CHAPTER 3
Theoretical Background:
From Individual Decision-making to Reasoning in a Multi-level Context

Many interventions that aim to improve sexual and reproductive health are based on theories around individual decision-making to understand and predict human behaviour (Michielsen, Chersich, Temmerman, Dooms, & Rossem, 2012). Such theories include the socio-cognitive reasoned action approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010) and the anthropological-cognitive cultural schema theory (D’Andrade, 1984; D’Andrade & Strauss, 1992; C. Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Although often applied in quantitative studies, the research described in Chapter 5 applies the reasoned action approach in a qualitative way, using qualitative data collection methods and principles of grounded theory methodology to understand, rather than to measure or predict, Ugandan students’ perceptions of relationships and sexual practices.

However, the reasoned action approach shows limitations in understanding students’ individual decision-making processes within the wider cultural meaning system (de Haas, 2009). Because I was interested in the interaction between individual perceptions and their sociocultural context, including culturally shared values, goals and discourses, cultural schema theory was applied in the subsequent research to better understand teachers’ motivations for teaching sexuality education. This chapter discusses in more detail both theories and how they are applied.
3.1 Students’ Perceptions: A Reasoned Action Approach through Qualitative Research

In their evaluation of WSWM, a comprehensive sexuality education programme targeting young people in secondary schools in Uganda (see Chapter 5), Rijsdijk et al. (2011) based their quantitative questionnaire on the theory of planned behaviour, a previous version of the reasoned action approach. This quantitative evaluation aimed to measure the programme’s effectiveness by measuring students’ knowledge, attitudes and behaviours before and after implementation of the programme.

Parallel to this quantitative evaluation, the present study presented in Chapter 5 aims at a more in-depth understanding of students’ perceptions and, as such, of the evaluation findings. The study applies the reasoned action approach in a qualitative way, using qualitative data collection methods and principles of grounded theory methodology to explore and understand, rather than to measure and predict, students’ perceptions of relationships and sexual practices, and to gain an understanding of how students construct and negotiate their sexual agency in the abstinence-only context of Uganda.

The reasoned action approach, which is visualised in Figure 3, has been developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) and originates from the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2002) and the theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). It is often used in quantitative studies to predict, explain or change individual behaviour. This approach assumes that three different determinants of behaviour — i.e. the attitude to the behaviour, the perceived norm, and the perceived level of behavioural control — lead to the formation of a behavioural intention. Ultimately, if it is not interrupted by actual control factors — i.e. skills/abilities and environmental factors — this intention will predict the actual behaviour. The three determinants of behaviour are considered to be embedded in individual background factors, including the person’s knowledge of the given behaviour (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

Attitude towards a behaviour consists of behavioural beliefs — i.e. “considerations of the likely consequences of a behavior” — and their associated positive or negative evaluations. These beliefs and their evaluations combined result in an “overall positive or negative evaluation or attitude toward performing the behavior in question” (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005, 193).

Perceived norms are the “perceived social pressure to engage or not engage in the behavior” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, 20). Fishbein and Ajzen (2010, 20) distinguish between injunctive norms and descriptive norms: injunctive norms concern the belief that important others, such as friends and family, would “approve or disapprove” of the individual’s behaviour, whereas descriptive norms concern the belief that these important others “perform or don’t perform” this behaviour themselves.
Background factors

*Individual*
- personality
- mood, emotion
- values, stereotypes
- general attitudes
- perceived risk
- past behavior

*Social*
- education
- age, gender
- income
- religion
- race, ethnicity
- culture

*Information*
- knowledge
- media
- intervention

Figure 3. Reasoned action approach (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, 22)
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Fishbein and Ajzen (2010, 64) consider perceived behavioural control — that is, “people’s perceptions of the degree to which they are capable of, or have control over, performing a given behavior” — to be very similar to Bandura’s (1997; 1977) concept of perceived self-efficacy. They hypothesise the existence of a hierarchical model in which perceived behavioural control consists of (1) perceived capability, or “the belief that one can, is able to, or is capable of, performing the behavior”; and (2) perceived autonomy, which deals “mainly with the degree of control over performing the behavior”, including “judgments that performance of the behavior is ‘up to me’” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010, 165-166).

The reasoned action approach focuses mainly on individual perceptions of performing a given behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010). It provides a clear framework for researchers to analyse data that are derived through deductive reasoning because perceptions are already predefined in the categories’ attitudes, perceived norms and perceived behavioural control. Research using the reasoned action approach is able to identify which perceptions are most important for predicting intended or actual behaviour. As a result, recommendations for programme improvements are likely to focus on changing individuals’ perceptions that prohibit them from performing the encouraged behaviour (Spencer 2014).

However, critics of the reasoned action approach have argued that the reasoned action approach shows limitations as a model for understanding behaviour and, especially, for understanding sexual practices. For instance, the approach assumes that sexual practices can be predicted because they result from fixed perceptions and individual decision-making. However, perceptions are actually dynamic, competing and conflicting, and sexual practices are a result of interpersonal and contextual interactions (Harding 2007; Quinn 1992). In this same way, individuals may exercise different forms of agency depending on these interactions (Reeuwijk 2009).

Spencer (2014) argues that individual approaches to agency, such as the concept of perceived behavioural control, assume that individuals can be empowered by increasing their perceived capability and autonomy. However, this neglects the role of structural factors that minimise individuals’ opportunities for empowerment and that increase their risk of and vulnerability to sexual and reproductive health problems, such as gender and power relations and sociocultural norms (Spencer 2014; Spencer, Maxwell, and Aggleton 2008; Wood, Rogow, and Stines 2015).

In the present study of students’ perceptions, the reasoned action approach was, therefore, used as a framework for conducting qualitative research where perceptions of students themselves were derived through inductive reasoning and analysed using principles of grounded theory. This research design enabled us to show that students’ perceptions were embedded in economic and sociocultural contextual aspects, such as perceived gender roles, restrictive and fear-based sexuality education messages, and the cultural meaning system of the school. New insights were derived which had not been included in the quantitative survey, such as that the students used Western high school movies and pornography to learn about sex and that boys were afraid to have sex with girls of their age because of the Ugandan Defilement Law which requires imprisonment for having sex with girls under the age of 18 years.
Based on the findings of this qualitative study, an inductive, substantive, theoretical framework was proposed for studying students’ relationships and sexual practices. This framework embedded the individual-oriented concepts of the reasoned action approach in contextual aspects at the micro, meso and macro level. It showed how most of students’ background characteristics at the micro level were found important because of their interaction with contextual aspects at the meso and macro level. For instance, a boy’s financial capital was found relevant because of perceived gender roles at the macro level that prescribed that boys should pay for girls, and because of the cultural meaning system of the school that showed that girls will only show interest when a boy has money to spend in the school canteen. Furthermore, the different contextual aspects at the micro, meso and macro level were found to be shaping the students’ perceptions through bounded knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights and high risk perceptions, such as that condoms are not reliable and that hormonal contraception can lead to infertility. The study also helped to provide inductive meanings to deductively derived concepts from the reasoned action approach, such as the important role of perceived autonomy for students who expressed insecurities that their sexual urges hindered them from abstaining (de Haas, 2009).

The importance of embedding students’ perceptions within the cultural meaning system suggested that the use of another theory which could more clearly capture the interaction between individual perceptions and their context would be more suited for studying school-based sexuality education in Uganda. In contrast with the reasoned action approach, the anthropological-cognitive cultural schema theory, and its use of cultural templates, provides a theoretical lens for collecting and analysing inductively derived data. It enables researchers to categorise and visualise individuals’ reasoning, underlying motives or goals, and to identify potential conflicts. Whereas the reasoned action approach tries to predict one possible behavioural outcome, the interactional component of cultural schemas acknowledges that individuals show various behaviours because they adapt their behaviour to the specific context and their interpersonal relations.

3.2 Cultural Schema Theory as a Theoretical Lens for Data Collection

Cultural schema theory has been developed by cognitive anthropologists (e.g. D’Andrade, 1984; D’Andrade & Strauss, 1992; C. Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Schemas are internal conceptual structures — or knowledge structures — which allow persons to identify objects and events. They may include beliefs, perceptions, emotions, goals, values and discourses (D’Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Holland & Cole, 1995). Thus, in comparison with the reasoned action approach, cultural schema theory views individual beliefs and perceptions in a broader context of socioculturally shared schemas including shared goals, values and discourses.

D’Andrade (1984, 96) describes four functions of schemas, which are to some degree always present: (1) they represent the world, or the representational function; (2) they create cultural entities, or the constructive function; (3) they direct one to do certain things, or the directive function; and (4) they evoke certain feelings, or the evocative function.

Some schemas are individual to a person; others, so-called cultural schemas, are
shared by a group of people based on shared knowledge and experiences. Individuals may internalise cultural schemas differently, depending on their prior knowledge and experiences (D’Andrade, 1992; Garro, 2000).

### 3.2.1 Goals and their Motivational Force

As visualised in Figure 4, cultural schema theory assumes that schemas can act as goals that have motivational force because they are organised in a hierarchical way: lower-level, middle-level and master schemas (Bailey & Hutter, 2006; D’Andrade, 1992). Master schemas — or higher-level schemas — give “general interpretations of what is going on” and “contain the most powerful goals”. Middle-level schemas can “generate goals of their own”, but they sometimes “require other higher-level schemas to generate some of their goals”. Lower-level schemas only generate goals in interaction with higher-level schemas (D’Andrade in: H. F. Mathews, 1992, 140). For instance, whenever a low-level goal — for example, teaching in class — directs to a higher-level goal — for example, well-being of a teacher — these goals may motivate behaviour. Mathews (1992, 139) explains that individuals can experience “emotional distress” when they are unable to achieve their goals and that this, due to the evocative function of schemas, will motivate them to adopt strategies that will help them to “complete the original plan” or “substitute a new plan of action”.

According to Ormel et al. (1999), well-being is the central goal of human behaviour. They identify two ‘ultimate goals’ — i.e. physical and social well-being — which they argue that all humans seek to optimise, and five ‘instrumental goals’ by which they are achieved: (1) stimulation; (2) comfort; (3) status; (4) behavioural confirmation; and (5) affection.

D’Andrade (1992) argues that higher-level goals are a person’s most general goals, which are on top in the ‘schema hierarchy’. He illustrates that love and work can be higher-level schemas that can be linked to middle-level schemas such as marriage and a job. Comparing D’Andrade’s (1992) examples of higher-level goals to Ormel et al.’s (1999) ultimate and instrumental goals suggests that the latter ultimate and instrumental goals can be considered more general, and perhaps universal, goals than the context-dependent and culturally valued higher-level goals indicated by D’Andrade (1992; H. F. Mathews, 1992). For instance, work can contribute to physical well-being through comfort and to social well-being through status and behavioural confirmation.
3.3 Revisiting Cultural Schema Theory in Analysis: Deepening the Understanding

The data collection to study teachers’ cultural values and beliefs and personal experiences of sexuality and sexuality education, and how these play a role in the sexuality education messages given to their students, started based on the theoretical framework of cultural schema theory as described above. However, it was especially during the analysis of the data collected that the need emerged to reflect with the participants on the preliminary findings (see Chapter 4) and to return to the literature about cultural schema theory to obtain a deeper understanding of the findings. The sections below describe in more detail which parts of cultural schema theory enabled these deeper understandings:

- Section 3.3.1: The role of **discourses and values** within cultural schema theory and the extent to which they have motivational force for teachers in teaching sexuality education, as presented in Intermezzo 2 (Sociocultural Context);
- Section 3.3.2: The historical durability of cultural schemas to understand how teachers reconstruct their past experiences and how they experience **cultural transitions** in society, as presented in Chapter 6 (Ambivalent Cultural Schemas: Why Teachers Feel Uncomfortable Teaching Comprehensive School-based Sexuality Education in Uganda);
- Section 3.3.3: About **internal conflicts** between schemas to additionally interpret the strategies teachers adopt to deal with conflicts arising from these cultural transitions, as presented in Chapter 6 (Ambivalent Cultural Schemas: Why Teachers Feel Uncomfortable

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**Figure 4.** The motivational force of hierarchically linked schemas visualised in a cultural template based on Quinn (2011)
3.3.1 Cultural Schemas: Values and Discourses

Rokeach (1968, 160) defines a value as a belief “that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative modes of conduct or end-states of existence”. A cultural value system represents a common set of values shared by a culture about what is considered good and bad behaviour. Once internalised, it becomes a “criterion for guiding action [...] for morally judging self and others, and for comparing self with others” (Rokeach, 1968, 160). Thus, values can be considered cultural schemas that are internalised by individuals and guide behaviour (Rokeach, 1968). For instance, Mathews (1992, 139) describes how morality tales are about realising “culturally valued goals”. This suggests that values can act as goals that have motivational force and, as such, can be regarded as middle-level or higher-level schemas (D’Andrade, 1992). Due to their evocative function, acting according to cultural values, such as morally accepted behaviour, and achieving culturally valued goals may lead to feelings of satisfaction, whereas an inability to act accordingly or to achieve these goals may incite anxiety (H. F. Mathews, 1992).

The concept of discourse considers knowledge to be cultural constructs that are given meaning by a cultural meaning system of rules and practices. It is about producing and reproducing knowledge and power through language, and it governs which knowledge is created through language, and which is not (Hall, 2001; Holland & Cole, 1995). As a result, dominant discourses can reinforce social inequalities (Allen, 2007). Examples of dominant discourses around sexuality are heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, childhood sexual innocence, sex negativity and sexual essentialism (Allen, 2007; Bhana, 2007b; Rubin, 1984; Tamale, 2003). Secrecy and taboos, the use of laws, sociocultural norms and religious beliefs are ways to reproduce knowledge and power (Tamale, 2003). According to Holland and Cole (1995), discourses and cultural schema theory seem exclusive approaches that can be bridged by the use of cultural artefacts. Quinn (2005, 44) links discourse and cultural schema theory
by explaining that features of discourse, such as keywords, metaphors and reasoning, are “governed by cultural schemas”.

### 3.3.2 Historical Durability of Cultural Schemas

Schemas develop throughout life in interaction with the context in which people live. Depending on prior knowledge and experiences, and circumstances, individuals may internalise cultural schemas differently, and they may internalise them differently at different stages of their life (D’Andrade, 1992; Garro, 2000). This means that cultural schemas are not fixed but dynamic due to new incoming information and new experiences (Garro, 2000). This new knowledge and these new experiences are internalised selectively to fit with current schemas (D’Andrade, 1992). Cultural schemas thus change, and due to the time dimension of cultural schemas, individuals may experience cultural change. In the same way as individuals may internalise new knowledge and experiences selectively to fit with current schemas, they may constantly reconstruct their past experiences and knowledge based on their present constructions of the cultural meaning system, or general cultural models (Garro, 2000). Figure 5 visualises the dynamic nature and function of schemas in relation to new and reconstructed experiences and the emotions these experiences evoke.

![Figure 5. Development of schemas and reconstruction of past experiences based on Garro (2000)](image)

Strauss and Quinn (1997) discuss the historical durability of cultural schemas. In their view, there are two ways in which culture can be passed on by generations. First, individuals may unintentionally acquire “habits from repeatedly observed and practiced patterns of behaviour” — Bourdieu’s so-called “cultural reproduction” (C. Strauss & Quinn, 1997, 112). Second, members of society may intentionally impart values they feel “must be transmitted to the young and what knowledge must be preserved for future generations” (C. Strauss & Quinn, 1997, 113). For instance, when members of society feel that the world is changing, they may want to preserve values which they feel are fading out or slipping away (C. Strauss & Quinn, 1997).

According to Harkness, Super, and Keefer (1992, 164), “the pace of culture change” can be overwhelming to individuals when the experienced culture change requires “a fundamental
shift in thinking”. Individuals may experience such cultural transitions in society — for instance, due to globalisation or technical improvements. In such transitions, “the present is separated from the past”, and individuals will need to “reconsider and restructure past elements from the point of view of the present” (Harkness et al., 1992, 172).

These insights from cultural schema theory were used to understand how teachers may reconstruct and separate the present culture from the past ‘traditional’ culture as discussed in Chapter 6. In the next stage of analysis, internal conflicts were found between these ‘present’ and ‘traditional’ cultural schemas. The following section describes the strategies individuals may apply to deal with these conflicts.

### 3.3.3 Internal Conflicts between Schemas

Quinn (1992) discusses how individuals may experience internal conflicts between cultural schemas. For instance, she discusses how married women may experience conflicting self-understandings of what it means to be a good wife. For individuals to deal with such internal conflicts, Strauss (1997, 214) describes several mechanisms to internalise conflicting schemas: (1) choose one and reject the other; (2) integrate parts of the competing schemas in a single schema; (3) unconscious compromise, whereby “acting on one [schema] creates some anxiety or need to compensate by later acting on the other”; (4) ambivalence, whereby “no workable compromise has emerged and the person feels torn”; and (5) compartmentalisation, whereby the conflicting schemas are internalised in unconnected schemas which “are activated in different contexts and the person feels […] [no] conflict between them in the ordinary course of events”. A cultural template (see section 3.3.6) may visualise such conflicting schemas, the mechanisms individuals may use to internalise them, and how such reasoning may motivate individual behaviour.

### 3.3.4 Situation-defining Cultural Schemas: the Interactional Component

Individual behaviour may depend on the situational context because cultural schemas not only characterise “understandings of the self alone” but also “culturally constructed understandings” of “interpersonal relations” (Quinn, 1992, 93). This allows individuals to adapt their behaviour to the context they are in and to the relationship they have with the person (Quinn, 1992). For instance, as discussed in Chapter 9, teachers’ schemas for teaching sexuality education at secondary school may differ from their schemas for teaching sexuality education at another type of school or outside the school context (Harkness et al., 1992).

In the same way teachers construct their own role at school, they may construct their role as a teacher in interpersonal relations — for instance, in relation to their students (Harkness et al., 1992). Teachers’ teaching of sexuality education may be motivated by their cultural schemas of students — for instance it may motivate them to adapt their messages according to their students’ age, gender and the roles and goals teachers perceive students to have. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.
3.3.5 Internalisation of Schemas

The internalisation of schemas can help to understand how cultural schemas and personal experiences play a role in teachers’ motivations. According to Spiro (1987 in: D’Andrade, 1992), individuals internalise cultural schemas to various degrees: (1) they may be indifferent or even reject the schema, so that it has no motivational force for them; (2) they may acquire it as a cliche; (3) they may acquire it as a personal belief; and, in the highest level of internalisation, (4) the schema may be highly salient to them, whereby it not only engages their minds but also their emotions, or the evocative function of schemas. The higher the internalisation of cultural schemas, the higher their motivational force (D’Andrade, 1992).

The social psychologist Rokeach (1968) examines the internalisation of schemas by looking at their centrality. The more central a schema is to a person, the more connected the schema is to other schemas and, therefore, the more difficult to change. Rokeach (1968, 5) provides the following criteria to determine the centrality of schemas:
• existential versus non-existent beliefs;
• shared versus unshared beliefs;
• derived versus underived beliefs; and
• beliefs concerning and not concerning matters of taste.

According to these criteria, cultural schemas, which are shared with others, and personal experiences, which are underived schemas, are more central to a person, or connected to other schemas, than individual schemas or schemas that are unshared and derived, or learned from others (Pajares, 1992). Based on these criteria, cultural schemas and personal experiences are expected to be highly internalised and, therefore, to have high motivational force, to be more difficult to change, and to have more implications for other connected schemas. The role of teachers’ personal experiences in teachers’ motivations to teach sexuality education is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

3.3.6 Cultural Template

To visualise the concluding findings for teaching school-based sexuality education in Uganda as discussed in Chapter 6 and 7, this study uses Quinn’s (2011) concept of ‘cultural template’. Quinn introduced this concept to emphasise the interconnected structure of schemas, or the role of “event sequencing” in the “organization of cultural knowledge” (Quinn, 2011, 256).

According to Quinn (2011, 260), cultural templates are “abstract schemas”, shared by a group of people, which support causally linked schemas. She argues that “emotions and motivations” underlie these connections (Quinn, 2011, 259). Individuals rely on these cultural templates to support their reasoning and narrative. Since the cultural template is shared, people will understand each other’s reasoning. In this way, the use of the cultural template as a “guide to action” enables individuals to reason “relatively effortlessly and quickly”, as “prior or intervening” schemas can be left implicit (Quinn, 2011, 263).

To explain the cultural template, Quinn gives the example of the cultural template for American marriage. This cultural template represents “the dominant way of thinking about marriage among Americans” (Quinn, 2011, 256). For instance, dominant ways of thinking
about marriage among Americans are that marriage involves living together and that marital infidelity may lead to divorce. Linkages between events in the cultural template often include causal relationships such as marital infidelity leading to divorce.

Figure 4 shows how teachers’ shared reasoning for teaching sexuality education as motivated by higher-level schemas could be visualised. Because these linkages to higher-level schemas are shared, they may be left implicit in conversations. Depending on individual variability in the motivational force of each schema, the same goal may result in different behaviours by different people. Likewise, individuals may demonstrate the same behaviours but be motivated by different underlying schemas (Quinn, 2011). As discussed in Chapter 9, the visualisation of the inductively derived cultural schemas from teachers’ narratives into a cultural template enabled a deeper understanding of the findings, as it interpreted emerging higher-level goals and their role in internal conflicts identified between the cultural schemas.

3.4 Overall Theoretical Framework for Studying Teachers’ Reasoning Process for Teaching School-based Sexuality Education in Uganda

Figure 6 shows the overall theoretical framework for studying teachers’ reasoning process for teaching school-based sexuality education in Uganda. This framework is based on cultural schema theory as described in this chapter. Other than individual decision-making, which connotes an individual, rational process independent of context, the term ‘reasoning’ is used, as suggested by Quinn (2011).

The framework indicates which parts of the theoretical framework were used in each chapter to collect, analyse and interpret the findings. The reasoning process is assumed to start with a teacher’s schemas, which the teacher continuously develops, internalises and reconstructs based on cultural schemas learned from society — as visualised in the cultural template — and on personal experiences. Subsequently, the teacher is required to apply these schemas in a specific situation. Because the motivational force of schemas is situation-defined, the interactional component comes into play: the teacher will formulate his or her message — meaning that specific schemas will gain motivational force — depending on the individual(s) they are interacting with and the context in which the interaction takes place. If this interaction does not lead to an internal conflict, the teacher can deliver his or her formulated message. Otherwise, if the interaction does lead to an internal conflict, the teacher may adopt a strategy to deal with this conflict and deliver the resulting alternative message.
Figure 6. Theoretical framework for studying teachers’ individual reasoning process resulting from an interplay between cultural schema theory and data validation and analysis.