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Lydia Namatende-Sakwa

To cite this article: Lydia Namatende-Sakwa (2018) 'Madam, are you one of them?' 'Reflexivities of discomfort' in researching an 'illicit' subject, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 31:4, 328-340, DOI: [10.1080/09518398.2017.1422285](https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2017.1422285)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2017.1422285>



Published online: 22 Jan 2018.



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## 'Madam, are you one of them?' Reflexivities of discomfort' in researching an 'illicit' subject

Lydia Namatende-Sakwa<sup>a,b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Department of Languages, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Uganda Martyrs University, Uganda; <sup>b</sup>Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Teachers College Columbia University, New York, USA

### ABSTRACT

Informed largely by Affect theory (2004), this paper takes up 'reflexivities of discomfort' to reflexively engage with my affective struggles as a Christian, heterosexual, mother, educator, undertaking a study on homosexuality, which is a thorny issue in Uganda. It a methodological prologue, reflecting my thoughts and struggles before I undertake the study. My purpose is not to find solutions, but to lay bare some anxieties and ambivalences, also suggesting the limits of reflexivity. The paper begins with an autobiographical narrative about school in relation to (homo)sexuality. This is followed by an exposition of Uganda's Anti-homosexuality Bill; my use of reflexivity and affect to inform my affective struggles; my background as it relates to sexuality, providing insights into my researcher positionality. I then engage with moments imbued with high affective/emotive intensity in my preparation to undertake the study.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 March 2015  
Accepted 22 December 2017

### KEYWORDS

Homosexuality; Uganda; reflexivity; affect; education

My first break with imagined 'universal' heterosexuality and/or compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) came in about 1994 as a 16-year-old girl, with the news of the expulsion of girls for lesbianism from Gayaza High School, an affluent all-girls' Christian missionary school in Uganda. It is from this incident that lesbianism earned itself the name 'gayazaring', a term students in my school used for persons believed to be 'guilty' of this 'illicit' practice. It became illegal for girls in Gayaza to hold hands, and indeed, they were supposed to walk at least one meter apart. This was followed by a plethora of rumors in my own affluent Catholic school about girls larking in dark corners and sharing beds.

Looking back over those years, I am reminded of the long awaited 'Social', comparable to prom in the American setting. This event always took place in the last two years before leaving secondary school. We had watched the older students prepare for the event and had peeped to see their clothes as well as the boys they interacted with. In my head were fantasies of romance and happy-ever-afters, as in fairy tales like *Cinderella* and *Snow White*, as well as romantic novels like *Sweet Dreams* series, which I had read as a child and a young woman, respectively. It was simply exciting now that our 'day in the sun' was finally here. Ahmed makes mention 'that the affective repertoire of happiness gives us images of a certain kind of life ... it is hard to separate images of the good life from the historic privileging of heterosexual conduct as expressed in romantic love and coupledness' (2010, 90). The affective repertoire of happiness therefore directed us toward heterosexual coupling in the hope of finding happiness of a good man as necessary for a good life. To deviate from such a happiness script was tantamount to being 'threatened with unhappiness' (Ahmed, 2010, 91). Yet, while we planned, bought dresses, and

experimented with makeup and different hairstyles in preparation for Social, Joana and Lori deviated from the happiness script embodied in heterosexual coupling, playing tennis and chess, respectively, oblivious of the very 'big' coupling event ahead.

Lori, a tall attractive, light-skinned girl from an affluent family, wore expensive rimless glasses, and a one-inch haircut. She walked with 'swag' as if there were springs in her feet. She only wore dresses (with what were considered boyish sneakers) because trousers were not accepted in school. She was a great dancer and rapper who could sing along and mime to the newest lyrics, espousing her as 'cool' and also popular. She reminds me of the highly popular basketball girls in Pascoe's (2007) *Dude You're a Fag*, whose socioeconomic status made it possible for them to cross gender boundaries with impunity. Joana, on the other hand, from a different social location than Lori, performed gender using a bounce in her walk, and by participating in the relatively wide range of sports made available by the school. These girls, as such, both made use of the discursive resources available to them to do gender in ways that disturbed the 'normal' order of things for girls within my school context. This included their rejection of the excitement and fuss over the upcoming Social.

However, as a school rule, Social was a compulsory event. This compulsoriness in retrospect served to direct and/or coerce all the subjects/students in the 'right' way toward the right kind of objects aligned to normative gendered happiness scripts. When the day finally came, both Lori and Joana not only slipped out of the hall before the event was complete, but also desisted from joining the bubble of endless talk about events at Social, which lasted weeks on end long after the event had ended. In this sense, Lori and Joana could be described as 'affect aliens', a phrase used by Ahmed to describe one 'who as it were "kills" the joy' (2010, 49) by being 'misaligned' with others and/or *not* 'facing the right way' (Ahmed, 2010, 45).

While Lori now lives with her partner in the United States, Joana, from a less affluent background remains in Uganda where she continues to struggle as one of the faces of gay pride. What is interesting about Lori and Joana is the ways in which they troubled the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990), undoing normative gendered scripts through a masculine bounce, dress, and comportment, thereby embodying feminine masculinities (Paechter, 2007). As such, I recognize and reiterate Pascoe's (2007) study of masculinities in high school that indeed masculinity is a socially constructed constellation of practices that can be enacted by both boys and girls. While I chose to focus on Lori and Joana because both had 'come out' (Rasmussen, 2004), there were other girls in the school whose practices disrupted the heterosexual matrix. I also acknowledge that my own reading of Lori and Joana, which is based on their clothing, hair, walk, and so on, is problematic as it is based on how the body gets inscribed as lesbian and/or gay or heterosexual (Butler, 2003), and is on the this basis disciplined (Foucault, 1975) in respect to the norm.

The idea of Social is in retrospect a disciplining of the body through hetero-sexualizing traditions, which not only normalize, but also institutionalize heterosexuality. Such traditions make possible only heterosexual coupling, which in my school was reflected in inviting a single boys' school to interact with a single girls' school. Amy Best, in *Prom Night: Youth Schools and Popular Culture*, critically examines the practices and/or traditions within prom night. Much of the focus of these traditions is on girls, and as Best elaborates, 'the emphasis on consumption, beauty and romance for girls is stunning ... prom is packaged as a feminized space, wrapped up in contemporary conceptions of heterosexual romance' (2000, p. 4). However, the emergence of the 'gay prom' within the American context as a space for solidifying non-normative sexual identities as well as contesting heterosexuality unsettles heterosexuality as a taken-for-granted cultural practice (Best, 2000). Similarly, Lori and Joana also contested and/or disturbed the hetero-sexualizing practices imbued within Social (prom) by rejecting the preparatory practices and even walking out before the end of the event. In this way, the girls made use of covert rather than outright resistance to gendered norms. Indeed, citing, Connell legitimizes covert resistance, affirming, 'challenges to patriarchy need not involve head-on confrontation' (2008, p. 60). Additionally, Jones reiterates that silence for marginalized groups 'may be a rational response to their (dominant) peer's lack of ability to hear and understand' (2010, p. 60).

This discipline of bodies which transgresses compulsory heterosexual norms (Rich, 1980) is illuminated in Ugandan schools today, which remain sites in which (homo) sexuality is contested especially with the controversial Anti-Homosexuality Bill (which I explain later on). Tamale (2007) explains for example that in the early 1990s, school administrators investigated and meted out severe corporal punishment, expelling young boys and girls believed to be 'guilty' of homosexuality. This culminated in formal sex education in schools, in which counselors, teachers, and administrators continue to caution young people from early adolescence against such 'vices'. Indeed, the current teacher education program at a prominent university in Uganda lists homosexuality among vices like prostitution and alcoholism. There have also been cases of suicide associated with homosexuality in school (Lule, 2009), as well as allegations of recruitment of students into homosexuality (Femia, 2010), through, for example, the circulation of 'sodomy' books, purported to recruit students (Mubangizi, 2009). Indeed, the government conducted an investigation of four prominent secondary schools in Kampala and Wakiso districts over allegations that 30% of their students are involved in homosexual activities (URN, 2014). The expulsion of students for homosexuality has continued, with media reports on the expulsion of three primary school students (eight-year-old girls) from Gayaza Primary School, an all-girls' school in Kampala, as well as the expulsion of 20 girls from Iganga Secondary School, a high school in eastern Uganda (Chew, 2013; Wandawa & Semakula, 2013). Schools have predominantly responded to homosexuality by expelling students as they did in the 1990s, as well as flogging and giving harsh punishments (Lule, 2003). For this, teachers and school administrators have received a 'tongue-lashing' especially from parents, criticizing them for acting unprofessionally. Inasmuch as I would want to point fingers at the teachers whose response is far from unproblematic, yet I hesitate, questioning the options available to them given the silences and taboo around sexuality in general (Tamale, 2011b), and homosexuality in particular, which is deemed unacceptable in most African countries (Seager, 2009).

As a former teacher, and currently a teacher educator within the Ugandan context therefore, I feel compelled to undertake a study on homosexuality in the context of education, providing a forum for educators to talk about (homo) sexuality. I would have preferred to listen to the perspectives of teachers. However, I focus on teacher educators because of the potential volatility in approaching schools with the topic of homosexuality at this time. Teacher educators on the other hand are more independent of their views, to which I have been privy. While I have read and listened to their positions on homosexuality mostly on university online forums, they have not attended to teacher education and schools. My proposed study is therefore a forum to open the conversation, and listen to the voices of educators (through interviews and focus group discussions) in regard to homosexuality and education, in a context where it is considered 'difficult knowledge' (Britzman, 1991). At the time of writing this paper, I had not conducted the study yet.

Given the potential volatility of my proposed study, this paper is a methodological prologue into this thorny subject within the Ugandan context. I make use of this as a reflexive space to engage with what it means to conduct my proposed study. Recognizing that sexuality in education is an affect-laden and intensely emotive arena (Lesko, 2010; Lesko, Brotman, Agarwal, & Quackenbush, 2010; Niccolini, 2013), I make use of reflexivity (Pillow, 2003) and affect (Ahmed, 2004) within a poststructural frame (St. Pierre, 2000). My aim in this paper is not to present findings, but to use narrative and/or my own 'small stories' (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008) to engage with the discomfort around the study. This reflexive endeavor is important to me because what I thought was a subject of interest has flung me into spaces in which I have found myself questioning and being questioned about my investments in this research. It is to this that I commit in this paper, engaging with the conflicted voices that simultaneously enable as they disable my endeavor to undertake my proposed study. Before I proceed with my 'telling', I take a detour to first explain the context in which my reflexive endeavor is situated, giving insights into Uganda's Anti-Homosexual Bill.

## Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Bill

Uganda's Anti-homosexuality Bill received widespread international media attention because of the proposed death penalty for 'aggravated homosexuality' (Strand, 2011; Tamale, 2007, 2009). Uganda, a former British colony located in East Africa, is multi-ethnic and patriarchal, comprising a variety of cultures that view homosexuality as a taboo, against their religious and cultural beliefs, and a derailment of societal morals (Tamale, 2007). It is viewed as un-African – 'a foreign imposition from an imagined decadent West, or otherwise from an exotic, erotic East, and it is depicted as a sin, crime, psychosis, pathology or a transient pubescent phase of growth' (Nyanzi, 2013). Such discourses function to create a negatively charged affective field, triggered by the imagined threat that homosexuality represents. It is generally unacceptable in several African countries (Seager, 2009).

Yet, drawing from research on homosexuality in Uganda, Tamale explains that 'contrary to popular belief, homosexuality in Uganda predates colonialism and other forms of subjugation' (Murray & Roscoe 1998 as cited in Tamale, 2003, 2). She highlights that historically, as elsewhere in the world, homosexual practices were neither entirely tolerated nor repressed in Uganda. She gives examples of the Langi of northern Uganda whose *mudoko dako* 'males' were treated as women and could marry men. Homosexuality was also acknowledged among the Iteso, Bahima, Banyoro, and Baganda. Further, citing, she explains the long history of homosexuality in the Buganda monarchy, with an open secret in which the Kabaka (king) Mwanga was gay. Additionally, based on an ethnographic study in contemporary Uganda, Nyanzi shows how 'self-identified same sex-loving individuals claim their African-ness and their homosexuality' (2013, p. 952). These studies trouble and disrupt the idea that homosexuality is a Western import.

Nonetheless, the 'Anti-Homosexuality Act 2014', previously called 'kill the gays bill' in the media because of a death penalty clause in the earlier version, was signed into law. It was a strategy to prohibit any form of sexual relations between persons of the same sex as well as the promotion or recognition of such relations (Nyanzi, 2014). In addition to the death penalty were other punishments such as '(1) three years imprisonment for not disclosing homosexuality to the police, (2) seven years' imprisonment for the promotion of, conspiracy to engage in, aiding and abetting of or attempting to commit homosexuality and (3) life imprisonment for same-sex marriage or the offense of homosexuality' (Nyanzi, 2013, p. 953). This law, as well articulated by Nyanzi, was crafted by Ugandans, but 'its genesis and support are intricately interwoven with a complex assemblage of local, continental, and global foreign influences, including the homophobic rhetoric of some African presidents, powerful collaborations with conservative US evangelicals, and the diffuse discourses of some bishops of the African churches' (2014, 37).

Between October 2009 when the bill was first tabled into parliament, and February 2014, when it was passed into the law, violations and surveillance of gay persons escalated. In 2011, for example, an activist David Kato was beaten to death, although the police denied that this was related to his sexuality (Rice, 2011). In February 2013, David Cecil, a British theater director who had staged a comedy on homosexuality, was bundled into a car, locked up in a crowded cell for five days, and then deported, leaving a Ugandan girlfriend and two children (Beck, 2013). Tabloids like 'Rolling Stone' aggravated matters by publishing names and photographs of suspected gay persons, who were then ostracized, facing violations of privacy as well as discriminatory practices such as evictions from houses. While this law was eventually declared null and void due to technical glitches, the police continue to harass gay persons. This was reflected for example through a gay pride beach event which was interrupted by a pickup truck full of armed policemen who surrounded, summarily dispersed the gathering, and arrested some of the participants (Nyanzi, 2014).

On the whole, the (homo)sexuality milieu in Uganda continues to be shaped and defined by discourses of modernity such as colonialism, imperialism, globalization, fundamentalism, and patriarchy, which have interweaved with affective economies, shaping the sexual landscape, which, as well articulated by Correa, Petchesky, and Parker, is 'one of the most charged battlegrounds of the twenty-first century' (2008, 1). It is within this framework that homosexuality has become (un) thinkable in Ugandan, warranting my reflexive endeavor in preparing to work within this space.

## Reflexivities of discomfort and affect

Reflexivity is cited in qualitative research as an accepted method for engaging with the politics of representation (Lather, 2001; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Luttrell, 2010; Pillow, 2003). It has generally taken the form of increased attention to researcher subjectivity in the research process in cognizance that ‘who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis – that is an acceptance and acknowledgement that *how* knowledge is acquired, organized, and interpreted is relevant to *what* the claims are’ (Atheide & Johnson, 1998, as cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 176). As such, reflexivity demonstrates a researcher’s ongoing self-awareness about their knowledge production, through raising questions that illuminate how their multiple subjectivities influence each stage of the research process.

Yet, Pillow problematizes reflexivity for underlying implications that it can provide a cure for the problem of doing representation. Underlying reflexivity is the problematic assumption that a researcher can come to know him/herself, an Other as well as truth, gaining a transcendent clarity which releases him/her from raced, classed, gendered lenses which might have otherwise tainted representation. Rather than dismiss reflexivity however, Pillow seeks to illuminate the ways in which it can be re-imagined, not ‘as a confessional act, a cure for what ails us, or a practice that renders familiarity, but rather to situate practices of reflexivity as critical to exposing the difficult and often uncomfortable task of leaving what is unfamiliar, unfamiliar’ (2003, p. 177). She pushes for a move away from comfortable to uncomfortable reflexive practices and/or ‘reflexivities of discomfort’, which disturb uses of reflexivity for better data, instead foregrounding the complexities of engaging in qualitative research. She advocates ‘a reflexivity that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous’ (Pillow, 2003, p. 188). In reviewing the work of three researchers who engage in uncomfortable reflexivity in different ways, Pillow calls for more such examples of reflexive practices, which acknowledge their limits. My purpose then is not to find solutions, but to lay bare some anxieties and ambivalences in preparation to undertake my study, also providing insights into the limits of reflexivity. Indeed, feminist work has highlighted the need to reflexively locate emotion in the researcher’s relationship to the object of research as well as the research process (Gray, 2008). As such, in laying my affective struggles ‘on the table’, I draw on affect as theory to inform my reflexive endeavor.

Flatley differentiates between what he refers to as ‘the vocabulary of affect’ (2008, 11), including emotion, feeling, and affect. He explains that the numerousness of these terms as well as a lack of consensus on their meanings and/or distinctions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Shouse, 2005; Stewart, 2007) renders them confusing. Flatley (2008) advises that it seems least confusing to make use of the ‘everyday’ sense of these terms as synonyms, emphasizing the differences when this necessary. Like other scholars within this field (Ahmed, 2004; Cvetkovich, 2012; Shouse, 2005), I make use of the terms as synonyms, which can take forms like shame (Ahmed, 2004), depression (Cvetkovich, 2012), and optimism (Berlant, 2011).

I make use of ‘plugging in’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to plug affects, emotions, and/or feelings into my reflexive narratives and/or small stories (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). As well articulated by Lesko, ‘affects are a central part of what knowledge does’ (Lesko, 2010, 282). In other words, affects in this case provide insights into the ways in which homosexuality is understood in Uganda. Indeed, Thrift affirms, ‘*Affect is understood as a form of thinking* (original italics) ... . Affect is a different kind of intelligence about the world (Thrift, 2004, 60). Attentiveness to affects therefore provides unique access to knowledge for this work, given that (homo) sexuality is deeply complex, and is, specifically in Africa, ‘often wrapped in silences, taboos and privacies’ (Tamale, 2011b, 12). I select moments from my narrative that are affectively and/or emotionally dense and plug in the emotion/affect. Like Ahmed, I do not ‘end with the emotion, but with the work it does’ (Ahmed, 2004, 14), explaining how emotions work to move me, in engaging with norms engendered in my subjectivities as a Black, heterosexual, female, Christian, mother, wife, educator, Ugandan (and, and, and...), undertaking a study on homosexuality at this time. While I acknowledge the problematics around static categories in naming my subjectivities within a poststructural framework, yet, it is within the intersections therein that I am produced as an



intelligible, recognizable subject. I recognize however that far from static, these categories within which I identify remain fluid and conflicted.

I turn to a description of my background as it relates to sexuality, as a way of setting the stage for interrogating my conflicted subjectivities in researching homosexuality.

### **My background: homosexuality as unthinkable**

At the age of 8, my father, a Catholic, took me to a 'hard core' Catholic boarding school in rural Mukono district, administered by nuns. School was a strict setting, with bells and rules and monitoring from nuns, the school chaplain, matrons as well as class teachers and prefects. Corporal punishment was the order of the day, and we got beaten up or slapped whenever we stepped out of line. In fact, for a long time I thought beating with the cane was so much fun given how regularly teachers seized the opportunity, at the slightest provocation, to indulge in the 'pleasurable' moment of 'warming' our bottoms with the hard stroke of the cane. And secretly (and, shamefully, in retrospect), I looked forward to when I too would become a teacher in order to 'discipline' my students with the cane. The strictness within the school, coupled with the discursive silencing around sexuality (Tamale, 2011a), quieted dialog in regard to sexuality.

In this milieu as such sexuality was never discussed except in the context of biology lessons when the teacher taught reproduction. Even then, Mr Batutu, the teacher who took my class for biology, was a shy Catholic man, who did not dare mention the names of certain parts of the body. I am reminded about an exam revision session where Mr Batutu beat up the whole class for their answers to an examination question that read: 'what is the last part of digestion?' Mr Batutu had asked all those who had failed it to go to the front of the classroom. The whole class walked to the front. He asked us to lie on our stomachs and with his cane, thrashed each one two hard strokes. When he had 'sorted' all of us out, he reprimanded us for using 'bad words' instead of giving the answer. The whole class had written 'anus' instead of 'large intestine'. Rather than deploy a 'sanitized euphemism' as is common in speaking of sensitive and/or uncomfortable topics (Tamale, 2011b), we had directly referred to the genitalia, not only giving a wrong answer, but also 'scandalizing' and offending Mr Batutu. Even in this moment of revision, Mr Batutu could not bring himself to say the word 'anus', calling it a 'bad word' instead, which in hindsight is hilarious. Teachers' struggles to engage with sexuality in the classroom however are not unique to my context and have been documented even in more 'progressive' contexts like the US (Lesko, 2010; Lesko et al., 2010; Niccolini, 2013).

The closest we got to a discussion around sexuality was with a young and pleasant civics teacher, Mr Kawaka. He always wore a smile on his face dawning dimples on both his cheeks. He told us about his crush on Madame Xxon. Indeed, he always wore a badge on his shirt pocket with the word 'XXON'. For some reason, I imagined her to be a light-skinned, beautiful, classy, voluptuous woman who wore bright pink lipstick. Mr Kawaka updated us on the courtship during every class, spicing up each story, never disappointing our young and impressionable minds. These were really 'stolen' moments for us to indulge in the 'illicit' subject of sexuality and I looked forward to and enjoyed them immensely.

The exercise of power over social order including the regulation of sexuality in the school was institutionally deployed through the apparatus of surveillance (Foucault, 1975) embodied in teachers, matrons, and prefects. Most memorable was an encounter in which reversing roles of surveillance, or employing 'reciprocal' surveillance (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011), students surveilled our teacher, Mr Mukobe, a new young, handsome social studies teacher with an 'American' accent. The 12-year olds in my class were so taken up with him that whatever he said was interpreted and reinterpreted in ways that took it different directions. When he wrote the phrase 'My lass!' in my best friend's exercise book for example, dictionaries were taken from under the dust and cobwebs in order to find out what exactly he had meant. A most interesting encounter with Mr Mukobe came two days before we completed primary school. As we excitedly went about our evening schedule, somebody noticed that Namugga was missing. It had been rumored that she was one of the girls Mr Mukobe fancied. Word soon got round that Namugga and Mr Mukobe were in a classroom at the far end of the school. In frenzy, we

ran down to the classroom in a mob. When we got there, one of the students flung the door open, and alas! There stood Mr Mukobe attempting to wear his pants frantically. Namugga, on the other hand, only had her petticoat on, which she had pulled up to cover her breasts. She stood transfixed, shivering, looking utterly shocked. She held onto her slippers (I wonder why), and remained silent, as if in fear and bewilderment. I cannot recollect how Mr Mukobe, Namugga, and the mob ended up at the headmaster's house, but we did. Even as concerted attempts had been made to 'gag' sexuality, it found ways of slipping and then sticking out as this event illuminated.

Silencing around sexuality has been theorized in Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*. He makes mention that sexual practices had little secrecy and/or concealment at the beginning of the seventeenth century. As Foucault writes, 'codes regulating the coarse, the obscene and the indecent were quite lax compared to those of the nineteenth century' (1978, p. 3). However, in the Victorian regime, sexuality was later 'carefully confined; it moved to the home ... silence became the rule ... modern puritanism imposed its triple edict of taboo, nonexistence, and silence' (Foucault, 1978, 3–5). This regime continues to dominate even today and has been internalized by many Africans, who then legitimate talk about sexuality only within the confines of biology or sex education lessons where this talk is policed and regulated.

It is interesting that while there was a refusal to talk about sexuality in my school, there was simultaneously an incitement to heterosexuality. One enduring discourse in the three years that I attended this school was 'okukyalira ensiko' or 'visiting the bush'. This practice also called 'pulling' serves to elongate 'the inner folds of the labia minora, among several Bantu speaking communities of eastern and southern Africa, such as the Baganda (Uganda), the Tutsi (Rwanda), the Basotho (Lesotho), the Shona (Zimbabwe)' (Tamale, 2011b, 614). As a mandatory rite of passage that identifies membership of the tribe, one of its main purposes is to prepare girls to enjoy sexual pleasure with their male partners. Groups of girls in my school frequently picked *olutengo-tengo*, which are herbs believed to catalyze labia elongation, and run down the valley to pull each other. Matrons also helped the girls in the practice. There was talk about the intense initial pain, which dwindled as the labia minora became the length of the index finger. It was claimed that the initial pain however was incomparable to what one would feel if they started pulling after puberty. While I was too afraid to join the girls during these escapades, I remained afraid as I was warned that when an un-pulled girl got married, her aunt would have to sprinkle millet into her private part and then have a chicken eat out of there simultaneously pulling her labia minora in *public*! I thought of this spectacle – the public disciplining and shaming in utmost fear. As demonstrated here, and interrogated by the authors in Bruhm and Hurley (2004)'s collection, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of children*, the imagined asexuality and innocence of children as in this case is interestingly, and ironically interwoven with their assumed heterosexuality and destiny for reproductive heterosexuality. This reflects adult desire to contain and regulate children's sexuality. This adult desire is undergirded by compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) as well as the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, 2003) which maintains gender, identity, and sexuality as only intelligible within a heterosexual framework legitimizing the coupling of male and female.

I was later admitted into a top all-girls' catholic boarding secondary school (the school in which Lori and Joana were students too). Although we prayed a great deal and were also policed in several ways, the intensity was not as it had been in my primary school. This was the first time I got to read romantic novels, mostly *Mills and Boons* and *Sweet Dreams* series. At first my classmates and I were really shy about reading these romantic texts, for fear that others might think us decadent. Our fears were rooted in dominant moralizing discourses with material effects of shaming the reader of romantic texts. This is corroborated by Niccolini's study in the US, which depicts the shame (and shamelessness) felt by students in reading 'materials that are culturally cordoned to the privacy of the bedroom' (Niccolini, 2013, 7). However, many of the girls in my class soon got over this shame since Tracy one of our classmates fearlessly and *shamelessly* read the romantic novels, gleefully laughing out aloud for the whole class to hear whenever she got to 'those parts'. The novels triggered talk about relationships that girls had had with boys during the holidays. This relationship talk was confined within the heterosexual matrix.

My Catholic upbringing therefore had exposed me to a world in which sexuality could only be imagined within the heterosexual realm – period. Homosexuality, which is outside the heterosexual



'rubric of truth' (Salih & Butler, 2004, 314), was therefore rendered both invisible, unthinkable, and outside the margins, fringes of know-ability in my world at the time. Yet, in hindsight, as I demonstrate later on in the paper, some girls resisted the heterosexual norm, by performing gender in ways that transgressed the hegemonic heterosexual norms. Resistance as Foucault explains is extant in all power relations, 'Where there is power, there is resistance' (1978, p. 93).

As I take on this reflexive endeavor, I do not claim to have transcended and/or completely unpacked 'the invisible, weightless knapsack' (McIntosh, 1989) of heterosexual privilege. This is as such by no means a victory narrative in which I breathe a sign of relief for having come to terms with ideas and attitudes around by growing up. It is the reason why Pillow's reflexivities of discomfort appealed to me. It is a reflexive endeavor in which knowledge remains elusive as it does in this case. My commitment then as a researcher and teacher educator is to conduct an exploratory study in which we as educators grapple with and raise questions about homosexuality in the context of education. Given this backdrop, I now engage with my affective struggles prior to conducting my study of homosexuality in Uganda.

### Grappling with my conflicted subjectivities

I did not meet an openly gay person until I went to Belgium as a student. My colleagues were awesome in answering some questions that I had, especially about whether such people were *naturally* gay. When a European feminist conference in Hungary was advertised, I registered and attended many panels in which homosexuality was discussed. It was confusing. As a graduate student at Ghent University in Belgium and then Columbia University in the US, I have not only made friends of diverse sexual orientations, but I have attended classes, read lots of literature, and engaged in open conversations in this regard, dismantling some of my own 'truths'. I recognize however that I remain entangled within certain historically established prescriptive 'set of codes, prescriptions, or norms ... that precede and exceed the subject' (Butler, 2005, 17). These norms shape and/or regulate the ways in which certain subjects are expected to behave as ethical within a specific context. Such norms, according to Foucault, 'are invested with power and recalcitrance, setting the limits to what will be considered an intelligible formation of the subject within a given historical scheme of things' (as cited in Butler, 2005, p. 17). Such spoken and unspoken norms in Uganda posit as unintelligible and/or contradictory for one to inhabit the subject positions of Christian, heterosexual, wife, mother, educator while also researching homosexuality, as will be elaborated shortly. These norms are not imposed entirely from the outside but are internalized by the subject, who then becomes 'the site of the reiteration of these norms, even through its own psychic apparatus' (Salih & Butler, 2004, 343). Butler speaks of such norms as becoming internalized so much so that a subject becomes self-regulating. Nonetheless, 'even if a morality supplies a set of norms that produce a subject, in his or her own intelligibility, it also remains a set of norms ... a subject must negotiate in a living and reflective way' (Butler, 2005, 10). Stated differently, the norms, which constitute subjects as recognizable and/or knowable within specific contexts, must be navigated reflexively.

In taking this up, I have thought about my location as an insider – in some way – and as outsider in other ways (Narayan, 1993). While I am a Black woman, a Ugandan 'of the soil', I have also been a student in the UK, Belgium, and the US, casting me as an outsider, with an arguably tainted perspective to be listened to, but with suspicion. This was reflected for example in a heated argument I had with close relations with whom I had discussed my proposed study on homosexuality. Amidst the reprisals I received was that 'America' (aka the West) had ruined my value system. Also questioned was my Christianity, with quotations used to remind me that the Bible is clear on homosexuality, which was one of the reasons that people were punished through the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Bible.

As a Christian, I have spent time reading scripture and wrestling with plausible interpretations therein. I recognize the cherry picking of scripture to rationalize anti-homosexuality positions. This has been coupled with the emergence of unbiblical discourses cited among church-going Christians. A dominant one in regard to homosexuality is 'hate-the-sin-love-the-sinner'. This for me conjures a discourse from a secular song 'hate the game not the player', which speaks to promiscuity as 'the game' to be loathed, rather than promiscurer. This discourse has become the narrative churches have taken up, also linked

to 'the-come-as-you-are' discourse for 'sinners' to find refuge and love in the church. This narrative, referenced during the argument with my close relations, was recapped in at least two church services I attended. Expressing doubt, one of my close relations asked whether I was still a Christian. Clearly, he could not fathom how a Christian could accommodate the kind of study I intended to conduct.

Also called into question was my role as a mother: 'What kind of example will you be to your children?' In this moment, my authority as the mother of three children had been reduced to this 'bad' thing that I intended to research. It no longer mattered that I had been to the best schools in the country where I had been marked a 'goody-two-shoes'. My imagined position on homosexuality had swallowed all of that in one gulp. As a mother, I have been tasked, among others, to think about this: 'Since you are ambivalent about homosexuality, it means you would be okay if one of your children confessed they were gay? God forbid!' The use of the phrase 'God forbid' highlights how detestable, and unthinkable it is deemed for one's child to be gay. It suggests a sense of contagion, disgust. Indeed, as Ahmed asserts, 'through disgust, bodies "recoil" from their proximity' (2004, p. 83), as they did here, in envisioning the possibility of a gay child. In response to the 'accusation', I acknowledged that I would struggle with the idea if my child were gay because of the society in which I live, where homosexuality is unacceptable, and therefore bound up with 'badness'. This idea of the struggles of parents whose children are gay is explained in Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*. She points out that the queer child is perceived as an unhappy object for parents. This unhappiness Ahmed asserts, 'is not so much expressed as being unhappy about the child being queer, but as *being unhappy about the child being unhappy* ... . Queer fiction is full of such speech acts in which the parents express their fear that the queer child is destined to have an unhappy life' (2010, 92). In having tagged my response to an imagined future of inevitable unhappiness in a society that does not accept homosexuality, I had reified the narrative about unhappiness of gay people. I remain unsettled by this response. Yet, I fail to shake off the fear and difficulty associated with raising a gay and/or lesbian child. I also shudder that my children could be dragged into the work, and wonder how far this could go, and whether it would affect them.

Indeed, Sylvia Tamale, a Harvard graduate and professor of law at Makerere University, has borne the brunt of advocating the rights of gay people in Uganda. She describes how she 'became a punching bag for the public to relieve its pent up rage ... . Through radio, television, newspapers and the Internet, I endured the most virulent verbal attacks, including calls for the "lynching" and "crucifying" of Tamale' (Tamale, 2003). She has been accused among other things for partaking of 'gay money' in order to promote homosexuality. Bennett (2011) describes how Tamale was named 'worst woman of the year'. To this, Sedgwick explains that affects 'can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any other number of things (2011b, 19 as cited in Thrift, 2004, 61) as is reflected in the 'naming' of Tamale, whose personhood had in this moment been attached to the spread of 'perversion' in Uganda. How do I risk being labeled? What affects do I risk inciting? What will stick to my body?

My sense of shame in researching this 'illicit' subject has had me thinking about particular family, friends, and relations. Given the accusations about recruitment and gay money – What will they think of me? What would my well-learned but conservative father feel and/or say about this? Would he read my work at all? Would he tell me how disappointed he was? My father-in-law? My siblings? In-laws? Friends? Would the people I care about so much think I have been corrupted by the imagined 'deviant' *bazungu* (White people)? How could I possibly look them in the eye and tell them that I am researching homosexuality? Epstein says of an ashamed person as one 'who can hardly meet the gaze of those present (1948, 37 as cited in Ahmed, 2004, 103). Indeed, as Ahmed (2004) explains, shame is evoked by the imagined and I would add explicit view of those who matter to us. She affirms that '*we feel shame because we have failed to approximate "an ideal" that has been given to us ... shame can also be experienced as the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence*' (original italics; Ahmed, 2004, pp. 106, 107). Additionally, Ahmed talks about shame as 'a feeling of negation, which is taken on by the subject as a sign of its own failure' (Ahmed, 2004, 103), a failure, in my case, to live up to my family's expectations, and a sense of guilt that they will be associated with me – that my shame could have a ripple effect, shaming them too.

I have thought of putting this research interest ‘under wraps’ – they needn’t know about it, I have told myself – they might never find out. But again, supposing they do? It is this constant presence of fear as a feeling linked to the threat of rejection, admonishment, shame that creates a sense of anxiety which threatens to deter me from undertaking the study. This kind of fear is closer to what Silvan Tomkins would call ‘fear-terror’ (Sedgwick & Frank, 1996, p. 35, as cited in Probyn, 2010, p. 72). Indeed, Probyn (2010) asserts that affects have specific effects. Fear, specifically, as Ahmed affirms, works by shrinking some bodies back from the world in order to avoid the object of fear. Yet, the need for a space, as an educator, to engage with homosexuality, in ways that are useful for the students in our schools continues to steer me on.

I have grappled with how to recruit participants and, most importantly, I remain concerned with how to safeguard them in a climate where the legality of homosexuality is on the fence. How can I craft ‘safe’ questions, get participants to respond? Will they accept to take part? What will they think of me? I remember having a focus group discussion with my students at the university about their views on homosexuality. One of the students boldly raised her hand and asked ‘madam, are you one of them?’ This was quickly sashed by one of those students who always ‘ally’ with the teacher, stating, ‘Banange Sarah, Madame mufumbo, alina n’abana’ (madam is married and even has children). While I recognize that categories like ‘mother’ hold few certainties given the long history of the ‘down low’ people who live as married heterosexuals, but also have same-sex relationships (Heath & Goggin, 2009), part of me was relieved that heterosexual marriage and motherhood had shielded me from ‘suspicion’, and, that I had survived from engaging with this question at that time. However, I remain troubled that I do not know how I *should* have answered it or how I *will* address it if it pops up again. How do you open a conversation when you feel so much hostility and suspicion and paranoia?

I am reminded of a professor friend of mine at a highly rated American university. He asked about the paper that I would present at a qualitative conference in Illinois in the US. I elaborately explained that it would be about my conflicted subjectivities in researching homosexuality in Uganda. He shocked me when he said that a study like mine could get me asylum in the United States. I was silent for a while, and when I responded, I did tell him that I actually love my country and would love to live there. He blushed and looked away. Was this blushing a sign of embarrassment, anger, confusion? Tomkins explains that the face is the key site of affect. He affirms that, ‘I have now come to regard the skin, in general, and the skin of the face in particular, as of the greatest importance in producing the feel of affect’ (1999, 89 as cited in Thrift, 2004, 62). It was indeed a moment of discomfort. I felt like I had been taken for an opportunist with a hidden agenda to benefit in some way from the precariousness of gays and lesbians.

This discourse of taking advantage of marginalized groups in this way is not uncommon in regard to homosexuality. There have been suspicions and accusations of heterosexual persons who have feigned homosexual persecution in order to get visas to emigrate to the West. In citing this discourse therefore, the professor had, albeit unintentionally, put me on the defensive, and set me questioning whether this is what the work would be about? If a highly learned, exposed, and intelligent professor could think of me like that, what then will other people think? Should I care what they think of me? Is it possible to *not* care? Nonetheless, in retrospect, I wonder how much of my interpretation of the professor’s statement, as well as well as my concerns about what people think of me is, but paranoia? Sedgwick (2003) names and describes paranoia as anticipatory. She asserts that ‘The first imperative of paranoia is *there must be no bad surprises*’ (original italics; 2003, 130). Sedgwick might argue that my aversion to surprise could be the reason for my active imagination, which has set me ‘watching my back’, to avoid surprises – so that in Sedgwick’s words, ‘bad news be always already known’ (2003, 130). Paranoia has been classified by Silvan Tomkins as a negative affect to be minimized, as opposed to positive affects which should be maximized (Sedgwick, 2003). Yet paranoia is a seductive affect because it is in some ways a shield, and/or cushion against surprise, disappointment, disillusionment, and embarrassment.

## Conclusion

The questions in this partial, incomplete, non-definitive account of myself revolves around historically prescribed codes of conduct, which govern the ways in which certain subjects are expected to behave. In other words, the concerns raised here are questions of morality as understood in the Ugandan context. Interestingly, these norms simultaneously uphold and trouble the ethical obligations imbued within my subjectivities as a Ugandan, teacher educator, Christian, mother, researcher: What does it mean for example for teachers to care for *all* students, while at the same time silencing the ones who fall outside normative frames of sexuality? While the ethical obligations engendered in these subjectivities compel me (even as they draw me away), I commit to plough on, with the intent of creating possibility to address homosexuality in schools, in ways that are meaningful for the education of our students.

This paper draws attention to methodological research processes, particularly reflexive work, which I argue should be undertaken even before taking up research on difficult knowledge (Britzman, 1991). While this reflexive endeavor does not provide solutions to the researcher struggles, it illuminates the complexities of undertaking this type of qualitative research, highlighting the affective dimensions of research, which have been dominantly overshadowed to legitimize rational, tangible research endeavors. Following feminist appeals to reflexively locate emotion in the researcher's relationship to the object of research as well as the research process, therefore (Gray, 2008; Womersley, Maw, & Swartz, 2011), I illuminate some anxieties and ambivalences in preparation to undertake my study, also providing insights into the limits of reflexivity. The paper dislodges the mind/body binary in research process, illuminating the entanglements of emotion and thought in reflexively engaging research.

Most importantly, the paper provides an example of uncomfortable and tenuous reflexivity. This endeavor informed some of the choices that I am currently working through in undertaking the study. In cognizance of what is at stake for example I decided to work with teacher educators rather than teachers as my respondents, as already explained. I will guarantee confidentiality, and tighten the privacy clauses recognizing the risk, and my obligation to protect my respondents given what is at stake not only with the law, but also with their families, friends, and close relations, as my own reflexivity highlighted. The use of interviews rather than focus groups in which respondents would have interacted will be useful in giving them space to communicate their thoughts and feelings in the absence of the moral judgments which my own reflexivity provided insights into. Overall, the struggles within my affective reflexive endeavor provided the space not only for me to meaningfully design my study, but also to confront and cushion potential hostility, which I expect in undertaking the study.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

*Lydia Namatende-Sakwa* is a lecturer in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Uganda Matyrs University and also a visiting scholar at Teachers College, Columbia University. The author's research interests include gender, sexuality, curriculum, teacher education, and poststructural theory.

## ORCID

*Lydia Namatende-Sakwa*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3550-4869>

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