

Ugandan adolescents' sources, interpretation and evaluation of sexual content in entertainment media programming

Ann Neville Miller^a, Evangeline Nalugya^b, Charles Gabolya^b, Sarah Lagot^b, Richard Mulwany^b, Joseph Kiva^b, Grace Nabasaaka^b and Monica Chibita^b

^aNicholson School of Communication, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL, USA; ^bMass Communication, Uganda Christian University, Mukono, Uganda.

ABSTRACT

Although mounting evidence in Western nations indicates that entertainment media influence young people's sexual socialisation, virtually no research has addressed the topic in sub-Saharan Africa. The present study employed 14 focus groups of Ugandan high school students to identify media through which they were exposed to sexual content, how they interpreted and evaluated that content, and how they compared its influence with that of parents, schools and religious institutions. Participants most often mentioned TV, followed by print media and Internet as sources of sexual material. Media were said to present discrepant messages regarding the timing of sexual debut, with international programming urging early sexual debut and local programming described as urging young people to delay sex. Young people spoke of turning to *ssengas* and *kojjas* for sexual advice, and a number of boys suggested pornography could also be educational. Both local and international programming was interpreted as conveying views of men as sex driven and women as submissive in sex and relationships. Participants expressed the belief that sexual media content had a negative impact on young people. Most nevertheless assessed these messages as more influential than other sources of sexual socialisation.

KEYWORDS: Media effects; young people; communication; sexual socialisation; Uganda

Although mounting evidence in Western nations indicates that entertainment media influence young people's sexual socialisation (see summary by Wright 2011), research on media and adolescent sexual behaviour in sub-Saharan Africa has focused almost entirely on the impact of health communication campaigns (e.g. Goldstein et al. 2005; Muraya, Miller, and Mjomba 2011). Lack of research on entertainment media messaging about sex is an especially salient omission in a country like Uganda, where the limited evidence available suggests sexual content media accessible to young people has dramatically increased in recent years (Gatsiounis 2011), even as HIV prevalence has crept back upward (Uganda AIDS Commission 2015). Interventions that attempt to influence behaviour are likely to be more effective if they take into account the messages young people take in on a daily basis from the media in their lives. The present study, therefore, investigated young people's reports of media in which they were exposed to sexual content, how they interpreted and evaluated that content, and how they compared its influence with that of parents, schools and religious institutions. We examined these issues in one specific context – Mukono, Uganda.

Literature review

Globalisation has increased the role of media in the sexual socialisation of young people across sub-Saharan Africa (Kabiru, Izugbara, and Beguy 2013). Uganda is typical in this regard. Recent relaxation of government restrictions on the overall media environment has led to the rapid expansion of the number of media outlets in Uganda. Between 1993 and 2015, the number of television (TV) stations increased from one government station to 67 operational public and private stations. Radio, traditionally the most accessible medium in Africa (Myers 2008), has expanded even more dramatically, from a single radio station to 292 broadcasters as of 2015 (UCC 2015). The Internet, prohibitively expensive 10 years ago, is increasingly accessible to urban young people (Ogilvyafrika 2013). The result has been an anecdotally reported upsurge in sexual content across a range of media such that the popular press has expressed concern (Gatsiounis 2011; Wabwego 2012). A nation-wide survey of public perceptions of media by the Ugandan Communications Commission (Chibita and Kibombo 2014) revealed what the

authors described as a 'widespread concerns about the disregard for cultural values in TV programming' (80).

The authors could locate no research analysing the sexual content in locally produced media. However, much of the expanded content on Ugandan TV is imported from the USA, where studies indicate the amount of sexual content has steadily risen in recent decades (Kunkel et al. 2005). Sexual content is defined as portrayals or references to touching, kissing, fondling, sexual intercourse, sexual talk and innuendo, as well as sexual risks and responsibilities. By this definition, an estimated 70% of US TV programming contains sexual material; one in nine programmes includes portrayal of sexual intercourse. Just four per cent of scenes with sexual content incorporate messages about sexual risks and responsibilities. With only about half of the portrayals of sexual intercourse taking place between couples who have an established relationship, the most consistently conveyed message about sex conveyed in US programming is that casual sex is acceptable and desirable (Ward and Rivadeneyra 1999; Wright 2009).

At the same time, the Ugandan media are reportedly becoming increasingly laden with sexual material, urbanisation and modernisation have resulted in the weakening of family systems for the sexual socialisation of children (Kabiru, Izugbara, and Beguy 2013). In most Ugandan cultural groups, the role of helping young people navigate the transition to adulthood traditionally fell to same-sex aunts (*ssengas*) and uncles (*kojjas*; Nobelius et al. 2010), mostly during rites of passage such as circumcision (Kinsman et al. 2000). Today, young people rarely get to spend time with relatives who would formerly have provided critical sexual information, and parents are often uncomfortable stepping into the gap (Nobelius et al. 2010). Schools have to some extent taken up the mantle of the *ssengas* and *kojjas*, but their input has been described as at best partial and incomplete (Iyer and Aggleton 2013). Rural Ugandan out-of-school adolescents in Nobelius et al.'s (2010) study reported turning to peers for sexual information, though they admitted their friends were as ignorant as themselves. Many told researchers their most valued source of reliable information about reproductive health issues was the radio, and some young men mentioned pornographic films as being 'instructive'.

In Western contexts, viewing or listening to portrayals of sexual activity on media has been associated with risky sexual attitudes and behaviour (Bleakley et al. 2008; Collins et al. 2004; Pardun, L'Engle, and Brown 2005), including

early sexual initiation and teenage pregnancy (Chandra et al. 2008; Collins et al. 2004; see Wright 2011 for an argument on evidence for causality). Among the few studies undertaken in the sub-Saharan African context, a multilevel analysis of Demographic and Health Survey data from 20 African countries found that, contrary to predictions of the researchers, greater media exposure in general was associated with higher HIV-risk behaviour (Uchudi, Magadi, and Mostazier 2012). Similarly, Onyeonoro et al. (2011) found that among young women in southeastern Nigeria, media and peers were the main source of sexual information and their influence was predominantly toward earlier sexual debut. Results of a multi-nation study by Stephenson, Calleen, and Finneran (2014) varied by country, indicating that higher media exposure was associated with early sex among girls in Burkina Faso, but with later sex among girls in Malawi and Uganda.

These studies broadly suggest that entertainment media may influence the sexual behaviour of young people in sub-Saharan Africa, but they provide few specifics about young people's media use. Therefore, we posed the following research questions about young people in one Ugandan context: Mukono town, a peri-urban area just outside the capital city of Kampala. First, from what entertainment media sources do young people report receiving sexual content? Second, how do young people interpret and evaluate entertainment media messages about sex? Third, how do young people report that media influence them in comparison to influence from parents, schools, houses of worship and other sources of sexual socialisation?

Method

Six focus groups with female high school students and six focus groups with male high school students were conducted. Focus groups have been recommended as appropriate for developing a culturally informed understanding of issues (Kreuger and Casey 2000), and have been used to access sub-Saharan young people's views about sexual issues (e.g. Baumgartner et al. 2010; Chilisa et al. 2016; Embleton et al. 2015; Rijdsdijk et al. 2013). Furthermore, adolescents interpret media socially, in groups with their peers (Steele and Brown 1995).

Data collection took place in six high schools in Mukono, Uganda: two lower class private schools, one lower class public school, two upper class private schools and one religious school. Mukono was selected because it is adjacent to the capital city, and provides a mixed urban, peri-urban and rural

environment. Students in Mukono come from a range of ethnic groups, with the Baganda being the most prevalent.

The study was judged by the institutional review board of the University of Central Florida as exempt from the requirement of obtaining informed consent, and approved by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST).

Procedure

On the day of data collection, administrators gave instructions to school prefects to select 10–12 students aged 14–16. They were asked to not to focus on outstanding students, but students who were typical of their age group. Several school officials chose students outside the stipulated age range and some prefects brought with them more than the requested number of participants.

Four of the authors who were the same sex as participants, fluent in Luganda, and close to their age – being either advanced undergraduate students or young members of faculty – served as moderators and assistant moderators. Four hours were spent training on focus group data collection skills.

After participants were gathered together, moderators reiterated the purpose of the research and assured participants of confidentiality. Participants were given the choice between discussing in Luganda or English. All groups requested English, but some students expressed themselves occasionally in Luganda. Discussions lasted from 60 to 90 min. Refreshments were provided afterward.

Instrument

The question guide included questions about where young people encountered sexual media content, how they interpreted and evaluated that content, and how they compared media influence to that of parents, schools and religious institutions.

Analysis

The four members of the research team who had moderated discussion jointly determined when saturation had been reached. Audio recordings were transcribed in full and edited to remove participant disfluencies. In 4 of the

14 groups, difficulties with equipment forced the researchers to rely on the notes taken by assistant moderators. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman’s (1994) process of data reduction, data display, drawing conclusions and validation. Four members of the research team analysed data separately, then met for discussion. One of the authors combined patterns into categories related to the research questions. Reference was also made to an audit trail by the first author that comprised 50 double-spaced typed pages of reflection on the research process.

Findings

In what follows, the principal findings are organised by research question. A number of differences emerged between boys’ and girls’ groups, and are highlighted under the relevant research question.

Sources of sexual content

The first research question asked from what media sources young people would report receiving sexual content. Although at a national level radio continues to be more accessible than TV, participants in our study mentioned TV and movies as the most common place in which they encountered this (see Table 1 for frequency of talk turns). In order of frequency, young people talked about TV, then print, followed by Internet, with a smattering of responses about radio, video games, and culturally distinct media forms. Girls were more likely to mention TV as a sexual content source. Both boys’ and girls’ groups mentioned boys’

Table 1. Frequency of mention of media sources of sexual content.

Media source of sexual content	# Talk turns addressing
TV/movies	279
Newspapers/magazines	160
Internet	58
Radio	48
Video games	8
Music	4
other (non-traditional media including public meetings of <i>ssengas</i> and <i>kojjas</i>)	20

being exposed to sexual content more through print and Internet sources than girls. Different forms of media are considered separately below.

Television and films

Participants mentioned a range of US movies that had sexual content including comedies (e.g. *American Pie*), romances (e.g. *Endless Love*) and horror films (e.g. *Drag me to Hell*). They also mentioned sexual content in US TV programmes of multiple genres including drama (e.g. *Spartacus*), action (e.g. *Prison Break*), comedy (e.g. *Orange is the new Black*), fantasy (e.g. *Reign*) and mystery (e.g. *Pretty Little Liars*). Girls also mentioned Spanish language soap operas on Telemundo (e.g. *My Heart Beats for Lola*). A few participants mentioned unnamed local talk shows on NTV, but they most often talked about watching *ssengas* and *kojjas* – especially on a programme titled *Akasaale* on the Luganda language station, *Bukedde TV*. In these programmes, presenters dispense advice about how to maintain relationships, including explicit suggestions about sexual techniques. Distinct from the traditional role of *ssengas* and *kojjas*, the intended audience of these programmes was identified as married couples.

Participants were divided as to whether *Akasaale* was helpful or ‘gross’, but some girls stayed up late to watch without their parents’ knowledge. One illustrated:

We had a maid. For her, she was obsessed with that *Akasaale*. That the girl could sit until midnight. You are busy and you hear *Akasaale*. Midnight. ‘Snuggle when your husband comes back. Snuggle this and that. Wear a nice dress ... If the husband comes and see those beads when you hang them on the wall he will know that you don’t want to play sex. When he doesn’t see it there, he’ll know that you want it.’ (girl, low-income private school)¹

A few participants explained that they had to be careful to watch this sort of TV when their parents were not home.

For example they restrict me from watching TV programmes, especially they restrict me from watching *Bukedde* a lot’. A boy (low-income private school) explained. ‘But we teenagers are very crafty. We always find of way of watching it. For example, my mum. . . in the house you can easily hear her walking and change [channels].

Some participants reported viewing sexual TV and movie content at *kibandas*, tiny video halls that advertise a menu of movies for a small entry fee. Unlike regular cinemas, *kibandas* have no fixed age limitations. Participants

explained that adult films including pornography were available from 6 pm onwards. *Kibandas* were said to be popular because they were cheaper than either buying or renting movies, and in any case many people did not have TVs in their homes. Several boys from each school and a few girls admitted having gone to *kibandas* at some point in the past. Most described getting in trouble with their parents afterward. When asked for specific movies they had seen there, participants mentioned popular films like *Smallville* and *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Although some expressed little shame at taking in movies at *kibandas*, most associated them with bad behaviour. 'OK for me I can't watch a movie in a *kibanda*,' one girl (upper income religious school) avowed, 'Because my parents, first of all, they are born again Christians and I am a born again Christian, so I can't'.

Print

The print media participants mentioned most often were local Ugandan tabloids, *Red Pepper*, *Kamunye* and *Onion*. Participants also identified columns and weekly pullouts of more mainstream papers such as *ssenga* and *kojja* columns in *Bukedde* newspaper. In comparison to *Akasaale* on TV, print tabloids and columns were described as more salacious, and very popular with boys. Girls evidenced nothing but disgust about them. Regarding the *Mr. Hyena* column in *Red Pepper*, a girl (low-income private school) explained, 'It's like cartoons ... but they are nasty'. 'Even those *ssengas* and *kojjas*, they can publish things in newspapers which are not good. Which are not good to be, which are obscene', another girl (low-income private school) stated. Some girls from high-income schools were less negative regarding *ssengas* columns in the newspaper, saying they educated women on their cultural roles. However, they agreed the content was not appropriate for children or adolescents.

Internet

Some respondents spoke of experience with the Internet, citing it as a source of sexual content, especially for boys. They said schoolmates shared pornographic photos or videos on Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, and some accessed Internet pornography websites. Many disavowed seeking such material on their own, but admitted viewing it on someone else's device:

Some person can come to school and has some videos of sex in his phone and you can't refuse to see it cause there's some things you can't avoid,

like, and you just keep watching it. And after all, I don't know, you just get many thoughts of thinking about that thing. (girl, low-income private school)

Radio and music

Most sexual content mentioned with reference to radio was in talk shows. Several participants mentioned programmes on FM stations like *Doctor Love*, in which presenters gave sex tips. They also talked about *ssengas* and *kojjas* on Beat FM as sources of sexual information. Members of several groups spoke of Ugandan musician Desire Luzinda, whose former boyfriend had recently published nude photos of her on social media. Discussants also named international artists whose songs have explicit sexual lyrics as their favourite musicians, but they rarely cited music as a source of sexual material. Exceptions were several boys and girls who objected to Jamaican music, and a handful who objected to specific Western artists, for example: 'These international musicians like Chris Brown and Rihanna. You know there are some things they talk about in their songs and some things they sing about that are not really educative' (boy, low-income private school).

Other sources of information

When prompted, a few boys said they played video games that included sexual content like *Grand Theft Auto*. Several participants spoke of public meetings of *ssengas* and *kojjas*, which a few boys had attended or listened to on CDs.

Interpretation and evaluation of sexual media content

Research question two asked how participants would interpret sexual media content. Participants' answers to the question of what messages about sex they derived from media addressed three major themes: timing of sexual debut, sexual tips and gender roles. Messages they described about timing of sexual debut were discrepant, depending in part on the origin of the programming. Many participants flatly stated media told them early sex was OK. Some girls spoke about the pressures surrounding virginity that they sensed from international programming,

Like those movies I watch high schools [high school movies]. Eh. If you are in high school and you have never had sex they take you, what, to be, I

don't know, stupid. There is a way they describe you and you feel out of place. (girl, high income religious school)

Students from across groups agreed that entertainment education efforts like *Straight Talk*, and radio dramas like *Rock Point 256* gave the message that sex should be saved until one was older. *Akasaale* was cited as a programme that taught viewers that it was important for spouses to be faithful to one another.

Many participants said they picked up sexual tips from the media. Various girls in one group (low-income public school) offered a ready list with comments such as: 'ways of kissing', 'sex positions', 'ways of getting someone's attention', 'how to make your guy like you more', 'how to hold on to your guy', and 'you get to learn whether it pains or it does not pain'. With respect to *Akasaale* in particular, another young woman said, 'We come to know the playing styles, eh, of sex. Now, like when you are going to have sex you have to know, eh, which style you are supposed to use. [Laughter]' (girl, low-income public school). A few participants also mentioned messages about using condoms in programming like *Straight Talk*, or how to resist temptation to have cross-generational sex.

Boys and girls in all groups also said they derived messages from media about gender roles in relationships. According to them, media taught them that men are the providers and protectors. Boys should pay the bills, love and protect their girlfriends, fulfil their promises and make girls feel special. Participants of both sexes said girls should be submissive and nurturing, cook good food and take care of the children. They should love and respect their men, make them happy and satisfy them sexually. 'The role of a guy is to give the role of a girl is to receive', one boy (high-income private school) summarised. A girl (high-income private school) explained women's role: 'Advise. Wash the clothes. Iron. Cook Food. Take good care of the guy. Then the guy will be gentle'. Another explained:

A woman is supposed to obey the husband and she is supposed to [laugh] play sex with the man. That's the work of the woman. That's what I learned. A woman is supposed to be responsible. ... She's supposed to respect her husband; she's supposed to be faithful. (girl, low-income private school)

Participants mentioned picking up these messages from social media, the radio talk show *Doctor Love*, *Akasaale*, stories about local celebrities, the local reality show *Be my Date*, and Philippino, Latin American, and Indian soap

operas (e.g. *Bad Achhe*). A very few participants took a different view, such as one young woman who described a girls' role in relationships as to 'be herself and not change because of a boy' (girl, high-income private school).

Although participants of both sexes said that boys should protect and girls should give sex, the unfaithfulness of men was a consistent theme only in girls' discussion groups. For example, one girl stated, 'OK, some of the movies, I'm sure that some guy has cheated on the chick and the chick she loves him so much. For me I think all guys and men are all the same' (low-income private school). 'I heard of these movies that they have just mentioned about', one of her colleagues added, 'Maybe the girls are just used. Men are, OK, men don't come with genuine love all they want is to use [women]. Maybe have sexual experience. That's what most of the men do.'

Among specific programmes mentioned that gave this impression were *Friends with Benefits*, *The Other Woman*, *From Paris with Love*, *The Big Wedding*, *Grown Ups*, *Deception* and several movies whose plots the girls described but the names of which they could not recall. They explained that *Akasaale* taught them not to fully trust men: 'The more you love someone is the more you lose him. ... You keep 20% for yourself' (girl, low-income private school).

When asked whether they thought sexual media content was a good or bad thing, participants articulated a range of responses. Some cited sexual media content as harmful, voicing concerns that media portrayals of sex would lead students to imitate unhealthy behavioural models, and sexually arouse them. 'Those things can destroy us. They make us learn bad manners. Now like boys. They make boys like to go, they start even erecting by the way', one girl (low-income private school) stated. 'Even girls they make us to be as if we are on heat', she added to general laughter. A number of participants talked about sexual content from media replaying in their minds, as in the following excerpts.

You see those things they make us get bad ideas. Like teacher is in class teaching, eh. Teacher is explaining a point you are like this as if you are dozing. But *kumbe* [lo and behold] you are remembering the other things you are seeing yourself as if you are the one doing that thing there. That really affect us the youth. Cause you don't think about anything else. (girl, low- income private school)

To me, I think we boys have the most imaginative brains on earth. So I think even just sitting if you become really addicted. Even just sitting

beside a girl are not even touching, it can turn you on, really ... You know it just rushes everything ... I think if you watch it brings about this masturbation. (boy, low-income private school)

Other reasons for the condemnation of sexual media content included health-related and moral justifications. In every group, several participants said that attending to such messaging could lead to sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, HIV, being seduced by sugar daddies or sugar mommies, and ultimately dropping out of school. For example, a boy from the high-income private school) said,

Like when I, assume I'm watching a soap or a movie I see people doing their things then I get that urge that I should put it into practice. At times [if] I put it into practice I get pregnant and diseases.

Several also broadly stated that sexual content in media would teach boys to masturbate and practice homosexuality, and girls to want money for sex. A few young people expressed specifically moral or religious objections to sexual media content:

People have sex and these are married couples cheating on one another. Even some are not married but they have it. So to them, OK, what they are giving out to the people watching it's like sex can be had even before marriage and even if you are married and you have a crush on another guy you can go ahead. So there was some wrong message about sex. (girl, high income religious school)

Some cited their perspective as Christians as a basis for their objections. Although this reasoning was expressed among students at religious schools, it was by no means limited to them. The following comment was typical: 'It's not acceptable for unmarried people. Because the Bible talks about sex was the gift even to the married people, not to the youth' (boy, low-income private school). More commonly, participants said they were too young to be exposed to such things. 'I think it's harmful on the younger generation', a boy (low-income public school) stated, 'but it is helpful on the older generation'. Another opined, 'It is useful to married people if they watch they transform it to enrich their tactics in bed' (boy, high-income religious school).

Several students connected sexual media content with disrespect for their elders. The following two quotations serve to illustrate this:

To me it's harmful; it's the main reason youth are looked at these days. Like our generation. So these girls are exposed to such. They know each and everything. So they rarely, rarely respect their elders. It also leads to loss of dignity. (girl, low-income private school).

Whereby when young kids see those movies they see the body of the, eh person, eh? How can you respect your mom when you have seen a naked person when you watched TV? (girl, low-income public school)

Nevertheless, a number of participants, especially boys, said sexual content of media, including pornography, had some positive outcomes. Several boys stated that they did not want to go ignorant into marriage or into their first relationship, or to have to be instructed by their girlfriends or wives. Portrayals of sex in media could help them fill the gaps in their knowledge and make them more confident about sex. This was the only issue that provoked real debate in the boys' groups, as in the following exchange:

Boy 1: I think sometimes they are helpful for some people.

Researcher: Ah hah. How?

Boy 1: How? So a married guy who doesn't know what to do, he is exposed to some of those videos he will get to know what to do that way...

Boy 2: I'm sorry but [Boy 1] said it's helpful because he gave a reason that sometimes people get married and don't know what to do. But according to me what is shown on videos is called extreme sex. It's not practical in what? In a relationship, in a relationship like marriage. If you're going to start watching pornography in marriage then I think you'll miss. ...

Boy 1: But I will tell you. ... Why do you find that some women leave their men? Because they do not satisfy them, right? That doesn't mean they know how.

All: [Laughter]

Influence of media in comparison to other sources of sexual socialisation

The third research question asked how young people perceived the influence of sexual media content in comparison to other sources of information about sex and relationships. To address this, we first asked participants how their parents responded to the presence of sexual content in media in their homes.

Many young people reported that their parents talked to their children about media only occasionally. A parent might say nothing for weeks about a child's media habits and suddenly fly into a temper when an offensive scene on TV happened to come on. Parents were described as seeming embarrassed to discuss sexual media with children. They only did so after some other catalyst forced it into conversation. Mostly, however, these parents walked out of the room when sexual content appeared on the screen.

Other participants' parents were depicted as strict about media use, setting firm guidelines about what their children could and could not watch, how often, and when. One girl said her father allowed his children to watch only DVDs he vetted and brought home. A number of students said their parents blocked certain channels on TV, did not allow them to watch alone, or reserved media use for certain times of the week. Some girls said their parents took their mobile phones away from them at night.

Finally, a few parents were said to talk freely to their teens about media and sex, as in the following explanation:

Like for me, my mum. She's free. She talks to me about many things about sex. She tells me I shouldn't go rush for sex because if I rush for sex I might have many ambitions, eh, for my future maybe I want to do this, do that. She tells me be patient in the future you will do whatever you want at your own free will. (girl, low-income public school)

None of the girls commented on gender differences in parental media monitoring. However, several members of one boys' group said that girls tend to be more free with their parents about these issues than boys. Therefore, parents were more likely to talk to girls about sex. Boys, they said, were left to figure things out on their own, so they tended to go outside of the family for information. A few boys though stated that their parents, especially their mothers, had talked frankly to them about sex.

When asked to compare the strength of influence of other sources of sexual information in their lives to that of the media, many participants stated that media messages were more influential. Boys especially rated the influence of media in their lives as very strong. Participants attributed this to the ubiquity and straightforwardness of media messages about sex, and the difficulty adults seemed to have in talking about it.

School, church and parents advise the youth to wait and get involved in sexual activities after they are married, but [the] media says as long as one is above 18, it is OK. (girl, high-income private school)

Mass media they are open to everything, but you might say that in churches or in schools they might not open, OK, talk openly to the students. Like when they want to call a vagina they call it a hole. Now a student may not understand. But those with mass media they display everything. (boy, low-income private school)

Mass media influences more because you watch the real thing. For example *Big Brother* show portrays the participants kissing and having sex live while other sources like school are boring. (boy, high income religious school)

Not all students agreed with this assessment. Some claimed that media was less of an influence in their lives than interpersonal sources. 'The school message is more influencing than the media', a boy from the low-income public school said, 'because the school message, it tells you the truth'. Even among participants who acknowledged media messages about sex as influential, the largest number said messages they heard about sex from church, school and parents were better, healthier and more correct.

Discussion

Investigations of the role of media on the sexual behaviour among young people in countries in sub-Saharan Africa have focused on the brief time each week young people are exposed to multi-media campaigns or entertainment education efforts (e.g. Goldstein et al. 2005; Muraya, Miller, and Mjomba 2011). Little research has addressed the influence of entertainment media. This study investigated which media are a source of sexual content according to Ugandan adolescents. Although the radio has traditionally been viewed as the medium of choice in Africa, especially for development-related purposes (Myers 2008), young people in our sample were far more likely to mention encountering sexual content on TV. The Internet was mentioned by some participants as a source of pornography for boys, but many participants were not familiar with it. This is perhaps not surprising considering that in a recent national survey (Chibita and Kibombo 2014), only 13% of adults had actually ever been online. Unlike their US counterparts (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010), Ugandan young people in our sample frequently accessed sexual content in print media such as tabloids and newspaper pull-outs. It is possible

that as the Internet becomes more easily accessible, the importance of print vehicles will dissipate, but for the present, columns in these publications appear to be a ready source for boys.

Many of our participants evaluated entertainment media messages about sex as unhealthy, immoral or unsuitable to people of their age. Boys and girls said media content aroused them sexually and could distract them in school. Paradoxically, they judged media as more likely to influence them than what they said were more trustworthy sources: family, school and church. Like the young people interviewed by Nobelius et al. (2010), a number of them still looked to entertainment programming and even pornography for sex and relationship 'tips'.

One explanation for this contradiction may lie in some participants' contention that they had no other straightforward source of sexual information. They described churches and schools as tiptoeing around the issues and most parents as being uncomfortable talking about either sex or sexual media content. At the same time, participants regularly referenced warnings that they must have derived from adults in their lives or public health efforts, about sex as a risk for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, a mistake for children who hoped to succeed in school and something to be saved for marriage. Participants may, of course, have mentioned these concerns because they thought that was what researchers wanted to hear, but the fact that these phrases sprang so readily to their lips indicates this is a discourse with which they are familiar. Among the peri-urban young people in our sample, therefore, it appears to be not so much a question of participants not having received any sexual information from reliable sources in their life worlds, but of their not having found certain types of information that are of interest to them. Specifically, members of our sample spoke about obtaining from media sources information about the how of sexual behaviour, and also about the best ways to manage romantic relationships.

As to the specific messages about sex that young people gleaned from entertainment media, members of our sample reported receiving two different messages from TV about delaying sexual debut. From international TV offerings, they inferred that casual sex is good and virginity is bad. This is not surprising considering that content analyses of US entertainment programming show endorsement of casual sex to be the most consistent message about sex on American TV (Ward and Rivadeneyra 1999; Wright 2009). From local TV programming, in contrast, girls reported learning that

sex should wait until marriage. Major sources of this message appeared to be entertainment education programming like *Straight Talk*, and programming with *ssengas* and *kojjas* on *Bukedde TV*. The latter is a genre without an exact equivalent in the North American market, in which explicit sexual advice is dispensed to married couples. Although they accessed the programmes covertly, participants understood the advice to be intended for their elders. Without content analysis of local programming it is impossible to make definitive statements about differences in sexual messages communicated between the two programme sources. However, from participants' descriptions, it appears that international TV dramas provide a sort of back door persuasion toward acceptance of casual sexual norms; local talk and advice shows on radio and TV fill a more straightforward advisory role about committed relationships. It is worth noting that the level of explicitness in the two types of programming is not necessarily different.

When it came to gender roles, local and international programming seemed to convey similar rather than oppositional messages. Participants uniformly reported that women should be submissive, nurturing and responsive when it came to sex and relationships. Men should be caring and protective, and could be expected to be unfaithful. Girls described a generic media script in which a woman is devoted to and pours her energy into a man and he ultimately betrays her. Ward and Rivadeneyra (1999) reported that beyond endorsement of casual sex, the next most frequently emphasised sexual themes in popular US TV programming are that women are sex objects and men are sex driven and have trouble being faithful (see also Wright 2009). Although some specifics of these roles undoubtedly differ between sub-Saharan African and Western countries – Westerners are less likely in the twenty-first century to assume women will inevitably be the ones to cook and care for the children, for example – from these young people's perspective, the same broad stereotypical gender roles were communicated.

It was not within the scope of this study to identify interventions that address media messaging about sex and also resonate with young people. Nevertheless, several possible directions for future exploration come to mind. For example, could religious youth workers, parents and school personnel reshape their communication about sex to make its content more frank and practical, so that young people are not solely reliant on media depictions? Or, does the mediated version of traditional sex educators, radio and TV versions of *ssengas* and *kojjas*, offer a natural vehicle for communicating pro-social sex

messages? Could youth-appropriate programming fill a gap for young people such as those interviewed here? Of course, the forbidden nature of current programming may be part of the appeal, but its popularity among some peri-urban youth is evident. Along a different line, might media literacy interventions specifically focused on identifying sexual media scripts help young people navigate the tensions our participants elucidated regarding what they thought to be right regarding sex, and the powerful oppositional pull many acknowledged they felt from the media? Given that many secondary school students in our sample still for the most part shared the values espoused by their parents, teachers and youth leaders, the early high school years may be an appropriate audience for this type of intervention.

As a qualitative study, our results cannot be extended to all Ugandan high school students. The sample included a range of school types in the Mukono district, but the sample was not representative. Furthermore, given that we had to rely on school teachers and prefects to select participants, it is possible that the range of opinions represented in the group was narrower than it might otherwise have been. Finally, discussants may have been constrained from expressing their own viewpoints by concern to agree with the group and look good in front of their friends. Nevertheless, findings from this study support the need for further investigation of the role of exposure to sexual TV programming in the sexual socialisation of Ugandan youth. With levels of sexual content in media rising in many sub-Saharan nations as media environments continue to liberalise, the potential influence of entertainment media on young people's sexual attitudes and behaviours is a critical piece in the puzzle for promotion of healthy sexual behaviour.

Note

1. Having a maid or house help is not a privilege reserved for the wealthy in Uganda. It is, instead the major source of childcare for families at most socio-economic levels. The indicator of likely middle-income socio-economic standing of this girl is not so much the fact that she had a maid, but that her family had a TV. Although she did not elaborate on her attitude toward her maid, her amusement may arise from her view that the maid was more rural in outlook than were family members.

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