The Beast Had to Marry Balinda: Using Story Examples to Explore Socializing Concepts in Ugandan Caregivers' Oral Stories

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Introduction

The current essay is based on interview data gathered during the summer of 2009 in the rural Ugandan village of Kitengesa as part of a larger constellation of studies (Dent 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008; Dent and Yannotta 2005; Parry 2004) that have investigated the impact of rural village libraries in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa on the users they serve.[1] One of these studies focused on the learning readiness of young children (ages 5-7) as influenced by the reading habits and library use of their primary caregivers—most often their mothers and grandmothers (although there were two fathers in the study who were the primary caregivers). The project included more than 50 hours spent interviewing 51 caregivers about their reading, storytelling, and literary practices, as well as their home lives, health, and socioeconomic status. As part of the interview process, we asked caregivers to talk about the stories told to their children who were participating in the study. These stories were actually *examples* of told stories; the caregivers were not observed telling the stories to their children in a natural setting. The caregivers were thus engaged in telling us *about* their telling of these stories by answering other related questions while also providing examples of the stories themselves.

Our study employs a grounded theory approach in order to analyze the data extracted from these interviews. Such an approach provides a way to explore qualitative data systematically for patterns, themes, and theoretical constructs (Glaser and Strauss 1967); the raw data involved may consist of interviews, focus groups, oral narratives, and so on. The method can of course be used to generate research questions for further study, but it also allows researchers to begin their inquiry with guiding ideas that frame the domain being explored (Backman and Kyngas 1999:149). One such research question guided this study: what

socializing concepts are present in the stories that Ugandan primary caregivers tell their young children?[2]

The goals of this essay are therefore twofold. First, guided by our research question, we aim to explore particular story examples and describe these stories in relation to the sociocultural ecology of life in Kitengesa. Through this process we hope to provide what Charmaz (2008:10) refers to as "an interpretive portrayal of this world, not an exact picture of it." Second, we will then use the theoretical constructs resulting from our content analysis in order to characterize the socializing concepts inherent in these story examples.

Fig. 1. The original Kitengesa Community Library, built in 2002. Photo by Valeda Dent Goodman.
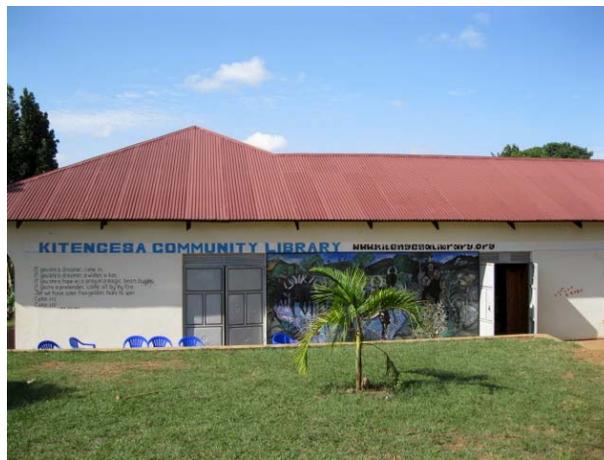
Fig. 2. The new Kitengesa Community Library, built in 2009. Photo by Valeda Dent Goodman.

It is important to point out that the perspectives presented herein are those of Western researchers who readily acknowledge the impact of their own cultural and social biases during the course of this study. Any discovered themes and constructs are certainly colored by this bias. On the other hand, as researchers we have also spent long periods of time over the course of eight years in this village and do indeed have an experiential framework from which to conduct our study. Accordingly, this study is able to make use of a broad constellation of ethnographic experiences to aid in the discovery of patterns, categories, and connections within the story examples. These examples were not told in a vacuum; they were in fact "triangulated with

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[2] In order to answer this question, data were coded by following the steps explicated by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003:7) and according to the constant comparative approach as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967:3), Glaser (1978, 1992), Strauss (1987), and Strauss and Corbin (1998:71). Grounded theory allows researchers to generate research questions and hypotheses after data collection and after careful examination of the data (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003; Strauss and Corbin 1998), and the discovery of categories from the data is one of the strengths of the approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Researchers can also begin the grounded theory process with research questions in the manner described by Backman and Kyngas (1999:149): "The research questions in grounded theory are statements that identify the phenomenon to be studied. The questions are formulated so that they give the researcher the flexibility and freedom to explore the phenomenon in depth."

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003:35) discuss the seven elements of the grounded theory coding process: raw text, relevant text, repeating ideas, themes, theoretical constructs, theoretical narrative, and research concerns. These steps progress from the most elementary to the most sophisticated, with the first step being the initial examination of the raw text. The development of the theoretical constructs is key to surfacing the research concerns. It should be noted that the process of coding the data is iterative rather than linear in nature (Auerbach and Silverstein 2003:35; Strauss and Corbin 1998:71). For this study the original interview transcripts provided the raw text, and the story fragments provided the relevant text.

ethnographic background knowledge" of the researchers (Olshansky 1987:56). Our own interactions with the caregivers, with their children, and with other people in the village, as well as our involvement in local practices and cultural activities, provided a rich palette from which to explore and better understand the socializing aspects of these story examples. This level of interaction was key to understanding the oral traditions and storytelling practices of the culture being studied, much in the way that Schott (1994) has described.

It is also necessary to understand that the story fragments used in this study make up only a small part of a larger set of oral traditions at work in the village where the study took place. Oral traditions are a familiar part of the communication constellation in cultures around the world and may take many forms.[3] Storytelling is just one type of oral tradition, and stories play a role in religion and history, as well as in the actual development of cultures and the self. In many cultures, stories are frequently shared between adult and child. Degh (1969:vii) reminds us that storytelling is actually a complex matrix of factors—the oral narrative, the storyteller, the setting, and the audience—working together to form a "whole in the expression of culture," and Stoeltje (2003:94) suggests that "in studies of African oral traditions two topics have emerged as significant in recent years. The first concerns the interweaving of concepts and practices defined as traditional or indigenous with those originating in the paradigm of modernity, while the second identifies the relevance and the power of gender and sexuality." Each of these sentiments is relevant to this study since the story fragments are being considered within the framework of storytelling as oral tradition.

Background and Theory

The theoretical framework for this study is informed by two primary, related areas: 1) the socializing role of oral stories told within African cultures, and 2) the role that stories play within the parent/child communication framework. Each of these areas certainly merits thorough review; however, for the purposes of this essay a more general overview of their relation to this study must suffice.

Research has demonstrated that oral stories are a powerful medium for communication and socialization within cultures. The context for such socialization practices can be found in the work of Bamberg (1997), who suggests that stories help to create a moral order, and also of Bruner (1990), who explicates the value of the story in sharing morals and values: "The practice of giving our children moral lessons in the form of stories is common not only in western traditions, but in many, perhaps most, other cultures" (cited in Walton and Brewer 2001:308). Walton and Brewer examine the role of the story in helping children become a part of the moral discourse of their culture and the ways in which the narrative "functions to position children as moral agents" (2001:308); they go on to conclude that stories (those told by children and those told to children) can be a critical element in the socialization process "crucial to the transmission

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[3] According to Finnegan (1992:5) oral traditions can be any "unwritten tradition," including those that are "enunciated or transmitted through words." Henige (1982:2) suggests that oral traditions are verbal, non-written, belonging to the people, and typically "recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a culture and have been handed down for at least a few generations."

and re-creation of culture" (330), and they should thus be encouraged. Stories can communicate shared values within a group, contribute to social stability, and promote and maintain the social status quo (MacFadyen 2004). Oral stories in particular play a key role in the transmission of cultural capital and support the ongoing maintenance of beliefs, morals, and rules (Macfadyen 2004).

Jacobson-Widding (1992:19) suggests that African stories may function in the same way as their western counterparts, providing a means to share moral and cultural messages and to "express ambiguous emotions involved in close interpersonal interaction that we all share" within a culturally established framework. These stories can also "epitomize the structural and structuring principles of the public, social order" (10). Such stories may sometimes play upon certain emotions to help create this moral order, and fear works as a particularly good example of this phenomenon. Rachman describes the way in which fear may be transmitted from parent to child within the communication framework (1977:384):

> Information-giving is an inherent part of child-rearing and is carried on by parents and peers in an almost unceasing fashion, particularly in the child's earliest years. It is probable that informational and instructional processes provide the basis for most of our commonly encountered fears of everyday life. Fears acquired informationally are more likely to be mild than severe.

Consideration of cross-cultural differences in how parents talk to and interact with their children is an interesting framework from which to view the story examples collected for this study, particularly because many of these story examples were represented by the caregivers as more of a conversation with their children meant to impart some relevant cultural, moral, or social information. Burns and Radford (2008:194) suggest that children develop within "complex and interactive social relationships, located within social institutions and organizations such as families and communities." In a conversation analysis study designed to explore the interactions between Nigerian parents and their children, Burns and Radford (2008) discovered that the Nigerian mothers' conversations with their children fell into four categories: tuitional modeling (eliciting a desired response through explicit instruction), initiation-response-evaluation (an adult-initiated question to the child, followed by the child's response and evaluation of the answer by the adult), initiation-evaluation (interaction initiated by the child, with response by the adult), and initiation-confirmation-topic pursuit (interaction initiated by the child, with further topic pursuit by the adult). The researchers concluded that the Nigerian mothers' talk was highly instructional, similar to the discourse one might find in a classroom. In another study of Nigerian mothers' conversations with their young children, Trevarthen (1988) found that mothers tend to talk to their (very young) children while they are being fed or changed, and Law (2000) observed that conversation and stories in West African culture heavily emphasize obedience and responsibility. These findings by Trevarthen and Law are similar to observations made during our own study.

The interplay between sociocultural and socioeconomic factors has also been examined in relationship to stories and communication between mothers and children. In general, past researchers have found that poverty plays a major role in the communication patterns between mothers and children, and these themes sometimes surface in local stories. For instance, poverty

often interacts with other social factors to influence how children learn to navigate communication itself (Farran 1982), and as is the case in Uganda, impoverished familial living conditions also have a great impact on children's early development and socialization. As Farran (1982:33) notes, such homes are characterized by great amounts of stimulation but little attention being paid to children who are not still infants.

Further, stories are acts of language, laden with symbolism and meaning, that serve a particular function, especially where children are concerned. Stavans and Goldzweig (2008) suggest that one of the most common types of parent-child interaction is the oral story. Stavans and Goldzweig also contrast stories told at home (an informal setting) with those told at school (a formal setting) and suggest that these different contexts impact how the story is told, why the story is told, who speaks when, and so on. Duranti et al. (2011:2) suggest that language— including stories—is "a fundamental medium in children's development of social and cultural knowledge and sensibilities;" they also assert that "social competence" is cultivated "in and through requesting, questioning, asserting, planning, storytelling, correcting, evaluating, confirming, and disputing" (7), to name just a few such activities. "Language socialization" can therefore be described as that which "examines how children and other novices apprehend and enact the 'context of situation' in relation to the 'context of culture'" (Duranti et al. 2011:1). In the case of the story examples that we ourselves collected for this study, the caregivers may be seen as those with more experience, and their children as the novices; the stories serve the purpose of socializing, guiding, and informing the novices across a variety of different situations. But Duranti et al. caution against seeing language socialization simply as a narrowly defined set of practices (2011:12): "language socialization does not boil down to a set of behaviors that are explicitly and intentionally oriented to enhance a novice's knowledge or skill." Rather, the emphasis should be on the complex matrix of experiences, learning, and interactions among the members of a culture that support the process. In the case of stories, it is this broader mosaic populated by the semiotic forms and cultural interpretations that is important (Duranti et al. 2011:2). Within this framework it is easy to find examples that are relevant to the current study. For instance, Miller et al. (2011) discuss how narrative can be used to challenge children's behaviors. Ochs and Capps (2001) refer to the fact that in many communities the narrative interactions that children have help to frame problems and provide guidance. As we shall see, both of these approaches were present in some of the story examples explored for this study.

Myers provides a higher-level view of the role of both oral stories and children's literature in childhood socialization, stating that "theories of child socialization typically function as synecdoche for broader ideologies of reform or repression" (1989:52). Myers' assertion that children's literature and stories provide a "reconstitution of the child, a locus for personal longing and reformist fantasy alike" (52) that is particularly attractive to women is highly relevant for our own study since the caregivers were women often telling stories with a girl as the main character. Myers states that women may use these forms of communication to "reimagine their own childhoods and invent the future childhoods of their gender in more satisfying forms than unmediated realities proffer" (52).

The Ecology of Life in a Ugandan Village

The sociocultural framework we experienced as researchers is an important component of our study, as it provides an ethnographic backdrop for the relevant themes and constructs. Our study began in 2009 and was renewed in 2011 and again in 2012. During these periods we accumulated many hours of interactions and observations that comprise two large quantitative data sets for our study, but just as important was the time we spent immersing ourselves in the life of the village: getting to know the locals; participating in their cultural and social events; spending time with their families; and visiting their homes, schools, and churches. This ethnographic approach has provided rich data that continue to inform our understanding of life in this small village. Kitengesa cannot be found on most maps; the nearest city is Masaka, which is about ten miles away. The people who live in the village survive mostly through subsistence farming, and most families have incomes of less than $275 US per year.

Fig. 3. A woman taking her cattle to pasture. Photo by Valeda Dent Goodman.

Interview data from our larger study suggest that a number of the participating mothers had husbands who had more than one wife (the area is a mix of both Muslim and Christian religions, and Muslim men may practice polygamy), leaving the mothers or grandmothers alone to care for the home for months at a time (Dent and Goodman 2009). In addition, fathers often left the village to work in the more urban area of Kampala, only to return a few weekends each month (Dent and Goodman 2009). Our interviews also revealed that mothers and grandmothers were often the primary breadwinners for the family, making a living by selling crops or animal products from their small farms (Dent and Goodman 2009). There is no running water in the village, and solar-powered electricity is only available at the Kitengesa Community Library.

Our larger, longitudinal study also explored the health status and health concerns of the primary caregivers in Kitengesa (and Uganda more broadly). Impediments to well-being and health are always present and include disease, famine, threats to hygiene, lack of access to clean water, low educational attainment, and low literacy rates (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2005; UNESCO 2007; UNICEF 2011; World Health Organization 2006), as well as even more sinister dangers such as kidnapping, ritualistic murder and child sacrifice, and familial violence (Li 2005; Whewell 2010). A number of mothers and grandmothers revealed serious, chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, and HIV. Many had nowhere to turn for medical help. There were a number of children in the study who frequently battled malaria and other illnesses (Dent and Goodman

2009). Primary caregivers reported that they sometimes struggled with depression and that they were sometimes unable to care for their children because they felt sad or down (Dent and Goodman 2009).

In terms of childcare and childrearing, our knowledge was again primarily shaped by collected data and observation over extended periods of time. Many of the caregivers participating in our study had more than one child. A companion study conducted by Yellin (forthcoming) also revealed that some of the caregivers had lost a child at some point, and some struggled with symptoms of profound grief. Children in Uganda do not begin formal schooling until age 7, so young children are left to play and interact with other children, siblings, and other family members while their caregivers work. Young children also do chores—it is not uncommon to see children as young as age 4 carrying sticks or water or fruit on their heads or filling water cans at the spring. There are few amenities, and children do not have the luxury of toys, books, or games. Children often make their own toys out of plastic jelly cans (which are used to carry water), sticks, mud, stones, and even refuse they find on open fire pits used to burn garbage. Residue from any of these experiences and activities may find their way into the stories told by the caregivers to their young children.

Fig. 4. Children carrying kindling for their households. Photo by Karen Gubert.

Fig. 5. Children carrying a chicken home. Photo by Valeda Dent Goodman.

We also learned a great deal about the challenges related to literacy and language. Many villagers are eager to learn English because it is the language of trade in many urban areas and nearby countries that do trade with Uganda; for villagers who have larger farms and sell their crops across borders, knowledge of English is an important skill. Younger children learn English in school, but for the most part adults speak the local language of Luganda. The story examples we collected were told in Luganda and carefully translated into English by native Lugandan speakers/research assistants who had worked with the Kitengesa Community Library since 2004.

Overall, the essence of life in this Ugandan village is similar to many others in the developing world where poverty is chronic, resources scarce, and isolation fairly common. On the other hand, the people of the village have an indomitable spirit and a desire to learn about the world around them while contextualizing that knowledge against the backdrop of their history and their own experiences. They are eager to share what it means to be Ugandan, and they are

kind, warm, welcoming, and proud of their culture. These aspects are all relevant in terms of gaining a better understanding of the nature of the story examples told by the caregivers.

Methodology

Participants

Caregivers recruited for this study were previously known by our research assistants in Uganda, and they were required to have at least one child or grandchild between the ages of 5 and 7.[4] From a total of 51 interviews conducted with mothers and grandmothers, twelve were chosen for analysis based on the greater length of their included story examples.[5] Five of these twelve women were members of the Kitengesa Community Library (the site of the study); seven were nonmembers. The age range of the women was from 24 to 67 years. Two of the women were heads of their households. Seven of the women were mothers and five were grandmothers, and all were primary caregivers for the target children in this study. The participants were from roughly similar socioeconomic backgrounds, ones considered extremely poor by Western standards.

Fig. 6. A few of the participants wait in the Library for the interviews to begin. Photo by Karen Gubert.

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[4] IRB approval for this study was granted by Long Island University.

[5] Some caregivers gave very short examples that would have been challenging to work with from a research perspective. For instance, a number of caregivers simply stated that they told their daughters to "do well in school" or "to behave." While these statements are certainly representative of themes that tell us something about the ecology of life within this village, they do not function well as actual story examples.

Procedure

Structured interviews were conducted in connection with our larger set of studies over the course of two and a half weeks and were held in the local secondary school with the aid of a translator.[6] Participants answered 40 questions focusing on the caregivers' reading habits, library use, literacy practices, and storytelling practices, as well as their socioeconomic and health status. The answers to two specific questions from these interviews generated the data relevant to the current essay: "Do you ever tell your children stories?" and "If yes, can you provide an example of a story that you tell to your children?" Caregivers were given as long as they wanted to respond to this second question, and the answer to that question was used to generate the story data; we did not witness the caregivers telling the stories directly to their children.

The transcripts from these interviews were initially read in their entirety. Notes and descriptions about the interviewee, the setting, and the interview itself supplemented our review. Next, the data were initially coded for repeating ideas independently by the two researchers.[7] During this review process we were mindful of factors such as to whom the story was told (whether it was a girl or a boy, for instance) and the context for the story example. Disagreements were addressed by way of periodic discussions during which we referred to our own notes in order to talk through inconsistencies in coding and come to agreement. This iterative process resulted in each of the repeating ideas eventually being included in the next methodological phase. Once the repeating ideas were solidified, we again reviewed the data to surface emergent themes. This process included each researcher working independently in order to group the repeating ideas into meaningful categories by looking for patterns and relationships among coded terms.[8] Disagreements were again addressed by way of periodic discussions utilizing notes, during which time we would eventually come to agreement about which categories to include as we moved forward. Those categories were then consolidated into smaller groups. Once the themes were consolidated, we shared our analyses with each other, referring back to the transcripts and repeating ideas to demonstrate how we had arrived at our results. We next reviewed the themes in order to surface emergent theoretical constructs. A constant comparative method also guided this phase of the analysis. Those themes that showed up most often in the results contributed to the three major constructs as detailed in the next section.

"Analytical exhaustivity" as defined by Ellis (1993:478) was the goal at each stage of the work. Ellis states that "the categories and properties derived should be able to subsume completely any relevant information contained in the transcripts, and no major category or property should remain unidentified" (478). He further clarifies that the final categories should apply "with some generality across the sample" (478). By using these guidelines, we were

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[6] The interviews each took approximately one hour to administer and were all translated simultaneously from the native Luganda to English through a translator as they were being conducted. The videotaped sessions were later transcribed into text by students from Long Island University's clinical psychology doctoral program.

[7] See note 2 for further information concerning the theoretical framework according to which data coding was performed. In actual practice, a spreadsheet was used to capture and tally the words, concepts, and ideas that recurred in the transcripts. The repeating ideas provided the unit of analysis for calculating initial inter-rater reliability, which was r = .81.

[8] The process is known as axial coding.

reasonably certain that we had reached these goals in our coding, and that we had thereby addressed the initial research question about the socializing concepts in these story examples.

Results

The outcome of the content analysis revealed three major socializing concepts (presented as theoretical constructs) that answered our initial research question:

1) Punishment and blessings
2) Moral/acceptable behavior versus immoral/unacceptable behavior
3) Attachment (separation/abandonment versus searching/reunion)

The discovery of these concepts does not imply that these are the *only* concepts in Ugandan caregivers' stories; rather, for the data that were reviewed, these were the constructs that emerged. The story examples were themselves varied and engaging, and in some cases the caregivers were extremely animated and told their stories with relish and great theatrics. We were therefore mindful of the fact that the caregivers' recounting of the story examples probably differed from the way the stories were actually told in their naturalistic settings; in fact, the caregivers were "performing" these stories for the interviewer.[9] Each construct is discussed in detail below in relation to the context of rural life in this part of Uganda and in relation to the theoretical framework for the study.

Construct 1: Punishment and Blessings

Characters in the story examples frequently experienced either punishments or blessings, depending on their actions. This was a recurrent and strong socializing concept that framed many of the stories. Many of the story examples featured girls as the main characters, and often these characters met with some fateful end or punishment if they behaved in a socially unacceptable way. A number of the story examples within this construct focused on marriage, the importance of fulfilling marital duties, and doing the household work required of a wife. These tales may therefore serve to socialize girls to act appropriately within marriage—a notion supported by responses from women when interviewed about their life in the village. When asked "What is the meaning of children?" a number of the women responded that female children "fetch a high bride price" (Dent and Goodman 2009). The idea that daughters may be sold as property may influence the need for this type of socialization, for no man in this community would want a badly behaving bride.

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[9] It is also important to note that the provenance of these stories was not always clear; some of the stories were reported to have been passed from generation to generation, while other caregivers shared that their examples were original creations. There were even stories that were repeated by a number of caregivers. *Njabala the Lazy One* is a good example of this type of common story and can actually be found in book form (Ssewankambo 1998); however, it is unclear whether the story was first an orally circulated traditional story that someone eventually put into print or the oral versions derive completely from the published tale. None of the caregivers indicated that their stories were from a library or from a book that they had read, but these possibilities cannot be ruled out.

The story of "Balinda" is a good example of a tale that combines marriage and gender-role elements with those of punishments and blessings (subject #0201022, transcript p. 2):[10]

> At one time when they go to the forest to fetch firewood. So people are fetching firewood, collecting firewood for hut. She was seated, Balinda was seated. So the beastie came, so in the process of bringing that firewood, that beast had to marry Balinda. When Balinda put the firewood on her head, that beastie followed Balinda. So the beast was like, "Balinda, wait for me!" Balinda was crying, then her friends were like, "You never wanted to collect the firewood, let it follow you. . . . Let the beast follow you." So they come with it home, Balinda come with this beast at home. So the beast told the parents that "we made an agreement with Balinda, that I have to collect her firewood, and every time I have to take her home, and she has to cook for me." So, Balinda cried. So what we learn in this story, that you have to work in this world, not sit. If you want free things, you end up getting what? Problems. So Balinda was married to the . . . to the monster, to the beast. The beast, yes, because she was lazy.

In the story, Balinda must marry a beast as her punishment because she failed to do her chores. The story suggests that punishment is the consequence for lazy behavior. Laziness was a recurring idea in a number of the stories, including the story (told by a number of the mothers and grandmothers) of "Njabala," a young girl who was married but lost her husband because she "failed to fulfill all the marital duties" (subject #1124021, transcript p. 4). The story of "Whengivla" also featured a young, married girl who was punished when her husband left her because "she was very lazy at home" (subject #0925021, transcript p. 2).

Female identity and the related theme of marriage are common socializing concepts in African stories. According to Jacobson-Widding (1993) these themes are often tied to punishment, blessings, and social norms. Within a study of individual identity in African storytelling, Jacobson-Widding describes stories that feature a girl who was destined to "assume an identity conferred to her by the official social system" and another story where a girl "finds her identity by relying on her own inner resources" (1993:28). The girl in the latter story faced punishment and disapproval from her community.

Lieberman (1972:386) points out that "marriage is the fulcrum and major event of nearly every fairy tale; it is the reward for girls, or sometimes their punishment." She states that through stories, children "learn behavioral and associational patterns, value systems, and how to predict the consequences of specific acts or circumstances. Among other things, these tales present a picture of sexual roles, behavior, and psychology, and a way of predicting outcome or fate according to sex" (384). Specifically, she suggests that the impact of some of the more traditional fairy tale stories on women is particularly worrisome (385):

> Millions of women must surely have formed their psycho-sexual self-concepts, and their ideas of what they could or could not accomplish, what sort of behavior would be rewarded, and of the nature of reward itself, in part from their favorite fairy tales. These stories have been made the

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[10] The translations provided within this essay are presented as originally captured during the interview and have not been altered with respect to any perceived grammatical irregularities.

repositories of the dreams, hopes, and fantasies of generations of girls.

While these Ugandan mothers and grandmothers were not telling the same traditional fairy tales to which Lieberman refers (for instance, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, or *Hansel and Gretel*), there are marked similarities with regard to the girls' portrayals and their punishments or blessings in these stories. Not one of the mothers' or grandmothers' stories featured a marriage with a happy outcome or without punishment, nor did any of the marriage stories feature a girl who was a heroine.

   While one or two of the stories included boys, most of the stories featured girls and women. The structure of these stories may also then serve another socializing purpose—that of maintaining the dominant social order in this culture, which is both fiercely patriarchal and polygamist (Gordon 1998; Mayambala 1997; Mirembe and Davies 2001). It is notable that none of the story examples featured a boy as the actual protagonist, perhaps implying that boys do not have to learn how to behave or be moral—that is the domain of girls. Both genders therefore learn that females are in a subservient role within the culture and that society's rules apply to only one gender.

   One of the most interesting punishment/blessings story examples we discovered was about a woman who is digging in her garden when she encounters something mysterious in the ground. Against the advice of her friends, who are fearful and tell her not to continue digging, she tries to see what it is. At once, her face begins to deform. She goes to a church for healing, despite her friends telling her that the trip will not help. She is then healed and able to testify to her friends about the power of God: "Have you seen the powers of God?" (subject #0201022, p. 2) she asks them. The story is clearly meant to highlight the power of God's ability to heal, but a punishment for curiosity and knowledge-seeking must first take place.

   One obvious message is that children who disobey a parent are likely to wind up hurt or in some kind of trouble. As one mother stated when asked about her story (subject #0907032, transcript p.9), "it teaches children to behave." Jacobson-Widding (1993) supports this notion and suggests that teaching children obedience, correct behavior, and good manners is "a woman's prime duty" (10) in several African cultures; "unconditional obedience to those who are bigger than yourself" (10) is a key socializing message. Consider the story example of a child walking alone at night, against her parents' advice, when a creature attaches itself to the child's back (subject #1202031, transcript p.1):

> There was a child that used to walk at night, many times. And there was a mask-like creature that attached to her, to her back when she was . . . walking at night. And that one teaches children not to move at night.

In another example, one twin is eaten by a monster because she disobeys a parent (subject #0907032, transcript p.7):

> These two twins went to the garden. And mom told them that you know what, it is time to go back home. So one decided to remain in the garden, then the one come with the mom. The one who remained behind was eaten by a beast.

Finally, there is within this construct the physical embodiment of the punishment, the essence of which is represented by monsters and beasts. Note that beasts appear in three of the stories mentioned above.

Construct 2: Moral/Acceptable Behavior versus Immoral/Unacceptable Behavior

A wife who does not fulfill her marital duties or is lazy is guilty of morally unacceptable behavior, as was the case in the story of "Balinda," who will never be able to reverse the ill-fated outcome of her laziness. "Njabala" is an additional story that features a lazy girl who does not fulfill her duties as a wife. The suicide story example below also contains socializing elements related to morally unacceptable behavior and punishment. The body of a father who commits suicide is publicly beaten in order to discourage others from committing the same act, which is culturally perceived as sinful (subject #0712042, transcript p. 4):

> She comes back and then finds the dad has committed suicide. The dead body. Was beaten and buried. So when they see the dead body being beaten, they can't also commit suicide because they will also fear to be beaten. After they're dead.

There were, on the other hand, a few story examples that featured morally acceptable behavior. For instance, in "Nakato" a girl has worked hard to plant millet in her garden. As she prepares to cut her millet, she is serenaded by birds who beg her to leave the millet for them, and she obliges (subject #1224032, transcript p. 5):

> A tale, where a girl left home to cut millet in the garden, while she was cutting these, I mean, the, the millet, then there were these birds, small birds, and then they were singing. . . . Yeah, birds were singing to this girl to leave us, we eat our millet, millet of our lives, those were birds singing to eat.

Nakato's behavior is morally acceptable on two levels. First, she is engaged in physical labor (which Balinda and Njabala refused to do), and second, she provides sustenance for the birds in her garden. In this way, the concepts of hard work and generosity are supported.

Construct 3: Attachment (Separation/Abandonment versus Searching/Reunion)

Lieberman (1972) discusses the themes of parental abandonment and helplessness in traditional fairy tales, and these elements appeared in some of our story examples. Talmon (2010) suggests that for children who have experienced the loss or abandonment of a primary caregiver, stories and fairy tales in which the mother is absent may serve as a "protective factor or a surrogate for the absent mother" and, in some cases, provide a "holding environment from which to develop a secure attachment and gain mastery over their traumatic experiences" (2). In terms of this study, three caregivers—in this case, grandmothers—disclosed that the mothers of their grandchildren had died from AIDS, so the loss of a mother was certainly real for some of these children. As a socializing concept, attachment is a complex topic beyond the scope of this

essay, but generally attachment seemed to be related to warnings about straying too far from parents.

A number of the story examples featured children who are either left alone or are walking alone. Abandonment is common in Kitengesa, and it is not unusual to find children who are wandering the roads, uncared for and basically fending for themselves. We were told that children tend to be unattended for long stretches of time while parents are away working or tending to farming, and parents may also leave children with extended family members when they themselves are unable to care for them. During our stay in the village, a number of adults and children also talked about the dangers of child-kidnappings and child-sacrifice by "witch-doctors" (cf. Whewell 2010). It was a subject frequently on the minds of the villagers, despite the fact that the majority of these acts were rumored to have taken place in the northern part of the country. We ourselves often observed very young children walking the roads alone at night, so the stories and their included warnings did indeed seem especially relevant.

In the suicide story, the children are abandoned by both their parents—first, by the mother who is out looking for food, then by the father who commits suicide (subject #0712042, transcript p. 4):

> That once upon a time, there was a man who married his wife. They produced kid, two kids. That there came a dry spell, famine. The mommy goes to look for the kid, goes to look for the food. She comes back and then finds the dad has committed suicide. The mommy comes back, finds the children were just alone. The dad has committed suicide. People gathered when mommy came back; she was so alone and people gathered. That the dead body was beaten . . . the dead body. Was beaten and buried. But after bury, burial and funeral, that after the family just dismantled, like the mom went in a different direction, and the kids went away because the mom could not look after these. The story ends there. This one to bring the mind from the same thing the dad did. So when they see the dead body being beaten, they can't also commit suicide because they will also fear to be beaten. After they're dead.

At the end of the story, the mother abandons the children again because she cannot look after them. The image of the father's body being beaten also heightens the fact that the father is never coming back, that he has permanently abandoned his family. Paradoxically, however, the fact that the beating after death is to be feared by the living suggests a denial of death and nurtures the unconscious wish that death is not the ultimate separation. Fairy tales that contain ghosts also nurture this wish that death does not represent a permanent separation.

Further Discussion

The theoretical framework for this study was informed by two primary areas: 1) the socializing role of oral stories told within African cultures, and 2) the role that stories play within the parent/child communication framework. While Stavans and Goldzweig (2008) are correct in their assertion that storytelling as a form of parent-child oral interaction acts as a socializing activity in general, the findings of the current study suggest that socialization practices may

differ from culture to culture within the African diaspora. For instance, Burns and Radford discovered that the Nigerian mothers' conversations with their children (including conversations made up of stories) were highly instructional and bore a similarity to the discourse one might find in a classroom; these researchers detailed four categories for this type of talk (2008:199):

1) tuitional modeling (eliciting a desired response through explicit instruction)
2) initiation-response-evaluation (an adult-initiated question to the child followed by the child's response and evaluation of the answer by the adult)
3) initiation-evaluation (interaction initiated by the child, with response by the adult)
4) initiation-confirmation-topic pursuit (interaction initiated by the child, with further topic pursuit by the adult)

The story examples explored in this study, however, were different in that they did not fall into any of these four categories. This variation does not mean that Ugandan stories are never instructional, but since we were unable to observe the children's responses to these story examples, it remains unclear whether they were designed to elicit specific responses—perhaps of an instructional nature.

Jacobson-Widding states that African stories can "express ambiguous emotions involved in close interpersonal interaction that we all share" (1992:19), and this study supports that notion. Our collected story examples featured a variety of close interpersonal relationships and characters experiencing many different emotions, and quite often these emotional messages were transmitted as Rachman (1977) described. Our findings can also be placed within the context of language socialization. Miller et al. (2011:198) state that stories can be used to highlight a child's unacceptable behavior; such a function is clearly seen in the story about Balinda and also in the story example about Njabala. Lastly, Myers (1989:52) describes the role of stories in the reconstitution of the child as a reflection of the storyteller (in this case, the female storyteller) who may be using stories to reimagine her own childhood. While this role might not be immediately apparent in the story examples of this study, the fact that the content typically focused on the female's acceptable behavior within the marriage framework could be seen as a mother or grandmother cautioning a young girl not to make the kinds of mistakes that they themselves or others had made in the past.

Limitations

There are a variety of limitations on this study. The stories used were *examples* of told stories—the caregivers were not actually observed telling the stories to their children in a natural setting. Stories told in such a setting may have varied in content or delivery. The story examples presented here have also been reduced to fragments of text for research purposes, which may impact the overall meaning. Additionally, the caregiver sample collected in this study might not accurately represent the population of rural Ugandan caregivers. And translation, of course, always presents further challenges. The stories in this study were translated from Luganda to English, and certain limitations related to meaning may therefore be present. Our inherent bias as

researchers may also be seen as a limitation. While we readily acknowledge the impact of our own cultural and social perspectives on the exploration and explanation of the themes, we are at the same time aware of this bias and used a variety of strategies (for instance, grounding our findings in the relevant literature) to reduce its impact. Finally, 51 caregivers answered the questions about stories and storytelling, yet we selected only 12 story examples for use in this essay. As mentioned earlier, our choice was primarily a result of some caregivers giving only very short examples that would have been challenging to work with from a research perspective, but this selection could also be viewed as a limitation in that the integrity of that portion of the data set was compromised and not used in its entirety; however, we reason that the story examples alone can still provide useful information.

Directions for Future Research

Further exploration might include the collection of stories by the same set of caregivers told in a natural setting to their children. This method of collection would address the concern that the way the story examples were obtained for the current study did not allow for the observation of the interaction between caregiver and child—an important component for any study exploring storytelling. In addition to the collection of stories told in the home environment, ethnographic interviews (which would be informed in part by the content of the stories) might be conducted with the female caregivers to examine their concept of women's roles within this rural Ugandan setting. Such interviews would thus ultimately allow further investigation of the idea promoted by Myers (1989:52), who suggested that women may sometimes project their own fears, problems, and warnings onto their children through the telling of certain stories.

Fig. 7. The research team: Julius Ssentume, Geoff Goodman, Valeda Dent, Ssewa Baker, and Karen Gubert. Photo by Kate Parry.

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