



Perceptions Regarding Formed Sexual Identities among Secondary School Students in Ubungo District

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Abstract:

This study sought to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions regarding formed sexual identities among secondary school students in Ubungo District. Specifically, the study was guided by two objectives that sought to: determine the ways used to identify sexual identities and examine the reasons for accepting a particular sexual identity among secondary school students. Mixed research approach and convergent research design were employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data through questionnaires and interviews. Purposive and stratified sampling were also used to

obtain a representative sample of 20 professional teachers and 232 adolescent students from selected schools. The obtained qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis and presented in quotes of respondents' voices; while the quantitative ones were subjected to descriptive analysis that indicate frequencies and percentage and presented in tables. The findings indicate that students and teachers perceive formed sexual identities as sexual labels that are formed through comparing themselves with friends/same-sex peers, self-evaluation based on physical appearance and sexual feelings, adherence to the advice and sexual information obtained from parents/guardians and moralists like elders/religious leaders, or through searching certain sexual identity contents via social media accounts. Also, they are formed due to personal conviction toward homosexuality/bisexuality, addiction to same-sex sexual intercourse, obtained parental advice and sexual information, adherence to the natural law of sex, diminished sexual desire/arousal, moral and religious acceptability, early childhood experiences, and issues related to impotence. Therefore, it is recommended that parents/guardians and teachers should continue to advise adolescent students on matters of sexuality and prepare programs that will enrich students with possible ways to overcome identity confusions and appropriately recognize their identities.

Keywords: *Sexuality, Sexual Identity, Sexual Information, Secondary School Students, Ubungo District.*

Introduction

Sexual identities are individuals' sexual labels and descriptions. They are correlated with how individuals project their sexual emotions, feelings, attractions, roles and behaviors in both online and offline environments (Hill, Reesor & Collict, 2017). They are concerned with how individuals want to discharge sexual duties and activities such as penile-vaginal intercourse

(PVI) or penile-anal intercourse (PAI) when mating with either same-sex or different-sex peers. Their distinction entails that each is unique based on projected sexual behaviors and activities, thus not similar (Herdt, 1990; Weinrich & Williams, 1991; Blackwood & Weiringer, 1999).

Current information indicates that there are about seven kinds of sexual identities that are



formed among developmental groups in our societies. Fox (1996) and Rust (2001) mentions them as homosexual identity, bisexual identity, asexual identity, heterosexual identity, straight, queer, and transgender. The homosexual identity is that which is formed when same-sex peers become sexually attracted to each other—male wanting male and vice versa is true. Its specialty entails that male attracted to fellow male are known as “gays” while female attracted to fellow females are known as “lesbians” (Kitzinger & Coyle, 2002). Those recognized as bisexuals are said to be sexually attracted to both male and female respectively—they are interested in penile-vaginal and penile-anal sexual intercourse (Rotheraw-Boras & Langabeer, 2001). Those identified as heterosexuals are also known as “straights” because their identity is in line with natural laws of sex that prioritize opposite-sex sexual relationships as described in creation theory – male having sexual attraction to females and vice versa is true. Those falling under asexual identity are said to have diminished sexual arousals and desires, wanting no sexual relationship with either same-sex or opposite-sex peers. Those identified as transgender are also known as “Transsexuals. They are said to be associated with gender roles that are incongruent to the biological sex assigned at birth – these include those who did hormonal or surgical interventions to change their bodies and sexual roles contrary to biological makeup. Finally, queer identity is that which is irresolute – the identity is neither of male or female – sometimes the identity is combined of male and female (Green & Maurer, 2015).

The formation of such sexual identities is determined by several reasons and ways. From the review of Cass’ theory of sexual identity formation, it is indicated that certain sexual identity is achieved stage-wise. Cass (1979) clarifies this by revealing that certain sexual identity is achieved when 6 stages are probably covered: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. At identity confusion stage, one is said to have a lot of questions regarding homosexuality/bisexuality and experience inner

turmoil together with feelings of self-alienation. This gives them a hard time to manifest their sexual orientations due to immature same-sex awareness, attraction, and self-identification compared to those who have identified themselves as lesbians, gays or bisexuals (Diamond, 2000; Diamond, 2008). When identity foreclosure becomes manifested, identity seekers are pushed to the second stage (identity comparison). Here, identity seekers do struggle to develop commitments toward homosexual self after realizing the differences between oneself and others, while changing their perceptions in order to influence their behaviors to be like homosexuals. Also at this stage, identity seekers begin to consider same-sex sexual relationships as special, thus opting to establish and maintain homosexual/bisexual relationships while blaming others in order to justify themselves right (Degges-White, Rice & Myers, 2000; Gervacio, 2012).

Those who will continue to be interested in homosexual/bisexual identity are likely to develop identity tolerance. Here, identity seekers do justify their identity choices and seek means of alienating feelings of aloneness, immediately after considering themselves having different sexual attraction and desires (same-sex) compared to others. They begin to tolerate all the changes and homosexual/bisexual self-image, while deciding themselves on how to present themselves to the public and privacy (Hicks & Milton, 2009; Martos et al., 2015). This stage mobilizes them to reach a fourth stage of “identity acceptance” which motivates individuals to search and find other homosexuals, having a purpose of being part of homosexuals’ subculture. Afterwards, identity seekers develop pride and disclose themselves as lesbians, gays or bisexuals regardless of rejections/obstructions projected to them (identity pride stage). That enables them to no longer be seen as individuals with sole identities, but rather a part of who they really are (Fassinger, 1991).

Empirically, sexual identities are said to be formed due to several influences. Contemporary studies indicate that social media use has mostly influenced adolescents in the USA, South Africa

and Kenya to be exposed to several sexual orientations and be convinced to form homosexual/bisexual identities (Plummer, 1995; Gross & Woods, 1999; Gross, 2007; Allison et al., 2012; Holloway et al., 2014; Winetrobe et al., 2014). However, elsewhere like in Tanzania, there seem to be less studies that specifically address sexual identity formation, especially among adolescents in schools. Therefore, this study was set to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions regarding formed sexual identities among secondary school students in Ubungo District. Two specific objectives guided the study:

1. To determine the ways used to identify sexual identities among secondary school students;
2. To examine the reasons for accepting a particular sexual identity among secondary school students.

Materials and Methods

Research Approach

This study employed a mixed research approach in order to assist the study obtain specific and detailed insights as obtained through qualitative and quantitative methods. Therefore, the approach enabled the researcher to collect in-depth and breadth data regarding the topic under study (Driscoll et al., 2007; Almalki, 2016).

Research Design

The study employed convergent research design in order to simultaneously gather the quantitative and qualitative data from separate databases and merge a comparison of the results. The design helped the study to formulate data collection methods and analysis plans, together with obtaining a reasonable sample size. For such facts, the design helped the study to obtain both numeric and text data (Creswell, 2012).

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Dar es Salaam, specifically Ubungo District. This is one of Tanzania's city centers that contain mixed populations with diverse cultural backgrounds

and different sexual orientations. Ubungo District was considered for the study because it is well established with secondary schools that are nearby city centers, thus having students who are exposed to diverse sexual orientations due to urbanization. With its specialty, the study narrowed itself within three (3) administrative wards that were obtained through stratified sampling: Makuburi ward, Ubungo ward and Mabibo ward. The selection of such wards was also determined by the spatial locality of the schools that had students and teachers intended for the study. Hence, four secondary schools were visited during the study for possible data collection: Yusufu Makamba Secondary School, Makoka Secondary School, Mabibo Secondary School, and Urafiki Secondary School.

Target Population

Secondary school students in adolescence stage and professional teachers were the targeted population during the study. Students were targeted because they are in a stage of identity formation as described in developmental theories (Meeus, 2018). Thus, eligible to share experiences, challenges and ways used to achieve sexual identity formation. On the other hand, professional teachers were targeted because they are well trained and adequately informed of adolescents' developmental issues that include sexual identity searching, confusions and achievements.

Sampling and Sample Size

Probability and non-probability sampling were employed to obtain the respondents out of secondary school students and teachers. The $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ formula of calculating the sample size was used to calculate the sample size out of the estimated population (N) of 1000 students. The expected sample size was to be 286 students but unfortunately only 232 willingly participated in the study. Stratified sampling technique was then employed to group the students into two strata based on age range and class level and draw such a representative sample. This took place after the researcher called each class at the school parade ground and asked students to group themselves into two Strata (Acharya et al., 2013; Stockemer, 2019).

On the other hand, purposive sampling was employed to obtain 20 professional teachers based on duties and departmental roles. For instance, there were 6 teachers working in the departments of students' welfare, 4 in discipline offices and 10 as class teachers. They were involved because they are concerned with daily students' welfare and exposed to students with different sexual orientations.

Data Collection, Analysis and Presentation

The obtained data were collected in two different phases in order to obtain qualitative and quantitative data. General data collection was guided by physical distribution of questionnaires to students and note taking during interviews with professional teachers. The obtained quantitative data were subjected to descriptive analysis (frequency and %) through SPSS version 20.0, USA, IBM, while the qualitative ones were under thematic analysis based on identified themes. Finally, the presentation of the quantitative data is in tabular form and that of qualitative data is in quotes of respondents' voices.

Validity

Instruments were sent to the fellow experts for the review, assessment and evaluation of their structure, contents and relevancy. Also, the instruments were translated in Swahili language that is national-wide spoken, so as to minimize misconceptions and unlock the barriers. Hence, the study managed to obtain authentic data using

questionnaires and interview guides that were used as data collection instruments.

Ethical Considerations

Permissions from regional and district administrative authorities were requested by and granted to the researcher for official initiation of the study. The respondents were informed of what was to take place and freely had the opportunity to participate in or withdraw from the study. During the study, the researcher avoided using ruin and biased statements that humiliate and embezzle respondents' dignity and identity. Hence, these helped the study to be conducted in a win-win situation.

Results

This section presents the obtained findings based on research objectives. Therefore, the following are the findings as presented in subsequent sections.

Objective 1: To determine the ways used to identify sexual identities among secondary school students.

The first objective sought to determine the ways used to identify sexual identities among secondary school students. To answer this objective, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews among secondary school students and teachers as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Ways Used to Identify Sexual Identities (n=232)

S/N	Proposed Ways	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	Conversing with my friends	06	2.6
2	Comparing oneself with their same-sex peers	19	8.2
3	Identity information searching via social media accounts	30	12.9
4	Self-evaluation by observing physical appearance & feelings	76	32.8
5	Adherence to parental advice and religious teachings	101	43.5
	Total	232	100

Source: Field data (May, 2023)

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the majority of secondary school students (43.5%) are subjected to parental advice and religious

teachings concerning sexuality. This implies that most students are adequately exposed to sexual information and gender roles that may support

them to understand their identities. Similarly, those subjected to religious teachings seem to be morally encapsulated to the extent of forming heterosexual identity based on Biblical/Quran concepts. The results also indicate that 32.8% of students are subjected to self-evaluations based on their physical appearance and feelings, so as to sexually orient themselves based on exhibited sexual secondary characteristics. This implies that students do evaluate themselves in order to understand how male and females are sexually different due to biological makeup and exhibited sexual secondary characteristics. For instance, males have male sexual organ (penis) and they do develop beards, tough voices, muscle expansion, and penile erections; while females have female sexual organ (vagina) and they do develop breasts, soft voices, and enlargement of waist and hips. Furthermore, the results indicate that 12.9% of students do use social media accounts to search for identity information during the sexual identity formation process. This implies that social media accounts do create an environment for students to independently access contents related to sexual identities and learn how to sexually present themselves as online friends do. Finally, the results indicate that 8.2% and 2.6% of students do converse and compare themselves with their friends/same-sex peers during the sexual identity formation process. This implies that the majority of students' identity choices are determined by peer influence and imitations, thus some may likely form homosexual or bisexual identity.

In similar regards, teachers were interviewed for triangulation purposes. The findings indicate that teachers perceive sexual identities as students' sexual labels that are formed when students adhere to parental guides/instructions and religious teachings concerning sexuality, or do self-evaluation based on their physical appearance and sexual feelings. For instance, one respondent said:

“Most of our students are either Christians or Muslims, who live with their parents/guardians and attend in churches or mosques. Those living with parents are likely subjected to parental guides/instructions on sexual issues based on their religious faiths and culture. On another angle,

those attending in churches and mosques are enlightened and reproofed to not be homosexuals/bisexuals through Biblical/Quran's stories, thus influenced to accept heterosexual identity” (Teacher 2, School A).

The other teacher added:

“Parents/guardians and religious affiliations have re-shaped adolescents' thinking and influenced their behaviors. Even in the time of identity confusions and identity searching, students are exposed to worldviews and criticisms regarding homosexual or bisexual identity, thus being influenced to accept and form heterosexual identity” (Teacher 3, School A).

Furthermore, the other teacher said:

“Students in Adolescence tend to experience developmental changes. The female students do experience menstrual cycles and enlargement of breast, waists and hips; while the male students do experience penile erections, muscle expansion, change of voices, growth of beards. All these act as determinants during the sexual identity formation process because they reveal how each is sexually different from the other. Hence, after understanding their sexual differences, most are influenced to be heterosexuals” (Teacher 10, School B).

On the other hand, the findings indicate that teachers perceive that sexual identities are formed when students converse or compare themselves with friends/same-sex peers, or search identity information via social media accounts. For instance, one respondent said:

“In a globalized world students do own different social media accounts and access different sexual contents. A few might be accessing homosexual contents via e-pages compared to the majority who are still heterosexuals. For instance, the minority of students do repeatedly access pornographic videos of homosexuals in order to learn how to similarly do same-sex sexual intercourse compared to the majority who access pornographic videos of heterosexuals. The end of it all is to be convinced to either be homosexual or heterosexual” (Teacher 8, School B).

The other teacher added:

“Some students have accepted to be homosexuals or heterosexuals due to the influence from their friends or same-sex peers. Amongst them there are those who through daily conversations have recognized their heterosexual identity, while others through comparing themselves with same-sex peers have accepted homosexual identity” (Teacher 12, School C).

These results imply that the majority of students do struggle to find their appropriate sexual identities through seeking information from those who have already formed their sexual

identities. Hence, most have become heterosexuals, while the rest are homosexuals or bisexuals.

Objective 2: To examine the reasons for accepting a particular sexual identity among secondary school students.

The second objective sought to examine the reasons for accepting a particular sexual identity among secondary school students. To answer this objective, data were collected using questionnaires among secondary school students as presented in Table 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2. Reasons for Accepting to be Homosexuals/Bisexuals (n=20)

S/N	Proposed Reasons	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	Personal conviction about the identity	08	40
2	Body changes and morphology	03	15
3	Individual feelings & emotional dimensions	05	25
4	Addiction to same-sex sexual intercourse	04	20
	Total	20	100

Source: Field data (May, 2023)

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that 40% of students have accepted to be homosexuals/bisexuals due to personal conviction toward homosexuality/bisexuality. This implies that there are certain experiences, occasions or events that convince students to accept homosexual/bisexual identity. It may also imply that students passing through different sexual experiences like sodomization during childhood/early adolescence are likely to form homosexual identity. The findings have also indicated that 20% of students have accepted to be homosexuals/bisexuals due to regular penile-anal sex done with same-sex peers. This implies that students’ choices of being homosexuals/bisexuals are determined by willingness, desire and addiction to same-sex

sexual intercourse, thus feeling proud to appear as homosexuals. The findings have furthermore indicated that 15% and 25% of students have accepted to be homosexuals/bisexuals after proving that their body morphologies (body shapes and facial expression) look like those of different sex—men looking like women and developing hip-shapes and soft voices, while women looking like men and developing beards and tough voices. Also, it may be after noticing that their sexual/emotional feelings are directed to same-sex peers and they are ready to engage in same-sex sexual relationships. These imply that students who have developed homosexual identity have not been subjected to sexual guidance and information that would assist them to recognize their realities.

Table 3. Reasons for Accepting to be Heterosexuals (n=196)

S/N	Proposed Reasons	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	Morally & religious acceptable	34	17.4
2	Parental advice and sexual information	76	38.7
3	Adherence to the natural law of sex	70	35.7
4	Individual sexual feelings & emotional dimensions	16	8.2
	Total	196	100

Source: Field data (May, 2023)

The results presented in Table 3 indicate that 38.7% of students have accepted to be heterosexuals due to parental advice and their sexual information. This entails that parents do expose and educate their children (students) regarding different heterosexual issues. Likewise, it entails that parents act as adolescents' reference point when they are struggling to form their respective sexual identities, thus most adolescent students are more likely to form heterosexual identity than any other. The findings have also indicated that 35.7% of students have accepted to be heterosexuals due to adherence to the natural law of sex, which emphasizes heterosexuality. This entails that students are aware that proper sexual orientation

is that of male feeling to present himself as male and female as female based on their roles and sexual pace. The findings have furthermore indicated that 17.4% of students have accepted to be heterosexuals due to moral and religious acceptability. This entails that students are religious believers and moralists, who make identity choices in accordance with religious/biblical principles and teachings. Finally, the findings have indicated that 8.2% of students have accepted to be heterosexuals due to adhering to sexual feelings and emotions. This entails that students are mostly attracted to opposite sex to the extent of desiring penile-vaginal sexual intercourse.

Table 4. Reasons for Accepting to be Asexual (n=16)

S/N	Proposed Reasons	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	Diminished sexual desire/arousal	05	31.25
2	Early childhood experiences	09	56.25
3	Issues related to impotence	02	12.5
	Total	16	100

Source: Field data (May, 2023)

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that 56.25% of students have accepted to be asexual due to early childhood experiences like sexual assaults, abuse and rape done by either male or female guardians who they once trusted. This entails that students' confidence and level of trust to the opposite sex is too low. Likewise, it entails that there were no secure-attachments between students and caretakers during childhood, thus not sexually informed to understand their roles and positions. The findings have also indicated that 31.25% of

students have accepted to be asexual due to diminished sexual desire/arousal. This entails that the sexual growth and development of students might be irrelevant to the stage/age they belong. Finally, the findings have indicated that 12.5% of students have accepted that they are asexual due to issues related to impotence. This entails that students undergo sexual dysfunctions at the stage of exhibition of secondary sexual characteristics, thus not getting the opportunity to prove their masculinity or femininity.

Discussion

Regarding the first objective, it was found that students in the sexual identity formation process do converse and compare themselves with friends/same-sex peers, do self-evaluation based on observed physical appearance & sexual feelings, do use social media accounts to search for identity information, and adhere to parental advice and religious teachings concerning sexuality.

Such findings are similar to those of Craig and McInroy (2014), DeHaan et al. (2013), Downing (2013), Duguay (2016), Steinke et al. (2017) and McInroy et al. (2019). They indicate that most adolescent students do use social media accounts in order to either access homosexual or heterosexual information during identity searching. In similar regards, Fox & Ralston (2016) made a study and found that adolescent students do prefer to search for identity information via social media accounts, so as to learn how to sexually orient themselves as online homosexuals, bisexuals or heterosexuals do. Those who happen to access homosexual/bisexual contents were also found to interrogate their parents/guardians and then chose to adhere to their advice and directives concerning sexuality.

On another angle, studies of Adamczyk and Felson (2006) and Bonell et al. (2006) have indicated that adolescents do manifest self-evaluation method during sexual identity seeking. Such self-evaluation is specifically trying to assess how their physical appearances (body morphologies and facial expression), sexual feelings and exhibited sexual characteristics during puberty relate with certain sexual identity characteristics.

Studies of Ghayas and Batool (2021) and Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) have furthermore indicated that adolescent students do initiate conversation with friends and other moralists like religious leaders and elders during the sexual identity formation process. The aim of doing so is to contextualize and understand which sexual identity is acceptable, why is it so and how can they form such an acceptable sexual identity. Those who will find that their identity is contrary

to that of their society will likely face stigma, identity confusions, and then fail to recognize their sexual positions. Hence due to these facts, adolescent students in the sexual identity formation process may likely form heterosexual identity, homosexual identity, bisexual identity or asexual identity.

Regarding the second objective, it was found that students' identity choices are determined by a number of reasons such as personal conviction toward homosexuality/bisexuality, addiction to same-sex sexual intercourse, obtained parental advice and sexual information, adherence to the natural law of sex, diminished sexual desire/arousal, moral and religious acceptability, early childhood experiences, and issues related to impotence.

Arguably, Katra (2014) has similarly indicated that there are a number of reasons for adolescents to accept homosexual identity. Such reasons were said to be lack of sexual attraction to men (lesbians) or women (gays), together with having a desire to initiate and engage in sexual relationship with fellow men/women. Other studies done by Berona et al. (2018) and Stewart et al. (2019) have also found that the majority of adolescents are heterosexuals and the minority are homosexuals due to developed romantic attraction toward a certain sex, or obtained sexual guidance and advice from parents. That of Patterson (2022) have remarkably found that there are some of parents who have become gays/lesbians and bisexuals in their adulthood, thus being influential in either homosexual or bisexual identity formation to their children, unless their orientations are not in line with parenting and guidance.

The study of Tomori et al. (2018) has furthermore revealed that adolescents do form their sexual identities due to personal conviction that is determined by early childhood/adolescence experiences like attachments, disapprovals, harassments, violence, and exclusion—this is often accompanied by acceptance or denials when exposed to identities that are similar to those they once trusted during their early childhood. Finally, studies of Salu (2011) and Holmes et al.

(2021) have similarly found that adolescents with diminished sexual desire/arousal have developed asexual identity due to disturbed genetic mechanisms that lower sexual stimuli or information learned through personal experiences. Hence due to these reasons, adolescent students may likely form heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual identity.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is discovered that students' and teachers' perceptions regarding formed sexual identities are similar based on reasons and ways used to achieve a certain identity. It is also discovered that adolescent students do form their sexual identities through comparing themselves with friends/same-sex peers, self-evaluation based on physical appearance and sexual feelings, adherence to the advice and sexual information obtained from parents/guardians and moralists like elders/religious leaders, or through searching certain sexual identity contents via social media accounts. It is furthermore discovered that adolescent students do form certain sexual identities due to personal conviction toward homosexuality/bisexuality, addiction to same-sex sexual intercourse, obtained parental advice and sexual information, adherence to the natural law of sex, diminished sexual desire/arousal, moral and religious acceptability, early childhood experiences, and issues related to impotence. Then based on these facts, adolescent students may likely be heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, or asexual. Therefore, it is recommended as follow:

1. Parents/guardians and other moralists like elders and religious leaders should continue to advice adolescent students on matters of sexuality, so they may recognize themselves, form acceptable sexual identities and not face social stigmas;
2. Professional school counsellors or teachers acting as school counsellors should prepare programs that will enrich students with possible ways to overcome identity confusions and appropriately recognize their identities;
3. The government through the ministry of education, science and technology (MoEST) should see how to control the flow of sexual information in social media accounts and establish formal sex education courses that may assist adolescent students to form appropriate sexual identities during sexual identity formation process.
4. More studies on sexual identity formation process should be done because the study has failed to unveil when do the adolescent students actually form their sexual identities in developmental timeline.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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