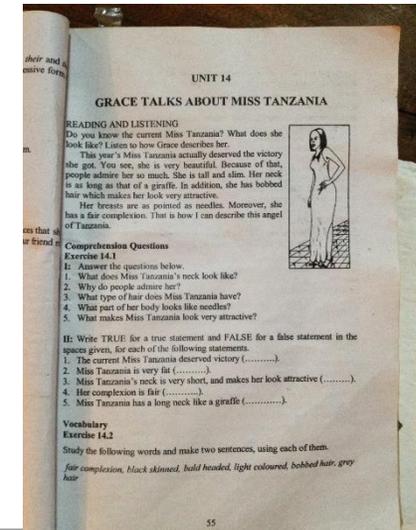


Re-theorising adolescent sexual agency in an era of 'girls' empowerment'



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Project overview

- Aim: to explore the relationship between discourses of young female sexuality within development policy and practice, and the experiences of girls themselves.
- Theoretical literature: increasing attention to young people as social agents (Prout & James 1990) yet acknowledgment of the socially constructed and regulated nature of young people's sexuality (Foucault 1976) leads us to ask how young people's sexual agency is conceptualised and operationalised within ID.

Methodology

- Ethnographic fieldwork
- Two sites in Northern Tanzania
- June 2014 - April 2015

Research questions:

- *How do various actors in teenage girls' lives (local communities, families, NGOs, policy-makers) 'make meaning' of their sexuality?*
- *How do girls 'make meaning' of their sexuality in relation to these norms and expectations?*



Key findings

- Restrictive norms of adolescent girlhood (respectability and respectfulness)
- Capacity to negotiate these restrictive norms mediated by immediate relationships and broader socioeconomic context of girls' lives.
- School expands and contracts girls' agency in various ways, but not necessarily in ways that are considered 'development-friendly'

Implications for work with adolescent girls

Limitations of 'empowerment' as a framework for conceptualising girls' sexual agency

- Relational and contextualised models of empowerment.
- Questions over the link between education and empowerment.
- Development interventions ignoring or potentially even curtailing girls' agency.

Implications for work with adolescent girls

...utility of 'resistance' as an alternative?

- Moving away from depoliticised and normative approaches to agency.
- Seeing beyond girls' conformity to 'development-friendly' expectations.
- What might this look like as a theoretical, actionable framework for expanding the agency of adolescent girls?