIV/AIDS, they say that they don't want that one. They say, 'you go to Moral Education there is HIV/AIDS, you go to Religious Education there is HIV/AIDS, in the Guidance classes there is HIV/AIDS, on radio, on television. . . we are tired.'

The effects of learner apathy had its toll on teachers who expressed feeling less enthusiastic to teach the HIV/AIDS education. Undoubtedly, teachers needed the skills of engaging with the apparently sensitive subject in ways that would make it interesting and acceptable to young people. In some countries, such as Rwanda and Kenya, teachers reported that parents were opposed to their children being educated on how to handle relationships with the opposite sex, describing it as a 'foreign' cultural phenomenon that encouraged young people to experiment with premarital sex.

Teachers' gendered identities: some implications for pedagogy

This section foregrounds the implications of teachers' gendered identities in the teaching of HIV/AIDS education. It also presents several recommendations in relation to the teaching about HIV/AIDS within Life Skills and Life Orientation programmes. Finally, it offers suggestions for further research.

Implications for HIV/AIDS pedagogy

Firstly, teachers' gendered identities, which include sexual identities, tended to influence the sorts of teacher images that the students constructed as they interacted in different school contexts. The construct of gender and sexuality assigned to female and male teachers differed quite explicitly in ways, which suggested that perhaps female teachers were more reflective about their interactions with students. Thus, the female teacher identity was constructed within the framework of care and empathy compared with that of the male teacher, which apparently represented power, sex and violence. These identities bore implications for the identities of girls and boys whereby girls were positioned as sexual objects during classroom learning while boys served as the teachers' 'punching bags', literally. Such constructions are hardly consistent with the achievement of Education for All (AFA) goals that aim at ensuring that all children receive an equal and empowering education. Firstly, staying away from school to escape sexual or physical violence would in turn retard HIV/AIDS education and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in eradicating HIV and AIDS.

Secondly, the fact that during HIV/AIDS classes, students located teachers at the centre of sexuality discourse, requiring them to provide concrete examples of their sexual lives underscores how important it is for teachers to learn to treat HIV/AIDS education, not as something to be 'passed on' or 'transmitted' to the learners, but rather as an educational and social discourse to be interrogated freely and discursively in the context of contemporary challenges that the pandemic posed to humanity. Undoubtedly, curtailment of discussions resulted in learners withdrawing or expressing apathy and fatigue that portrayed HIV/AIDS education as a boring subject, deficient in vision and mission. Thirdly, it was clear that HIV/AIDS education had introduced new challenges for teachers who were expected, not only to guide young people on

how to adapt to non-risky sexual behaviour, but also put teachers on the spotlight to demonstrate how such behaviour could be achieved. This was clearly problematic in HIV/AIDS education classes where the students perceived inconsistencies between what was being taught *vis-à-vis* actual teacher behaviour, particularly in the context of male teachers constructing themselves as sexual towards their female students while at the same time attempting to be moralistic about sexual relations among students. Fourthly, the sexualisation of girls in class, coupled with teachers' talk about sex and sexuality as if these were shameful things only increased the apparent inconsistencies in teacher behaviour that encouraged students to disrupt the teaching of HIV/AIDS education. Further, the presentation of HIV/AIDS education as a 'sex lesson' *per se* prompted teachers to use didactic and authoritarian methods of teaching in order to avoid being asked embarrassing questions regarding sex. Finally, the use of violence to construct boyhood essentialised violence as a masculine attribute, which boys could use to intimidate weaker boys, or as a tool for sexually assaulting girls.

Some recommendations

For teachers to become effective in teaching HIV/AIDS education, it is imperative that they receive the relevant training that is tailor-made to develop skills on how to construct HIV/AIDS education broadly as a social relations subject rather than sex-focused *per se*. If HIV/AIDS education is to address young people appropriately as sexual beings, teachers should not focus exclusively on sex, but rather on how the learners see themselves as particular girls and boys and the significance that they attach to sex in defining themselves in relation to others. Training teachers in participatory pedagogic skills should be a key component for both the in-service as well as pre-service teachers for all subjects, including sexuality and HIV/AIDS education. In order to help deconstruct male teacher identity from being sexualising and abusive to girls, teachers should be encouraged to be reflexive, not just about their work with students but also about the possible effects of their gendered and sexual interactions with their female and male students. By being reflexive and creative, teachers and learners could be better predisposed to challenging, rather than reinforcing, popular stereotypes upon which girls are constructed, for example as quiet, shy, subordinate and objects of male sexual pleasure, while boys are produced as tough, naughty, loud, dominant and distractive (See Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman, 2002). Male teachers should be encouraged to produce themselves as positive role models for boys and girls to experience

that adult men could be responsible, caring, sensitive and empathetic human beings. Specifically, male teachers must be perceived as protectors – not violators – of the rights of girls and women. In addition, teachers should consciously help to depolarise gender by presenting their relationships with colleagues and students as prototypes of gender equality that is essential in addressing HIV/AIDS issues within and outside educational settings.

In view of findings addressed herein, the author recommends research on the capacities of school administrators in developing ethos that support child-friendly, rights-based and gender-responsive education in the context of HIV/AIDS. This would help inform skills development programmes at that level, linking them to the achievement of MDGs and EFA goals. Research in children's and young people's engagement with peer learning akin to the 'child-to-child' approach and focusing on gender equality practices is also recommended.

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