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On Concealed Vulnerability: Interrogating Costs of Fractured Masculinities in Western Uganda

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Abstract:

Most studies on masculinity portray men as beneficiaries of male privilege and universally benefiting from a patriarchal system, they knowingly or unknowingly create. Based on an ethnographic inquiry, this article explores untold complex and taken for granted masculinity experiences among men in Kigezi western Uganda (among the Bakiga). We divulge into Bakiga men's space and unravel how they either adhere to socially masculinity and/or negotiate space to defy the constructed notion of a 'real man'. Findings indicate that there are vulnerabilities concealed beneath the masculine privilege which is a source of frustration and that pushes some men into relative self-destruction. Men's vulnerabilities like old age abandonment by children were attributed to impossible social expectations and failure to accept impossibilities, dwindling role model effect, distorted male entitlements and women's subtle takeover.

Keywords: *Ideal man, Bakiga, masculinity, vulnerability*

1. Introduction

While many studies are coming to a consensus that masculinities are socially constructed, changing across time (history) and space (culture), within societies and multiple (Connell's 1987; 2002), the portrayal of men as essentially privileged and women subordinate problematic continues to prevail (Clowes, 2013; Coston and Kimmel, 2012). Key in these debates is that there is no single masculinity but rather multiple masculinities arranged in a hierarchical order with the most ideal at any given time or in a given place being 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1987; 2002). Although the hegemonic masculinity model has been critiqued for its compromising effect on the understanding of masculinities as fluid, complex and overlapping identities, it helps us understand the variations. This study picks on hegemonic masculinity category a starting point to analyse changes, continuities and fractures. The model provides an analytical tool to inform the understanding the widely acceptable masculine practices and norms- some of which are performed through being a 'proper'/'real' men and in the portrayal of men not being 'manly' enough hence subordinated and/or marginalised masculinities. In this study, the hegemonic masculinity model helped in analysing the multiple categories of masculinity as omushaijja, omushaijja nyeishaijja, akashaijja, ekishaijja/orushaijja) among the Bakiga over a period of time.

Masculinity like femininity is explained by several theories among which is sex role which asserts that humans learn from society's institutions to behave in ways appropriate to their sex where men are presumed aggressive, rational, dominant, and objective while women are passive, intuitive, submissive, and subjective, loving, communication, beauty, and relationships. The earliest attempt by Talcott Parsons (1954) portrayed masculinity as an internalised male sex role which shifts from biological determinism. His argument that a man's role is instrumental (influential, active) concerned mainly with bread winning cannot explain the contrary behaviours of men was critiqued by feminists. Ann Oakley (1974) argued that there is no natural or allocation of social roles on the basis of sex there by refuting the categorisation masculine of feminine roles except child bearing that performed exclusively by females. Other scholars (Stacey and Thorne, 1985) and Connell 1985) rejected the sex role theory's explanations of gender division of labour influenced by ones sex because of its inadequacy to explain why gender relations continuously change over time.

Drawing on critical studies of masculinities and post-structural feminist thought, this study joins the growing scholarship (Marit and Munkejord, 2015; Smith, Parrott, Swartout and Tharp 2015; Coston and Kimmel, 2012) on rejecting the notion universal categorised as powerful and privileged versus universal woman constructed as subordinate. Rather, adopts the approach that these are heterogeneous categories of masculinities actively participating in the gendering of their identities, conforming or resisting changes in social norms and practices that benefit or disadvantage them. The purpose of this study was to explore the men's lived experiences and performance of masculinities in the changing gender terrain where factors that buttressed strong masculinity among the Bakiga seem to be crumbling. The pursued question was therefore, how men as individuals and as a collective are negotiating the vulnerabilities imposed by shifting masculinities among the Bakiga.

Notably, while feminism has helped women to question their positionality and identities according to different societies (Tong, 2009; Kopano Ratele 2013), men continue to live in what Goldberg (1976) refer to as male harness if

not false self-image. Although this was over four decades ago, there are current studies on masculinities calling for understanding men's position and interests by exploring their experiences just as femininities (Coston and Kimmel's, 2012; Pease, 2000; Yusupova, 2016).

Though most societies perpetuated men's absolute power and enacted it as laws which pushed women to a low status leading to low self-esteem (Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, 2013; Tamale, 2005; Boender, Malhotra, & Schuler, 2002), there has been some contestations that seem to loosen the grip of patriarchy on women. This article emanates from a broader study on revisiting masculinities exploring men's experiences of verbalised and unverballed vulnerability as they keep holding onto the male privilege. Aware of Coston and Kimmel's (2012) argument that privilege is invisible to the beholders we asked men to tell us the benefits and regrets about being a man. The question explored their stance about male privilege in a changing world where feminist movements, anti-racism and human rights activism, have contested unequal gender relations. This study therefore comes in to unravel the possible concealed vulnerabilities that silently bear for the privileges claimed in the name of performing masculinity.

2. A Note on Methodology

The research on which this article is based was conducted in South West Ugandan districts of Kabale and Rukiga in 2018 Western Uganda- purposively selected as a home district to ease the process of capturing men's stories in their language without distortions through interpretations. To capture changing trends in the understanding of masculinity, the researchers applied a purely qualitative approach based on a historical analysis of men's experiences and employed phenomenological research design that privileges participants' accounts, world view and their experiential claims (Clifton et al., 2001).

The primary selection of participants factored in the principle of willingness and appropriateness of participants and information richness and adequacy as advanced by Fossey, et al (2002). Snowballing and purposeful sampling were therefore employed to consider different age groups, education levels, marital status and socio – economic status.

Four community dialogues (two for a group of men only and two for men and women mixed group); four key informants and eighteen life histories with men of different socio-economic statuses were conducted. The interviews were augmented by desk based research done throughout the research period. To capture what influences positions on changing gender relations, the implications for their masculinity and the family relations, we employed life history interviewing. The method facilitated enlisting of male participants' memorised stories as well as their understanding of changes over the past 10-20 years or 30-50 years depending on one's age. The Life histories also provided insights into the men's often concealed experiences of vulnerability, expectations and performances of masculinity among the Bakiga in western Uganda. The views of the community members, we recollected through community dialogues in a more nuanced manner that gave the participants an opportunity to express themselves. The Government of Malawi, (2007) defines a community dialogue as:

...an interactive participatory communication process of sharing information between people or groups of people aimed at reaching a common understanding and workable solution. Unlike debate, community dialogues emphasize listening to deepen understanding and develops common perspectives and goals and allows participants to express their own views and interests (p.13).

While the dialogues with men only captured their stories and experiences that shape their positionality the mixed dialogue group (men and women) created an opportunity for contestations and revelations that helped men to reflect momentarily about women's perceptions of their male privileges. Four key informant interviews conducted with a religious leader, a retired politician, a farmer and an opinion leader on Bakiga cultural and linguistic dynamics helped together more societal views about masculinities and historical changes from a technical perspective. The interviews were conducted in an interactive and conversational manner which gave participants a chance to share deep understanding of their lived experiences as men who are perceived as advantaged but who seemed to be facing multiple and complex challenges due to their social position as men.

A comprehensive documentary analysis for historical information was conducted for a clear understanding of some traditions and gender practices.

2.1. Men's Vulnerability: A Heavy Price for Masculine Privilege?

Vulnerability is socially constructed just like masculinity and femininity. While it is common to portray women as the vulnerable and depict men as privileged, this article takes a contrary stance by arguing that men are not a homogenous category and heterogeneously enjoy masculine privilege with some probably at the periphery. When men were asked a question "what are your worries or regrets about being a man?" the responses revealed that compared to the commonly taken for granted view, men are vulnerable and suffer in silence. They are unaware of their disadvantages under the guise of being masculine and seem to bear a high cost as the analysis proceeds to elaborate. What would turn men, constructed as 'top dogs' vulnerable? Listening to men's narratives particularly on learning to perform masculinity in conformity with the narrow definitions of masculinity in pursuit of status and privilege made us reflect on the contradictions. During the men's dialogue, men expressed their contemporary experiences, full of benefits, flaws and regrets that certainly left their position of advantaged hanging. Several propositions were advanced to explain men's experiences victims of the system supposed to benefit them.

Listening to men's appreciated good masculine attributes, the rigid definition of men's roles and responsibilities and the endless pressure on men to perform masculinity becomes clearer. While this pressure may be intangible, heavily

suppressed, indirect and hidden it could easily contribute to male rage sometimes manifested in their unusual behaviours or social engagements. A 69year old man expressed his frustration of being a man:

After getting married, I regret and say I wish I left marrying. Naturally you have the urge to marry, you desire a woman but immediately after the marriage, the wife gets pregnant, you realize you don't have money to buy 'engonzi' or baby sheets, medical expenses...transport to the hospital. The burden starts, children will need school fees, and you find you don't have land to grow crops for food. All this happens because you married and as a man you are expected to take care of your wife and children... (Muhesi, 69years, Life History).

Muhesi's lamentation, explicitly reveals how men have not been trained to willingly resist societal pressure towards their sanctified roles/expectations even if it becomes impossible for them to handle. He wrestles with the inner pressure to affirm his dominance and perform masculinity by providing for his family irrespective of whether this might lead to self- stifling and distress. His expression further positions men indirectly and symbolically as sex objects- loved when they have money and can provide or equating masculinity with provisioning. Doesn't this create a burden on men especially in harsh economy like Uganda? Yet failure to provide constructs him as a useless man. Couldn't there be another reference point such as being a humble and supportive caring masculinity to save those with limited material resources?

A story was told of man in Kabale who failed to take care of his wife and children and disappeared only to be found with another woman. When asked about his wayward behaviour, he confessed that he had found a woman who is able to take care of herself, her children give him a place of abode as well as sexual services. However, men who are stuck in their rigid masculine unwritten text felt that is embarrassing not only to the man as an individual but as Bakiga men collectively as one elder said:

That is death. Do you still think you are a man when you are staying in a woman's house and she feeds you? Obwe niwe orebaara omubashaija? [can you be counted as man?] I would rather go and throw myself in Lake Bunyonyi (Mbwijano, 54years, Kitumba dialogue).

In another discussion, a 38 year old man said he would rather die or become an alcoholic than tell his wife that he cannot handle the family. Remarkably, in pursuit of maintaining masculine image, most men are losing it unknowingly. 'Acting' hegemonic masculinity when they are actually falling through the cracks especially in marriage and becoming a stumbling block for the younger men as one Key informant interviewee explained using as a case scenario below:

Someone challenged me. Why are you telling me marry yet I am always in the bar at midnight with married men, who fear going back home? If you are married, why do you keep in the bar with us unmarried people?... Do you want me to start getting scared of going back home?... (Key informant, Manzi, 77years, Kamwezi)

Conversations with men revealed that majority are living in the shadows of a legendary masculinity-performance of masculinity considered normal. They cited myths that a man should not tell his wife his source of income/ wealth. However, Omugurusi Karwemera challenged this notion where some men think it is unmanly and unmasculine to share their deals or incomes with their wives:

"... I would wish you to tell men it is important to accept what you cannot manage or what you have failed to do" nothing brings happiness in a home than when you work hand in hand with your wife. For us and I am now 93 years, I and my wife have one bank account and whoever goes there withdraws the money. I have seen people where you lose someone and the person who stays behind starts borrowing everywhere because they have no access to each other resources...

In Omugurusi Karwemera's opinion, men and women benefit from cooperating and sharing limited resources. On the other hand it could also mean that not all men's masculinity performance should be measured using the same reference points. While there are those who qualify to fit in the label of an ideal man, those fall through the cracks should also be accepted.

2.2. Dwindling Role Model Effect

Male roles used to mentor and train men to learn and maintain masculinity. An elder recalled his old times we used enjoy supremacy and left the same legacy, this has changed:

"If you're a dad, what kind of mark are you, leaving on your children, especially your sons? Do you realize that your little boys are watching and trying to figure out what maleness is all about, and you're their model" During our days, we had role models, we were trained to be men, but how many times have boys sat down with old men and talked to them? ... about their cultures? So how do the young men learn to be men?

Could the above expression mean that men are blamed for circumstances beyond their control? Young men and boys having few male models to identify with during their passage into adulthood, deprive them of the grooming and preparation for their contextual masculinity demands. Hence expecting them to become idealis unrealistic though they are still blamed for noncompliance to the standard they have no clue about.

Relatedly, the father figure/role models more often presents itself with the image of a punisher, uninvolved, absent or present in a 'terrorist' mode was discussed at length. Men accused women of tarnishing their image against their children citing cases where mothers threaten their sons when they misbehave that they will report them to their fathers. To men, this makes the father figure not only a rare parent but a feared one. While men claimed that they used tough faces and actions to help their boys grow into responsible young men, this could inadvertently recreate the inherent vulnerabilities. Such fathers' behaviour not only deprives boys of role models but also shrinks children's future love and care for their fathers and leads to men's abandonment in old age. It's not surprising as men's expressed their dissatisfaction that children care for their mothers more than fathers. Cases of abandoned men were said to be increasing because when their wives fall sick they are taken Kampala [referring to the cities/towns] for treatment when children

recall what the mothers went through with them in their childhood. On the contrary, when fathers are sick, the children send medicine rather than taking them to the city. It is even worse when the mothers die. It was mentioned that children forget about the father in the village but if the father dies, they tend to build a new house for their mother take her to the city. Accordingly, men become vulnerable and abandoned which they were never prepared for- a situation likely to quicken their deaths as if appropriate masculinity traits seem to be preparing men for a lonely life in their old age.

The above narrative points to a deeper problem of the missing father. Father-children relationship is important and it is needed most during the formative ages of 1 to 9 years. While some men accused women of black mailing them against their children, others agreed that there are men who have veered away from the normalcy. A male catechist in the men only dialogue in Kitumbaⁱⁱ said that those men who feel cheated by their wives and are suffering should not blame but reclaim their positionality.

"You see when the mother is busy bonding with the child the father is away seated nearby trading centers and towns conversing with other men maybe involved in sports betting, drinking alcohol or just chatting with fellow men ... so in the old age this man will be abandoned. This is commonly seen when a woman in a family dies, children abandon that family completely even when their father is still alive or come and take the land and other things you would have worked for... But once the father dies and the woman is there, the children and that family will continue thriving. As men, we need to go back to our roles and take back our control (Muhesi, 63 years, Kitumba, Men's Dialogue).

Muhesi expresses the agony of men failing to perform their socially constructed masculinity and implores them to reclaim their lost sanctioned position. Omugurusi Karwemera disputed the allegation that women black mail fathers. He used the mother instinct to explain why children like their mothers when they grow up but advised men to buy their bonding with playing significant roles as children are growing up.

A mother is the one "owashkekukire nekisha kyawampambura" meaning that mothers get connected to their children as their experience labour pains while for us men only 'deposit or spit' and go away only to come back and think you should benefit from the child more than the one who carried for 9 months. This is worse with some of the men who do not play significant roles in the lives of their children. There are times when the reasoning capacity of people become low and yet others take things for granted but the truth is they do not know how much they have made loses...

In other words, men should know that bonding with their children is hard work unlike mothers whose bonding may come 'naturally'. The conversation on men stepping back dominated the debate as illustrated by the following voices:

... "if I get school fees and pocket money from my mother... when I come back from school, father is absent and perhaps comes after I have slept, what do you want me to think of such a father? Men don't know that they are abandoning children and when the children study and get better, they will abandon them too in their old age, at the time they need them most...in the process they have abandoned families responsibilities especially caring for children to women... eventually children will run away from them when they need them most (Ainamani, 38 years, Kitumba).

Madam, I want to tell you that some of us men have lost the battle. Because the focus has been on girls and women, the boy has been neglected and no wonder we find many men who have remained boys-they are not even boys but stunted boys. They are not men and they not boys, they fear responsibility and want to be... I don't know what to call them... (Robert aged 25 years, Kamwezi).

You have said that some men are ever drunk so when the children come home they give bank slips to the mum. After that the mother will come in the bedroom and press you to bring the little money you have and she will return to the children that you know very well your father is a drunkard so take this half I have got...It is the woman who still goes to school to plead when she will pay the balance of fees, the children know it's the mother who cares... When the child grows and gets a job he/she will give the mother UGX200,000 to put to proper use and for you like the child grew up thinking you are always drunk, may give you 20,000 to blow at the bar (Kitumba dialogue, Muhesi, 63years).

The three voices depict the losses men make in a world of unrealistic expectations. Notably, men's aloofness from children and failure to become role models lands them into abandonment or 'old age masculinity' where they are ready to accept dependency on their children who also become aloof. The agony in the above quotes indicate the inherent invisible vulnerabilities within the masculinity constructions.

2.3. Distorted Male Entitlements

Masculinity entitlements in seem to be reducing. In the Kikiga tradition, men worked hard for their entitlements including sexual rights unlike today where there are men who think they are just entitled to women's bodies which older men perceived as a clear crisis if not confusion. Omugurusi Karwemeraⁱⁱⁱ expressed his dissatisfaction with men who want to have their sexual entitlements with women who have to fend for their families. In addition to demanding sexual entitlements, such men feel entitled to food that they do not produce as women described them "our men have become bread eaters rather than bread winners-causing food insecurity". While in the 1940s to early 70s Bakiga men were tilling the land or those who did not have enough land migrated to look for it in pursuit of fending for their families today, the men in their youthful ages are thinking of stealing money to buy waragi[alcohol]. The dramatic and rapid shift in their mind set is a threat not only women but also to themselves.

Both men and women agreed that there are many men who failing to perform their socially constructed masculine roles although they cannot accept their inadequacy. Women amplified this view that some of them have been married to 'women' not that because their husbands are not performing socially accepted masculinity roles. Other women refer to themselves as married widows meaning that their husbands ably produce children with them and are absent in their lives or are as good as dead. One elder in the dialogue added that "such men are very efficient on producing children because that is all they think about" What came out clearly is that the men 'who are not men' are easily identified because they are

always fighting for approval or affirmation asking children questions like “you children, don't you know that I am your father? Or asking the wife “Don't you know that I am your husband? Who married you? In such cases, Older men described those cases as “just living in the shadow of men” The number of married widows was said to be increasing because men are falling by the way side because:

“I think... when women start making money they save more than men save. After that spell of being able to save and men trying to be men at home then you have now known that you can also invest, you see when you invest you multiply your wealth, and when a woman's wealth increases, she gains power that threatens a man”. Because you are becoming a man, now like the way you [referring to the researchers] are working ...making money, you buy land, dress nicely, you make hair which I have not invested in, ... then I start feeling useless. In the process I start drinking or getting depressed.

The impression given in the above quotation is that women are taking over the roles of men and even being constructed as becoming men. Without falling into trap of believing that women are becoming men, it could be that they are demystifying the long feared male power and dominance.

The notion that women are taking over men was also explained by Ainemani that in most homes Kabale: the head of the family is a woman that's what is happening and nobody would doubt that ... where a child asks for books and you [the man] tells them ask your mother, I want school fees...ask your mother... men don't know that somehow you are pushing these children away. This makes the man useless to the wife and children...

In essence, he presents women's spending power in some contexts to magnify men's 'uselessness' or absence that give women space to take over the socially ascribed roles This confirms Akello's (2014) argument that women's improving economic muscle challenges the notion of equating financial dominance to masculinity.

When a man has no money, his masculinity world crumbles on him and buying waragi[alcohol] might be the only escape route. In both dialogues in Kitumba and Kamwezi women described men who do not have money as parasites while men in Kitumba described them as “basyo” described to mean as men who are frustrated and resort to drinking alcohol, do not provide for their families or pay for their children's school fees, a man who has no use but whose work is to sleep, he leaves all the responsibility to his wife or “giving your manhood to your wife”. Such a man according to the society has lost masculine traits because his home will be called after the woman as “twaza owa Beatrice (meaning that we are going to Beatrice's home) yet the husband is still living”.

Men's increased failure to perform their socially expected masculinities, has compelled women to painfully take the work of the absentee fathers/husbands who are left hanging in the masculinity 'coat' but not fitting in attracting derogatory labels such as basyo. Inability to provide for their families and claim the masculine entitlements may push some men into over drinking to cover up the inadequacies. The vulnerability of such masculinity becomes worse if the wives are rough and merciless or violent. It was revealed that men who are victims of gender-based violence fall in that category of “basyo basyo” as one a participant explained that:

“me what I know women used to live by the laws of their husbands whether good or bad, but the men were strong and commanded respect but if you are 'basyo basyo' women will beat you... surely families where wives beat their husbands you find that it's the fault of men for failure to... So if you drop your responsibility and let the wife take over then she will be the one to rule the family. She will be the head and 'akaraara na kutiiha' meaning that the woman will beat him.

The above quote reveals the costs of male privileges and entitlements. Women decried men's constant reference to the good old days when women respected their husbands without mentioning what men did to deserve that respect. Another old man who seemed to buy in the women's argument said that “when women are overwhelmed by provisioning responsibilities, they get stressed and tired especially if their husbands want to continue enjoying the male privileges”. His argument revealed that there has been role reversal that leads to exploitation of women explicitly or implicitly. In both Kitumba and Kabale participants agreed that when a man he doesn't want to admit his inadequacy, he feels guilty and shouts.

The older men recollected one of the greatest celebrated male privilege as inheritance of land and other resources. It was this inheritance of land that constructed male child as a preferred sex compared to his female counterpart hence the notion of “omusika” literally translated as heir and also informed the choice of polygamy . However, shortage of resources in Kabale and Rukiga districts has turned out to be a major frustration forcing men to lose grip of their normative masculinity. This could perhaps explain the presence of many men struggling to provide for their families as one elder commented “ I feel sorry when I see all these men hopelessly wasting time and end up languishing in prisons, they are dying on streets 'Abashaija kutwine ekizibu Kihango” meaning that men have problems.

Errant masculinity practices have made women more creative and hard workers like joining self-help groups and get money to buy household utensils such as blankets, source pans, plates and bedsheets. Some poor men who could not buy bedsheets but expected to sleep in them reported being harassed as raised in the dialogues both in Kamwezi and Kitumba that:

Hati abakazi bakaba abokuturaza omubuvera meaning that these days, women make polythene bags 'socksiv'. When we come home drunk our wives do not allow us to sleep in the bed sheets because our feet are dirty. They use black polythene bags as socks so that we don't spoil their bedsheets.

Women confirmed this allegation arguing that when they buy their bed sheets, and the men who don't even contribute anything come home drunk and dirty, they have to protect their bed sheets hence wrap their feet in polythene bag. This shows that although men may be victims of the patriarchal system they collectively create, for example being forced to adhere to the ideal, rather than making free life choices, they still have some benefits. That is why men who abandon their roles may continue to expect the same measure of respect and entitlements from their wives.

Men's frustrations are exacerbated by men's inability to communicate. When a man does not have money, he is engulfed by fear to perform his roles including marital roles, fear to achieve his goals and because he cannot communicate it to his wife, then the wife suspects him of infidelity and wasteful. The genesis of the problem emanates from associating masculinity with dominance that blocks communication and seeking advice from a woman as one elder put:

you know us men are very poor communicators, we don't want to communicate our weaknesses intentionally...because we don't tell you our salaries and don't give accountability of what we are spending on, so such you start suspecting, when you suspect, you will find it is true why?...They will tell you I was in accompany of Jane, Jolly, John, Peter? Is Jane the wife of Peter? No, she is part of our friends, how come that he has no money, he is always with them, and he comes at 10:00 pm drunk or tired what is exactly happening?... I am not saying no, sometimes it is true because men commit adultery not by love but by sight. If I meet you even if I have not asked you your name and you sit in such a way that If I ask you say yes, I don't have to ask your name and I don't have to be your friend, I will have sex with you. I am not in love, I still love the other one at home if I haven't had a problem with her also. That is about us and 90% of men do it including Bishops.

This assertion exposes the negative strength of maleness deep inside the men like a volcano fighting to get out; that forces itself to hold of the world in their hands and possessing all the women. The explanation which he presents casually, when it fell in the ears of a woman researching on masculinity, its meaning changes and is of course influenced by the researcher's positionality. Reflexively, as women, hearing that male energy pushes them to connect with and encompass the female energy in the world, scares us. Our interpretation also becomes subjective. We perceive such male energy as only emasculating masculinity and perversely reduces their respect before women who said that "there are many good men in this world but not enough who appear to be confident in their masculinity. Instead men use their masculinity to oppress women" (Mixed group dialogue, Kamwezi).

The exposition reveals that men are still in the cultural climate that tolerates wayward masculinity behaviour on the pretext of being dominant and strong willed which however magnifies their emotional and economic vulnerability. The researchers' positionality in this case may have influenced our analysis. Taking what the elder said ... sometimes men commit adultery not by love but by sight led us to believe that there are ways in which men engage in risky practices and behaviours in order to display or perform 'real men' actions. Saying that men are driven by sight to do something not in their mind says a lot about the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, men would willingly engage in risky behaviours such as unprotected sex, alcohol to prove that they fit in the superior masculinity despite the possible consequences. It seems gratifying as long as a man is likely to be applauded for performing legitimate and sanctioned masculine identities.

The findings revealed that there are men who abandon their wives because they cannot afford to fulfil the social demands. For example, there was a mention of men who abandon their wives in hospitals if they deliver by caesarean section or give birth to triplets or even twins. Inquiring why a man would do that, participants posited that financial inadequacy is the cause. An elder, "this is irresponsibility that was unheard when we were growing up and the question is how do we bring back 'men to be men'. Such a scenario points to a bigger problem where men in the contemporary society seem not to be anchored in a system that prepares them for performing masculinity. The matter is complicated by the men are not socialised to seek help and advice as one participant clearly said:

"...no one should advise me on how to look after my wife. You can't come to my family and ask me how I take care of my wife. I should have known what to do. I want to advise that never try to advise your husband on sensitive issues. You can use stories for example, rather talk about your marriage and its challenges you say that there are some friends whose wives come to tell me how the marriage is failing. Then you give him a story, you ask for advice. If he is a thinking man and he goes back home and thinks through the relationship you were talking about and how it is almost similar to his at home, then you also give him solutions, if at all he doesn't realise it. I advise you as women, never try to take that route because it is like touching a leopard's anus ... Men's egos are so delicate that even if one is the best man we have ever had, that moment will crush him because it is like telling him that he is useless and he can turn against you and accuse you playing away matches...(Manzi, 77years Kamwezi).

The above quotation tallies with what Julius Nyerere talked about 60 years ago "that in many tribes it is disgraceful for a man to seek advice from a woman before embarking upon a major undertaking. What does a mere woman have to offer that would motivate him (Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation, English version, 2013, p 6-7). Unfortunately, men are stuck because of their socialisation, mind set and delicate ego. In pursuit of being dominant men can turn aggressive, push their way through by trashing others and may not have compassion or understand others or be touch with their emotions. While women tend to learn from friends and would be willing to share with their spouses, they are blocked by men's false self-image as one elder explained: there are new tricks and styles that women learn from colleagues or books and movies but they cannot teach their husbands. Even if a wife knows something new that she would want to share, she remains stuck with it otherwise she will be accused that either she got it somewhere else or through watching pornography. Many questions will run through a man's head. Where else will you have learnt it? If you have not done it before, where will you get it? Where did you begin, you were talking about me the way I don't function well. Those questions are deadly. Where did the conversation begin from, so you talk about me amongst your friends how I don't perform well?

Although the conversation was meant to display performance of masculinity it positively constructed women as knowers whose knowledge transcends men's in matters of trending ideas. Instead it exposed men's false image and rigidity in taking up new ideas from the women whom they perceive as subordinate, less knowledgeable and powerless. Some men are not ready for any changes likely to make them powerless or less knowledgeable because of what they were socialised to believe that their knowledge is supreme.

The situation however has made them to live in fear and hopelessness which contradicts the historical orientation of Bakiga men. To escape this captivity, some men resort to drinking alcohol, 'hoping from one woman to the other' and others committing suicide as one Ainamani explained that "those men who have tried to regain power and authority in homes have faced stiff resistance that's why I earlier I said the number of men committing suicide in Lake Bunyonyi is going up high every day but the number of women throwing themselves into the lake is almost negligible". Although we could not access formal statistics, this assertion was validated in one of the community dialogues where men argued that you would rather commit suicide than accept to be shamed as a powerless mukiga man.

Men die in silence. There were voice that there are a number of men in prison because of beating their wives but no major reported cases of wives in prison because of offending their husbands. It was observed that while there are increasing cases of women who offend their husbands, men prefer suffering silently for fear of stigma as illustrated

While many bodies are fighting for women's rights not many are taking men's interests into consideration. Though the percentage of men offending women maybe high but the low percentage of women offending men should not be swept under the carpet. But there are also norms and practice that continue to hinder men from reporting their oppression. A man is socialised to be the head of the family and not expected to cry or be beaten (Friday, 52 years, Kitumba).

There are many men whose thinking has been locked and held captive that would be set free through men's liberation otherwise they continue suffering and dying in silence. There is also a feeling that no one is fighting for men and perhaps that is why women are taking over, not depending on men making 'men less men' because "now what role do I have to play in your life". Men are struggling with vulnerability that has no immediate solution.

Listening to most men during both formal and informal conversations, we frequently heard the phrase "women want to take our [men] property or women are taking over 'our powers'". It turned out that there are men who think their [given] male privileges such as power are being encroached on even when they visibly had none. Such a view that constructs women as men's property, who are powerless and not entitled to ownership of anything contravenes the reality of Bakiga women. During most of our village walks, we observed women digging or selling merchandise or cooking while majority of men were at the centres discussing, playing games, betting and drinking alcohol. While we are not saying that all men were wasting time, the issue of women not owning and being labelled property grabbers does not tally with what they were engaged in during our field work.

The men's lamentations express their feeling about apparent lost power. Whether real or imaginary, it brings out men's perceived though concealed vulnerability. However, there seems to be some generalisation in their lamentations as well as accusation against women that overshadows the reality that men are drifting from their responsibilities and positions. They express the victims' voice and likely to attract sympathy for men in their pursuit of recapturing lost or past glory.

3. Conclusion

While the common narrative in patriarchal settings is that men as a category generally occupy a favoured position with more power and choices, there seems to be a contrary view. Men who are portrayed as beneficiaries of male privilege in a patriarchal system are facing an untold complex scenario constructing them as failing to adhere to the ideal patriarchal masculinity which is a coveted space. Given that it is unmasculine or unmanly to speak about their weaknesses; many Bakiga men are silently struggling with various forms of vulnerability concealed beneath the masculine privilege which is a source of frustration. These men's vulnerabilities like old age abandonment by children were attributed to impossible social expectations and failure to accept impossibilities, dwindling role model effect, distorted male entitlements and women's subtle takeover. Those attempting to negotiate space in which to resist or defy the constructed notion of a 'real man' still find it impossible and resort to self-destruction engagements like over consumption of alcohol. Therefore gender, feminist and masculinity studies should focus on a new discourse that visibilise the tremendous high costs of masculine privilege not only for men but also women, their families and the entire community.

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ⁱ Male privilege and masculinity privilege are used interchangeably

ⁱⁱ Kitumba is a subcounty in Kabale which was one of the research sites.

ⁱⁱⁱ Omugurusi Karweremera is one of the oldest men in Kabale and a lynchpin in the Rukiga language. He has written many linguistic, historical and educative story books in the language.

^{iv} Women in most communities join village savings groups where they are able to buy essential domestic things such as plates, sauce pans and beddings. It has become common knowledge that women want good things which their husbands can provide due to their irresponsibility and alcohol drinking habits. Most women therefore, buy the stuff and enact rules of usage such as bathing or at least washing the feet before accessing bedsheets. Men who fail to comply or expect their wives to wash their feet when they are drunk find their feet wrapped in socks made of polythene papers.