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OBSTACLES TO GIRLS' EDUCATION AND GIRLS' LIVED SCHOOL EXPERIENCE IN BENIN: SCHOOL AS AN INSTITUTION OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

A Dissertation Presented

by

SIMEON AFOUDA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

September 2015

Educational Policy, Research and Administration
College of Education

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OBSTACLES TO GIRLS' EDUCATION AND GIRLS' LIVED SCHOOL EXPERIENCE IN BENIN: SCHOOL AS AN INSTITUTION OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation, my gratitude, and most sincere thanks to my advisor, Dr. Alfred Hartwell, for his continuous support and sustained efforts to bring my fieldwork to completion. I have been honored and blessed with the opportunity to benefit from Dr. Hartwell's vast field experience in international education. His rigor, his determination, and his detailed feedback and suggestions every step of the way guided my way through the daunting and murky world of research fieldwork. As I grappled with family-related problems, long periods of illness, and the demands of the field, Dr. Hartwell was there, offering hope and encouragement. Little would have been achieved without his guidance and leadership. Thank you very much indeed for bringing this work to the final draft.

My most sincere thanks and gratitude go to Dr. Cristine Smith, professor at the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Many thanks for agreeing to sit on my dissertation committee. I have been honored to be Dr. Smith's student and to benefit from her rich experience in international education. Her rigor and her constant feedback and suggestions have shaped my study and pointed me in the right direction. I would also like to extend my gratitude and most sincere thanks to Dr. Amanda Walker Johnson, professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Dr. Walker Johnson agreed to sit on my dissertation committee despite her busy schedule. Through her constant feedback and suggestions, she has brought an anthropological perspective to my study. Her keenness for details has contributed to the accuracy of the ideas developed in this study.

My academic journey started from my first year in the doctoral program at the Center for International Education at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Ever since, my

professors at the Center for International Education have played an instrumental role in bringing this study to completion. I would like them all to find here the expression of my gratitude.

Many thanks to Professor Bernard H. Russell from the University of Florida for spending time to perform a check on the analysis of the free list data collected in this study. The valuable feedback he offered enhanced the credibility of the study findings. Many thanks to my friends and colleagues for kindly providing feedback on some of the issues raised in the course of this study. I am grateful to Dr. Craig Wells, professor of Statistics at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, Professor Roland Abiodun of Amherst College, and Dr. Emmanuel Babatunde from Lincoln University for their support and interest in this study. Their feedback and suggestions shaped the early stage of this project. My appreciation and thanks also go to my research assistant for her availability at every stage of the research and for her full involvement throughout the fieldwork. She did a great job conducting the focus group discussions with the 30 female participants involved in this study. I am most grateful to Jane Eklund for providing technical assistance. She edited and kindly reviewed the final draft of my dissertation.

Finally, to Jerry and Karen, my caring and beloved children, I would like to express my deepest gratitude. Thanks for bearing with me for staying away for so long while completing my doctoral studies. Your encouragement and unfailing support kept me going when the times got rough. This work is for you.

ABSTRACT

OBSTACLES TO GIRLS' EDUCATION AND GIRLS' LIVED SCHOOL EXPERIENCE IN BENIN: SCHOOL AS AN INSTITUTION OF CULTURAL TRANSMISSION

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The persistence of gender inequality in education has received increased attention over the past few years. Findings from research studies have documented the hardships that girls experience in their day-to-day school life. Yet, more girls are being sent to school. This study explored the lived school experience of 30 girls in a public secondary school in Benin. Using a qualitative methodology informed by the grounded theory approach, the study investigated girls' perception of their school experience and the meaning that this experience holds for them. Thirty girls were interviewed on their lived school experience, and participant observation was also used as a method of data collection. The findings revealed that greater attention is given to girls' access to school than to their presence inside schools. Further, the study found that gender practices in the school setting, informed by a culture of women's subordination, create an environment of oppression, discrimination, and discouragement for girls. Based on these findings, the study made policy recommendations.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

Transition Rate	The number of pupils admitted to the first grade of a higher level of education in a given year, shown as a percentage of the number of pupils enrolled in the last grade of the lower level of education the previous year.
Literacy Rate	The ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one's daily life. It involves a continuum of reading and writing skills, and often includes also basic arithmetic skills (numeracy).
Gross Intake Ratio (GIR)	Total number of new entrants in first grade of primary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population at the official primary school-entrance age.
Net Intake Rate (NIR)	New entrants in the first grade of primary education who are of the official primary school entrance age, expressed as a percentage of the population of the same age.
Gross Enrollment Rate (GER)	Total enrollment in a specific level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school-year. Often higher than 100% because of repetition and overage students.
Net Enrollment Rate (NER)	Enrollment of the official age-group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population.
Repetition Rate	Proportion of pupils from a cohort enrolled in a given grade at a given school-year who study in the same grade in the following school-year.
Dropout Rate	Proportion of pupils from a cohort enrolled in a given grade in a given year who are no longer enrolled in the following school year.

Survival Rate	Percentage of a cohort of pupils enrolled in the first grade level or cycle of education in a given school year who are expected to survive through certain grade regardless of repetition.
Completion Rate	The total number of students completing (or graduating from) the final year of primary or secondary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of the official primary or secondary graduation age.
Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR)	Average nationally of: Total number of pupils/Total number of teachers. Rates may vary significantly throughout the country.

List of Abbreviations

EFA Education for All
GER Gross Enrolment Ratio
NER Net Enrolment Ratio
NGO Non-governmental Organization
SAP Structural Adjustment Program
SSA Sub-Saharan Africa

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The United Nation's Millennium Development Goals lay out a timeline for achieving gender equality and women's empowerment by 2015. In the year of this deadline, reports indicate that many countries are unlikely to meet these goals. In particular, there is growing concern about the barriers to equality and empowerment that girls face in the field of education. Both internal and external schooling factors are increasingly posing serious threats to girls' access to, retention of, and completion of educational opportunities (FAWE, 2001). Where access is possible, girls still suffer discriminatory practices in their daily school life, excluding them from enjoying the same opportunities as their male peers and limiting their potential to excel in school (Foster, 1997).

Education, however, is the right of every child (UNICEF, 2007). The Dakar Framework of Action for promoting Education for All (UNICEF/UNESCO, 2007) set two goals to support this right: 1) eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005; and 2) achieve gender equality in education by 2015. The Millennium Development Goals reiterated these objectives. These goals fall into two broad categories—gender parity and gender equality.

Gender parity, broadly speaking, is equal participation of boys and girls in all forms of education proportional to the gender break-down of the relevant age-groups in the population. This category is quantitative/numerical by nature (Subrahmanian, 2003, p. 2). Gender equality, on the other hand, addresses educational equality between boys and girls and is qualitative by nature (Subrahmanian, 2003, p. 2). Educational equality means equality of treatment and opportunity. In order to enjoy gender equality, girls must first possess gender parity. They must attend school and participate in the schooling process to enjoy equal treatment and opportunity. Gender equality, therefore,

> Needs to be understood as the right *to* education [access and participation] as well as rights *within* education [gender-aware educational environments, processes, and outcomes], and rights *through* education [meaningful education outcomes that link education equality with wider processes of gender justice]. (Wilson, 2003, in Subrahmanian, 2003, p. 2)

Failure to incorporate all three aspects—right to education, rights within education, and rights through education—of gender equality into initiatives to combat inequality render the initiatives ineffective. While many studies measure progress by emphasizing access and participation, few studies investigate girls' lived-school experiences in relation to their rights within education. In the same way, literature on girls' education repeatedly emphasizes the need to remove adverse physical barriers that prevent girls from accessing and participating in educational opportunities; however, the literature pays little attention to the hidden emotional and environmental barriers to learning that girls face in the school setting. Nor does the literature sufficiently explore the origins of these barriers.

The hardships that girls continue to encounter while in pursuit of their right to education, rights within education, and rights through education demonstrate the non-accountability of those charged with protecting their rights. It also highlights two contradictory philosophies that impact girls' school life: one promises them equality and empowerment through education while the other reminds them that they are intruding and that they must maintain a subordinate status in the coeducational school environment. This contradiction raises an important question about the intent of the Dakar Framework of Action for promoting Education for All: Is the international community promoting education to empower girls or schooling to encourage cultural reproduction?

The present study investigates the school experiences of 30 girls within a secondary-school setting in Benin. It seeks to understand what—from the participants' perspective—

constitutes an obstacle to girls' access to, retention of, and completion of educational opportunities. In particular, the study seeks to understand the meaning that the participants attach to their gendered school experiences; how peer interaction influences the construction of meaning; and how meaning influences their perceptions of their lived-school experiences. To accomplish these goals, the study utilized the grounded-theory approach informed by the qualitative-interpretive methodology. An analysis of the data collected from interviews, participant observation, and survey revealed the girls' main concern and how they process this concern. Further, the data and the analysis demonstrate that the cultural socialization of students in school occurs not just through passive exposure to gender-biased stereotypes found in textbooks and reinforced by teachers. Students also play an active role in the construction of their gender identities. In fact, observing the students in naturally occurring interactions revealed the processes whereby they make meaning of the gendered messages and values they receive, and how they construct their own meanings of gender. The meaning making process occurs through an appropriation of the gendered messages and values received from textbooks and teachers; an interpretation and modification of its content to reflect the students' real world; and the construction and transmission of meaning through peer interaction. The students' daily experience serves as a filter for the gendered message and values communicated to them. As one can see, peer culture influences the students' construction of the cultural meaning that they ascribe to gender values and to their gender school experience. Therefore, to change gender practices in schools, one must change peer culture by changing in the first place the negative cultural image of women as portrayed in textbooks. These textbooks represent important medium of gender socialization. Finally, getting girls into school is not enough—

schools must respond to girls' practical needs and gender needs. Schools, if they are to successfully empower women, must cease inculcating a culture of female subordination.

This paper is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the literature that addresses obstacles to girls' education and discusses the factors influencing girls' education in post-colonial Benin. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework of the study and describes the design of the study, the participants involved, the sampling method, the inquiry methodology, and the methods of data collection and data analysis. Chapter 4 reports and describes the findings. Chapter 5 analyzes and interprets the findings and chapter 6 concludes the study.

Background

Over the past two decades, greater attention has been paid to gender inequality in education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Promoting gender equality in education through the elimination of barriers to girls' education gained worldwide support among educators, donor agencies, policy makers, and governments. World education forums focused on creating equal learning opportunities for both boys and girls. The Dakar Framework for Action for promoting Education for All (2000) and the Millennium Development Goals on Education (2000), two influential frameworks in the field of education, made gender equality a top priority. The Dakar Framework for Action for promoting Education for All Summit, for example, spelled out a strategy for action on gender in Sub-Saharan Africa as follows: 1) ensure the equal participation of girls and women in all education programs, including science and technology; and 2) reduce gender, regional, rural/urban, and socio-economic disparities in educational participation (Dakar Framework for Action, pp. 27-28). Likewise, the Millennium Development Goals on Education set clear goals for achieving gender equality in education—elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015

(United Nations Millennium Development Goals 2000). It also established benchmarks for tracking countries' progress towards achieving these goals.

Existing literature identifies obstacles to girls' ability to participate in and complete their education, including, but not limited to, poverty, lack of adequate school infrastructures, distance to school, and adverse cultural practices (Colclough, 2000; Geiger, 2002). Addressing these issues, it is assumed, will help alleviate the gender issues pervading the daily school life of female students.

In response to calls for action to promote a better school environment for girls, international donor agencies and non-governmental organizations joined hands in an effort to remove the obstacles in the way of girls' education in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Benin—the focus of this study—United Nations' agencies and non-governmental organizations have been active in the field of girls' education for the last three decades. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Funds for Children (UNICEF), World Education, the Ambassador Girls' Scholarship Program (AGSP), and the Batonga Foundation, among others, made invaluable contributions to girls' education in Benin. These organizations partnered together to assist the government of Benin in its efforts to create equal educational opportunities for boys and girls. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been particularly active in the field of education, especially girls' education. This current study adopts UNICEF's approach to development: changing from within. Consistent with this approach, UNICEF, partnering with the government of Benin, currently runs projects throughout the country. These projects seek to raise citizens' awareness of children's right to education and to create—in combination with educational stakeholders—a sense of urgency for and ownership of UNICEF initiatives at the grassroots level.

In Bembereke in northern Benin, for example, UNICEF currently runs a "Bigsistering Project" in 16 districts. The initiative involves older girls (Big Sisters) who volunteer to walk younger ones to and from school to ensure the younger girls' attendance (UNICEF Benin, 2010). Many of the older girls

> also act as monitors. If someone in their neighborhood does not make it to school, that student visits the family to find out why and then reports back to the headmaster. They also look for children who have never enrolled and encourage them to attend. (UNICEF Benin, 2010, p. 1)

The Bigsistering Project benefits the younger girls, the Big Sisters, and the community at large. It keeps young girls safe on the way to and from school by providing the loving company of their Big Sisters. It puts girls in charge of solving problems facing other girls and develops their ability to solve their own problems. It also, most importantly, promotes the solution of local issues with local resources instead of relying on outside sources. Altogether UNICEF's development interventions helped increase girls' enrollment in the localities targeted for these interventions (UNICEF Benin, 2010). UNICEF also assists local communities, such as Djougou in northern Benin, by providing school furniture and school supplies and through the provision of school latrines and safe drinking water (UNICEF Benin, 2012). UNICEF's approach to community development—putting communities at the center of development initiatives—helps explain the success of its development interventions.

World Education also partners with the government of Benin to increase educational opportunities. The organization supports "the Benin government's goals to improve access to school for students (especially girls) in the most disadvantaged areas in Benin" (World Education, 2011). Convinced that school-related issues cannot be addressed only through top-down directives, World Education has adopted a bottom-up approach to involve communities at the grassroots level. For example, World Education currently runs Girls' Education and

Community Participation (CAEF in French), a USAID funded program (World Education, 2011).Girls' Education and Community Participation aims to increase girls' access to education through community participation, placing strong emphasis on women's participation and leadership (World Education,2011). Increasing women's participation by strengthening their leadership capacity will potentially give women a voice in decision making on school matters, currently controlled by the male-dominated Parents' Associations. World Education advances this strategy by facilitating "the organization of 500 school Mothers Associations (AME in French)" (World Education, 2011). Members in these associations include school mothers and ordinary community women. The school Mothers Association has achieved remarkable success on the ground: "Through World Education's work with AMEs women have gained a strong voice and the support of Parents' Associations in improving the learning environment and monitoring students' progress" (World Education, 2011, p. 1).Whether the success achieved changed the gender or power relations in the Benin school system is yet to be determined.

Increasing girls' access to school represents only one part of promoting their education. Even after enrollment, basic school and human needs must still be addressed. The Ambassadors' Girls Scholarship Program (AGSP), a USAID-funded program currently being implemented in Sub-Saharan Africa, addresses these issues. Scheduled to cover a period of seven years from 2004 to 2011, "the program covers the costs of education for 180,000 students, boys and girls—30,000 in West Africa alone (World Education, 2011).Beneficiaries of this scholarship include students who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, or orphans who are at risk of dropping out of school without the provision of assistance. The program covers school fees, school supplies, and school uniforms. It also provides an after-school tutoring program for girls and a mentor

program to connect girls to volunteer role models in their communities (World Education, 2011). World Education manages AGSP in 13 West African countries.

World Education also partners with the Batonga Foundation—an organization founded by Beninese singer, Angelique Kidjo, a UNICEF International Goodwill Ambassador. The foundation supports girls' education through middle school and beyond in several West African countries. The program covers school fees, uniforms, and school supplies. It additionally offers after-school tutorials to its beneficiaries and a mentor program to connect girls with volunteers in their communities. These volunteers inspire, advise, and educate girls on important health issues and motivate them. As a result of the combined efforts of these international donor agencies, girls' school enrollment increased dramatically during the past eight years. Figures 1 and 2 summarize the gross enrolment rate and the net enrollment rate for both girls and boys.

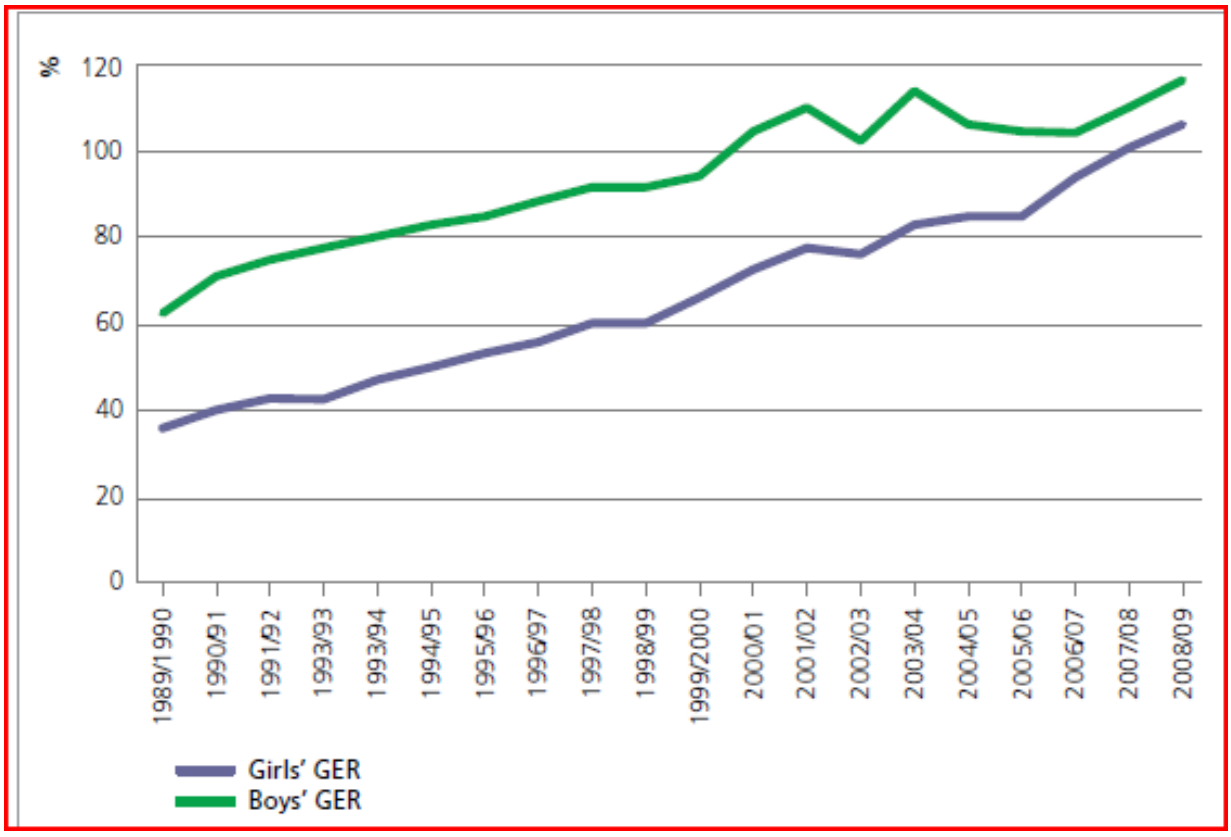


Figure 1. Primary Gross Enrollment Rates (GERs) between 1989/90 and 2008/09 in Benin

The GER in Benin is over 100% owing to a large number of overage and underage students. The net enrolment rate (NER), which expresses the rate of coverage only for the official school-age population, increased from 38% in 1989/90 to 89% in 2008/09 (92% for boys and 85% for girls).

Sources: MEPS data in Attanasso, M.-O. (2010) "Benin: Prestation Efficace des Services Publics de l'Education." AfriMAP an Open Society Initiative for West Africa.

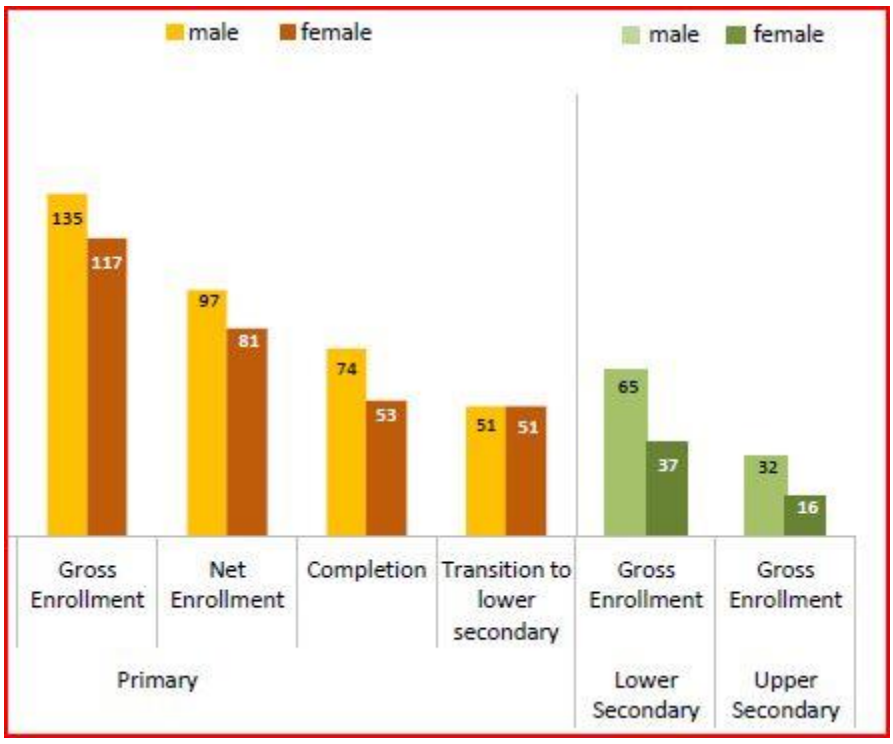


Figure 2. Student intake and flow from primary to secondary schools in Benin (2010) (gross indicators include under- and over-age students and net indicators include only on-time students of official school age)

Produced by FHI 360's Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC) on April 3, 2012.

Despite girls' increased access to education in Benin, much remains to be achieved inside the schools to promote an equal learning environment for boys and girls. As evidenced in the table above, efforts to expand girls' access to school and to narrow the gender gap achieved positive results. However, once the barriers to girls' schooling were removed, other gender disparities that pose serious threats to girls' schooling became apparent, making it necessary to redirect attention to girls' day-to-day school life. The sharp decrease in enrollment at the secondary level shown by Figure 2 for both boys and girls indicates a painful transition to the secondary level; this is especially evident for girls at the upper secondary level. The question is: what accounts for this discrepancy in enrollment?

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, attention has turned to girls' school experience in Sub-Saharan Africa. Studies on schools in Sub-Saharan Africa report widespread abuse of girls, school-related gender-based violence, and discriminatory attitudes towards girls in the school setting (FAWE, 2000, 2001; Colclough, 2000). Girls reportedly experience verbal abuse, physical abuse, and humiliation from school administrators, teachers, and schoolboys (Leach et al, 2005). They also suffer sexual harassment. Research on female education in Benin identified sexual harassment as:

> a major contributor to the high dropout rate of female students, demonstrated by UNESCO's 2006 statistics that showed that for every 100 Beninese girls who enter primary school, less than 39% in urban areas and 14% in rural areas are able to transition to secondary school. This is related to the fact that sexual harassment contributes to a lack of participation and underachievement. (Sene, 2009, p. 1)

Likewise, Wible (2004) found that 43% of female primary-school students and 80% of female secondary-school students drop out of school due to pressure for sexual favors from teachers and fellow students. A report from Inter Press Services News Agency (2012) indicated that nearly 6 out of 10 girls (57%) in Benin cease their educational pursuits because of early sexual activities. This abusive treatment affects girls' school progress and ruins their educational dreams and aspirations.

Studies also reveal that gender-based violence, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, and physical abuse prevent girls from progressing educationally (Gaba, 2005; Apko, 2007). Cultural perceptions of female inferiority lead men to violently control women, resulting in school-related, gender-based violence (Foster, 2008). Schools reinforce the perception of female inferiority through cultural stereotypes of gender (FAWE, 2001). Despite this tendency, there has been little systematic examination of schools' role in reproducing gender stereotypes in

Benin. Only recently has Aboh (2006) sought to explore girls' perceptions of their school experiences. Aboh's findings revealed the dissatisfaction of female students with the way their teachers and school administrators perceive and treat them. The girls complained about being ignored and neglected, teachers' abusive and derogatory comments about female students, and teachers' attacks on female character, morality, and intellectual capabilities (Aboh, 2006, p. 9). Aboh further documents that female dissatisfaction with the school experience influences many girls' decision to leave school. Aboh's work demonstrates the need to explore how schools reproduce negative cultural gender stereotypes in Benin. The government of Benin has also recognized the harmful effects of gender stereotypes. Thus, as research has demonstrated that gender stereotypes in school settings hinder girl's educational progress (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2009), it is vital to further examine the issue. Additional study could provide critical insight into designing an appropriate strategy to address the persistent gender inequality in Benin's school system.

At present, girls' educational progress is often hampered by teachers' attitudes and by gender-biased textbooks that reinforce negative gender stereotypes (Education for All Global Monitoring Report, 2009, p. 5). Recent statistics on gender disparity at the secondary level demonstrate continuing gender inequality in Benin's secondary-school system. The United Nations' Children's Fund reported a gender-parity index of 0.66 for male/female attendance at the secondary level in 2006 (UNICEF, Division of Policy and Practice, Statistics and Monitoring Section, May 2008). This statistic makes it clear that Benin fell well short of meeting the goal for eliminating gender disparity in education by 2005. Worse still, projections for 2015 predict a gender-parity index of 0.74 at the secondary level (UNICEF, Division of Policy and Practice, Statistics and Monitoring Section, May 2008).

The government of Benin recognizes the harmful effects of gendered cultural expectations and its Ministry of Education has entered into partnership with State University of New York-Oswego to explore ways of overcoming cultural barriers to female education. Together they recently held a workshop in Benin to lay the groundwork for a Collaborative Approach to Creating and Sustaining Educational Opportunities for Girls in the Republic of Benin. The individuals attending the workshop concluded that mandating school attendance is not sufficient—educators and policy makers must additionally address cultural understandings of gender. "We can't ignore that these expectations are powerful forces within any society and must be renegotiated if girls are to attend, be included in, and remain in schools" (On Campus with Women, 2007, p. 1). Much attention has been and continues to be paid to ensure that girls have access to schooling. The task that remains is to ensure their inclusion in the school system. Girl's school attendance serves little purpose if their presence is not validated in the school system. Naim Deen Salami, National Coordinator for the Benin chapter of the Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa (ERNWACA), voiced this concern: "After more than four decades of reforms and actions in favor of gender parity," he bitterly recalled, "girls still represent the most vulnerable population, particularly at [the] secondary school level" (Network for Policy, Research, Review, and Advice on Education and Training, 2005, p. 2). He then wondered if "school, as it has been handed down to us and as we are constructing it, can lead to change" (p. 2). In his opinion, "if school ceases to reproduce the relations of power, it will train individuals, both boys and girls, men and women, to understand that change is the most important thing in their lives" (Network for Policy, Research, Review, and Advice on Education and Training, 2005, p. 3).

The purpose of this study is to investigate girls' lived school experiences within Benin's secondary schools. It seeks to better understand the processes that transmit a culture of male domination to females in the school setting. In particular, this study seeks to understand (from the girls' perspective) how the reproduction of cultural gender stereotypes and the unequal power relations affect girls' school experience. Finally, the study attempts to identify strategies that girls use to cope with gender inequalities in the school setting.

Purpose of the Study

The study seeks the reasons for the persistent gender inequality in the schools of Benin through an investigation of the lived school experiences of 30 girls within a Benin's public secondary schools. To this end, the study attempts to understand the processes that transmit a culture of male domination to females in the school setting. In particular, it seeks to understand (from the girls' perspective) how the reproduction of cultural gender stereotypes and unequal power relations affect girls' perception of their school experience. Finally, the study attempts to identify strategies that girls use to survive the harmful practices they experience in the school setting.

Importance of the Study

This research is important for three important reasons. First, few qualitative studies have been conducted on obstacles to girls' education in Benin despite growing complaints that some school practices stand in the way and prevent girls from achieving academic excellence. Previous studies on obstacles to girls' education in Benin focused on gender-based school violence and its impacts on girls' schooling (Wible, 2004); or on how girls' perceptions of the realizable benefits of education impact their decision to remain in school or to drop out (Aboh, 2006). This study takes a broader approach to investigating the obstacles girls face in pursing education. It explores the interface of gender and culture and the way this interaction influences perceptions

of girls, attitude towards girls, and girls' schooling. This approach has the benefit of investigating the cultural roots of the hardships that girls routinely experience in schools. Knowledge of these roots will help design projects that specifically address the cultural dimensions of issues affecting girls' education. Secondly, while previous studies have focused mainly on physical barriers (e.g. poverty, lack of school infrastructure, distance to travel to school, etc.) to girls' education in Sub-Saharan Africa, this study focuses on invisible school-related obstacles that exclude girls from taught curriculum content and images and make them invisible in the classroom. In this way, the study raises awareness of hidden influencing factors of girls' school experience given little attention in existing literature on girls' education.

Thirdly, there is a widely shared belief in the international education community that getting more girls into school automatically decreases the educational gender gap in developing countries (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006). The educational community assumes that schools offer a peaceful environment and a unique opportunity for girls to achieve their aspirations and realize their dreams (Foster, 1998). Without questioning the relevance of this belief, this study indicates that while increasing female attendance is a good thing, it is also vitally important to validate girls' presence in the school. Finally, by raising public awareness of hidden cultural obstacles many girls face while attending school, the study will inform education policies that attract girls and keep them in school.

Delimitation

Due to its exploratory nature, this study focused mainly on a small number of participants. The study is an in-depth qualitative exploration of the lived school experiences of selected female students within a secondary school in Benin. The lack of available prior data or research on the topic for reference and comparison necessitated an exploratory rather than an explanatory design. Moreover, given the interpretive nature of qualitative research and its

demands for in-depth analysis of collected data, additional participants would have rendered the task of data analysis and interpretation unfeasible.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: OBSTACLES TO GIRLS' EDUCATION

The present review builds its approach to understanding girls' lived experience in Benin school settings on a survey of international education literature on obstacles to girls' schooling. The review consists of five main parts, including obstacles to girls' access to schooling, obstacles to attendance and performance; the concept of cultural hegemony; gender practices in pre-colonial and colonial Africa; and an anthropological perspective on the role of schools as institutions of cultural transmission. The review gives particular attention to previous findings on the gender socialization in post-colonial Africa schools and the role of school as an institution of cultural reproduction. The sources discussed in this review agree that the reproduction of harmful gender practices in post-colonial African schools represent an obstacle to girls' schooling.

Obstacles to Girls' Education in Existing Literature

A considerable amount of work has been published in the literature on girls' education in Sub- Saharan Africa. These studies identified several obstacles to girls' schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa. The obstacles identified fall in two broad categories: obstacles to access and obstacles to attendance and achievement. The obstacles to access refer to barriers that prevent girls from enrolling for school. These obstacles are mostly external to school (Strompquist, 2008). The obstacles to attendance and performance, on the other hand, refer to the challenges confronting girls in the school environment on a daily basis once they enroll for school. The pervading influence of these obstacles in the school setting distracts girls' attention from their school work (FAWE, 2001). This situation denies girls equal learning opportunities as their male

counterparts. This section will discuss both the obstacles to access and the obstacles to attendance often encountered in the literature on girls' education.

Obstacles to access

Economic Obstacle

The cost of education represents a major obstacle to girls' education in most African countries (Watkins, 2000; Boyle et al., 2002; Kane, 2004). In West Africa, in rural areas particularly, parents base their decision to send their children to school on the cost of education (Watkins, 2000). The high cost of education in most developing settings, Africa particularly, places heavy financial demands on parents' (Kane, 2004). "The cost of getting a child through primary school can represent more than one quarter of the annual income of a poor household" (Watkins, 2000, p. 172) in some cases. Faced with the choice to either send their children to school or keep them at home, parents often chose to send boys. Investing in boys' education rather than in girls' will pay dividends in the longer term, in parents' estimation. They believe that boys are most likely to take care of their parents in old age, while girls will marry and leave the family home. Parents' poverty, therefore, partly accounts for why a great many girls are still out of school. Evidence also suggests that the major reason why girls drop out of school in Africa is inability to cover the school-related expenses (Geiger, 2002; Watkins, 2000). Paradoxically, despite several attempts to remove these obstacles through scholarship awards for girls, provision of school supplies, and school meals for girls (FAWE, 2001), females' high repetition rate and high dropout rate are reportedly on the increase in African schools (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2006).

In an attempt to remove the cost of schooling for primary students a great many African countries made primary education free by removing tuition fees (UNESCO, 2005). These countries introduced schools capitation grant system to assist in the day-to-day management of

schools (Akyeampong, 2011). This has had an impact on enrollments, especially for girls (UNICEF, 2005). Despite this apparent success "many children still cannot afford to go, because of associated costs" (UNICEF, 2005).[1] "Girls are especially pressured to abandon their education because they have to help out with family chores; fall pregnant; or are married off young (Ligomeka, 2002). Also, school going girls can no longer play their role as care givers for sick family members (Morojele, 2012).

Distance

The distance separating home from school weighs in parents' decision to send girls to school (Colcough, 2000). A study in Chad (Central Africa) revealed through school mapping that enrollment increased sharply the closer the school was to the village, with gross enrollment rate of about 55% when school is located in the village; 35% when school is up to 1km away, and 10% when school is located more than 1km from the village (Mulkeen, 2005, in Lewis and Lockheed, 2006)**.** Further studies on the impact of distance on girls' education in West Africa found that distance reduces girls' participation in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Benin, and Niger (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006). In Ghana, (West Africa), Hartwell et al. (2004) found that the distance from home to a source of drinking water has significant impact on girls' school attendance. The girls who perform household chores in this context travel long distances to fetch water and cannot get back soon enough to prepare for school. The average Zambian student walks 7km to get to school (Bellamy, 1999). While bringing school closer to home increases girls' enrollment, it does not answer the question why girls still perform poorly at school and why they leave school soon after enrollment.

[1]In 2003 a great many countries made primary education free for both boys and girls as a means to increase access to primary education. Associated costs such as transportation and uniforms and indirect opportunity (child labor) costs remain significant obstacles (UNICEF, 2005).

The long distance from home to school affects girls' schooling in another way. For example, it deters parents from sending their daughters to school for safety reasons. Girls traveling long distances to school reportedly suffer abduction for forced marriage; sexual harassment and sexual assault resulting in unwanted pregnancies (Watkins, 2000); and ultimately in dropout**.** On cultural grounds losing one's virginity before marriage makes girls unfit for marriage (Colclough, 2000). For this reason, parents prefer their daughters to withdraw from school and get married when they reach adolescence, which denies the girls a chance to complete the school cycle. Early marriage, therefore, represents another obstacle to girls' education.

Cultural Barriers

In the literature on girls' education in Sub-Saharan Africa, several arguments have been advanced by scholars in the field of international education to account for the issues confronting girls in access and attainment of education. The main focus of these arguments has been on cultural practices. Four areas of African cultural practices, according to these scholars, represent obstacles to female participation in education. These areas include parents' attitudes to girls' schooling, the practice of dowry, early marriage, and initiation ceremonies (Swainson, 1995, Colclough, 2000). Parents' attitude toward girls' education, Swainson (1995) noted in a report on Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, informs decision to send or not to send girls to school. The cultural perceptions by some parents of "the primary role of girls as 'wives and mothers'" (p. 22), he argues, leads these parents to ascribe a low value to girls' education and to "consider that their sons should reach a higher educational level than their daughters" (Swainson, 1995, p.22). The low value accorded to education, according to Geiger (2002) is reinforced by the dowry tradition. She cites Zambia as an example where "the marriage of daughters is regarded as a source of bride-wealth . . . and where the bride wealth payments diminishes for an

educated girl" (Watkins, 2000, p. 196 in Geiger 2002, p.12). In contexts like Zambia the prospect of the bride wealth payments urges parents to take their daughters out of school and to rush them to early marriage (Geiger, 2000), another obstacle identified for girls' participation in education. Girls usually withdraw from school as early as grade four for marriage (Geiger, 2002, p. 12), while in Ethiopia (East Africa) they "are married as early as the age of eight" (Colclough, 2000, p. 22). The fear of girls getting pregnant out of wedlock (Swainson, 1995, Geiger, 2002) is another reason why parents rush their daughters out of school for early marriage (Bendera, 1999, p. 123). As Colcough (2000) noted "some societies regard the pregnancy of unmarried girls as culturally shameful" (Colclough, 2000, p. 22). Therefore, to avoid embarrassment and disgrace, parents remove girls from school as soon as they reach puberty (Colclough, 2000) for fear they might become pregnant. Otherwise, if a girl gets pregnant before marriage, her family cannot demand a high bride price if she gets married eventually (Swainson, 1995). Initiation ceremonies are also found to put constraints on girls' education. Initiation ceremonies, as Colclough (2000) defines them, are performed

> when children reach the age of puberty, the onset of adulthood; during the ceremony knowledge and values concerning procreation, morals, sexual skills are passed on to the girls concerned . . . sometimes these ceremonies are performed during term-time and could cause absenteeism from school for a period ranging from one week to one month, with final withdrawal being the end result. (p. 3)

Perceived as women by their communities after initiation, girls generally regard it as shameful to go back to school (Colclough, 2000) and decide not to return, which puts an end to their schooling. The aforementioned practices and the low value placed on girls' education inform general attitudes toward girls and shape perception of girls not just in their community; they permeate practices and the perception of girls in the school setting as well. Here, "teachers, according to surveys, believe that girls are less able than boys" (Geiger, 2002, p. 22).

The literature on girls' education provides substantial evidence of the harmful effects of adverse cultural practices on girls' education in South Saharan Africa. However, it appears that most research on girls' schooling in Africa focus exclusively on African cultures as the source of the cultural issues confronting schoolgirls in post-colonial Africa. It should be born in mind that schools in colonial Africa were created with a mandate to spread the cultural beliefs and values of the colonial power through education (Garcia, 1971; Barthelemy, 2003; Bunch, 1934). Consistent with this mission, the practices in colonial schools, including gender practices, reflected practices in the culture of the colonial administration in charge (Callaway, 1987). For the French colonial administrator Chaudie, for example, school is the most reliable tool at the disposal of a civilizing nation to promote its values and beliefs among primitive people (Garcia, 1971). The Western beliefs and values observed in colonial schools were nurtured into post-colonial African schools and still survive through the teacher-centered methodology; the school curriculum; and general attitudes toward girls. Therefore, holding practices in African cultures entirely accountable for the cultural barriers to girls' education; leaving untouched the cultural foundation of schools in colonial Africa; represents a gap in the literature on girls' education in South Saharan Africa. In terms of gender practices, the entire colonial enterprise, the education system included, operated on a gender discriminatory ideology whereby men were put in charge, and women, rendered invisible (Mba, 1982); the patterns and circumstances of discriminatory practices against women in the colonial era must be understood within the broader social context of the perception held of women in nineteenth century European culture. Wojtczak (2002) summarizes women's status in 19th-century England:

> They had to obey men, because in most cases men held all the resources and women had no independent means of subsistence. . . . Girls received less education than boys, were barred from universities, and could obtain only low-paid jobs. Women's sole purpose was to marry and reproduce. . . . Furthermore, rights to the woman

> personally—that is, access to her body—were his [the husband's]. Not only was this assured by law, but the woman herself agreed to it verbally: written into the marriage ceremony was a vow to *obey* her husband, which every woman had to swear before God as well as earthly witnesses. (p.54)

On close scrutiny, the way that women and girls were perceived and treated in 19th-century England shows some similarities with parents' perception of their daughters as mothers and wives in Zambia and Malawi (see previous section). Wojtczak's quote brings evidence to suggest that gender prejudice against women and girls in 19th century Europe informed gender practices in colonial schools in Africa (Bunche, 1934); it privileged boys' education over girls' (Garcia, 1971); it shaped the design of the school curriculum and determined its content (Barthelemy, 2003). Finally, it informed the teacher-centered teaching method adopted for use in colonial African schools (Lavan, 2005). One could infer from the ongoing discussion, that gender inequality in post-colonial South Saharan African schools and the issues confronting girls in education began with the establishment of formal schooling in colonial Africa. In French colonial Dahomey, (now Benin), for example, from 1903 (when colonial public schools opened) to 1938, for every five boys, one girl was in school. In the meantime from 1919 to 1920, for every 45 boys, one girl was in school (Barthelemy, 2003, p. 372). By 1937 the gap narrowed down to 10 boys in school for only 1 girl. The reason for this gap in attainment lies in the colonial educational policy, which encouraged boys' school enrollment to the detriment of girls'. The fact that the first training school for girls in colonial French West Africa was established thirty-five years (in 1938) after boys' training school opened in 1903 (Barthelemy, 2003) attests to that. Amadiume (1987) reported similar gender imbalance in the provision of educational services in the British colonial Igbo society of Nigeria (former British colony); here, enrollment figures show that boys had a head start over girls in the early years of Western education in Igboland (Amadiume, 1987). According to the Annual Report of the Department of Education of Nigeria

for 1906, for example, 1592 boys were in school for only 132 girls in the Eastern Province of Nigeria. In the Central Province, enrollment figures for the 19 government schools show 1038 boys for only 132 girls for the same year (Amadiume, 1987, p. 134). For Roman Catholic Mission schools in the same Province, 1550 boys and 11 girls were in school (p.134). In 1909 the 3 Eastern Province Government schools enrolled 4302 boys and 279 girls. In terms of the perception by parents of the role of girls as 'wives and mothers' purported as characteristic of African cultures, Barthelemy (2003) has this to say about the first teacher training school for girls established in colonial French West Africa:

> The political and ideological intentions behind the opening of this institution were not the training of an important number of African elite. . . . The main objective was to train the few girls selected every year through test to become good teachers, most importantly trained mothers, faithful and accomplished housewives who, once married, will form with their husbands, dedicated couples to the cause of France. (Barthelemy, 2003, p. 372)

This quote brings evidence that the perception of girls as wives and mothers, albeit a trait common to African cultures; also reflects the culture of the colonial administration that made school an official institution in former African colonies. The curriculum adopted for use in colonial schools and the teacher-centered methodology used in these schools (Bunche, 1934); the daily class schedule (Barthelemy, 2003), were all put in place to fulfill the colonial agenda. Long after the colonial advent, aspects of the colonial educational system still survive in post-colonial Africa mainly through the teacher-centered methodology and the school curriculum (Lavan, 2005).

In sum, the perception of women in both African cultures and the colonial Western culture have informed the perceptions and the treatment of girls' in the school setting of post-colonial Africa. Initiatives seeking to remove cultural barriers to girls' education in post-colonial Africa, therefore, should take a holistic approach to addressing the origins of these barriers. This

involves looking into cultural practices in African cultures while at the same time looking back at the gender ideology governing practices in the colonial educational system. Teachers and school administrators are agents of reproduction and transmission of these practices.

Girls' Daily School Experience

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition among researchers that the daily school experience represents an obstacle to girls' education. Anderson-Leavitt, Bloch, and Soumare (1994), for example, describe school in Africa as an environment of discouragement for girls; Miske and VanderBelle-Prouty (1997) advocate for an "environment of validation" (p. 1) in order to improve girls' school performance. Likewise, Leach et al. (2005) raised concern over the gender-oppressive environment in the school settings of Ghana and Botswana. Here, girls reportedly experience violence (both verbal and physical) in their daily school lives (Leach et al., 2005). The Forum of African Women Educationalists FAWE (2001) echoed Leach et al.'s concern. They issued a cry for help on behalf of girls in light of the discriminatory practices and acts of oppression perpetrated against girls in African school settings. FAWE's call for help is an invitation to education policy makers to pay more attention to girls' daily school experience in their search for ways to remove barriers to girls' education. The present study is a response to FAWE's call. In search for the meaning of being a girl in Benin school settings, the study focuses on girls' lived school experience. It pays particular attention to the way that teachers, school administrators, and male students perceive and behave toward the girls in the school environment. Anderson-Levitt et al. (1994) present school as an environment of discouragement for girls. Women's subordination through sexual harassment forms an integral part of girls' experience in this environment.

Obstacles to Attendance and Performance

Socialization through Cultural Transmission

While obstacles to access refer to external barriers to school, socialization refers barriers internal to school. Based on findings from previous studies the socialization of girls occurs through the formal curriculum, teachers' expectations of girls, teachers' attitudes toward girls, teacher-student interaction, and boys' perceptions of and attitude toward girls.

The Formal Curriculum

Stromquist (2008) has argued that "The nature of curriculum materials used in the schools and their relationship to the world of boys and girls gives us a critical window into the knowledge conveyed by schools" (p. 14). In African settings, the formal school curriculum serves as a tool for the socialization of boys and girls (FAWE, 2005). Socialization in schools has been viewed as "a critical dimension through which educational settings may introduce changes or, conversely, continue to reproduce traditional value and attitudes" (Strompquist, 2008, p. 7). School, in African settings, reproduces traditional gender norms of women's subordination (Colclough et al 2005).

Findings from class observation in some African classrooms revealed that in their delivery of lesson content, teachers adopt methodology that fail to promote equal participation of males and females in the classroom (FAWE, 2005). In terms of teaching materials, for example, the selection of materials that contain gender stereotypes often highlights male qualities while females are marginalized. Findings from research in Sub-Saharan African schools further indicate that the textbooks used in most African school contexts contain images and

texts that portray women and girls in position of inferiority to men and boys (Gaba, 2003; Watkins, 2000; FAWE, 2001; 2003; Lewis and Lockheed, 2006). As Stromquist (1990) noted:

> The school system does not offer knowledge that challenges sexual division of labor and Gender ideologies; there is evidence indicating that many school textbooks in developing countries requires the teacher to review contain negative messages for female identity. (p. 150)

The projection of females as inferior to males in these textbooks reproduces the values and beliefs found in the broader community. These values encourage boys to affirm their masculinity by means of violence, if needed, against girls (Morrell, 2001)Likewise, the representation of women as passive, weak, and submissive; and their portrayal in domestic roles as housewives (FAWE, 2005) limits their roles to household activities; conversely, men are portrayed in more privileged, active leadership roles (FAWE, 2005). The prevalence of male characters in textbooks, according to FAWE (2005), explains "the frequent use of sexist language involving the use of the 'he' pronoun in these textbooks" p. (5). In some developing countries the curriculum does not only present women as passive and men as active. It is also "differentiated for boys and girls with girls receiving more information on family life…, and boys on productive skills and sports" (Stromquist, 2007, p.14).

Socialization through Allocation of School Duties

Teachers also discriminate against girls in the allocation of school duties. A UNICEF study (2003) about *Gendered and Identities and HIV/AIDS in Education* in Africa reported a girl saying:

> Boys are not allocated duties like polishing, sweeping and other chores that are disliked by all students. They are given duties in the dining hall and picking [up] litter p. (52).

Girls perform the exact same duties they would perform at home, an indication that school culture reproduces patterns of gender roles attributed to boys and girls at home. As it often

occurs, boys do not perform their share of school duties leaving girls to complete them. School culture condones the exploitative nature of boys' behavior to girls (UNICEF, 2003) probably because of the cultural perception of males as superior to females. Teachers' failure to admonish boys for disrespectful behavior towards girls reinforces boys' perceptions of girls as inferior and shapes their attitude toward their female peers in the classroom. The teachers' guilty silence also betrays their own perceptions of girls.

Teachers' Perceptions, Expectations, and Attitudes toward Students

Evidence from previous research studies in the schools of Sub Saharan Africa suggests that teachers hold different percept on of boys and girls and that their perception shape their attitudes toward students.

In a survey conducted in Guinea and Ethiopia (Colclough, Rose, and Tembon 2000) on teachers' attitude to girls, teachers found boys more intelligent than girls, more active in the classroom, more interested in learning. Seventy-five (75) teachers were interviewed in Ethiopia, 28 in Guinea. The interviews revealed that teachers had more positive attitudes about boys than girls. In Guinea, for example, male teachers had more positive views about boys' participation and interest, whereas a small number of female teachers had more positive views about girls than boys. However, in the Ethiopian surveys, the majority of both male and female teachers believed that boys were more intelligent, participated more in class, and were more interested in learning, than girls. Table 1 summarizes the survey findings.

Table 1. Teachers' Attitudes toward Boys and Girls in Ethiopia and Guinea

	Ethiopia				Guinea			
	Male		Female		Male		Female	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Whom do you think is most intelligent?								
Boys	50	66	29	66	12	43	4	44
Girls	6	8	1	2	6	21	5	56
Both the same	19	25	14	32	10	36	0	0
Who participates most in class?								
Boys	70	93	39	89	16	57	3	33
Girls	3	4	0	0	4	14	6	67
Both the same	2	3	5	11	8	29	0	0
Who is more interested in learning?								
Boys	43	57	29	66	18	64	2	22
Girls	10	13	4	9	3	11	4	45
Both the same	22	30	11	25	7	25	3	33
For whom is schooling more important?								
Boys	4	5	1	2	2	7	1	1
Girls	7	9	7	16	4	14	5	56
Both the same	64	86	35	88	22	79	3	33

Source: Colcough and Tembon (2000) Gender inequality in primary schooling: The roles of poverty and adverse cultural practice

Similarly, a teacher from Rwanda noted that:

> The boys work harder—the girls don't really want to be here. Why should I waste my time with them? I have better things to do than try to teach someone who doesn't really want to be in school. If they do not want to work hard they should just leave school and go to the fields or get married, because that's where they'll end up. (VanBelle-Prouty, 1991, p. 124, in Miske and Prouty, 1997, p. 6)

Teachers also perceive girls as obedient, submissive, quiet, calm, and easy to control (Miske and Prouty, 1997).

In a study by Biraimah (1980), Togolese teachers were given a list of 37 characteristics that might describe their male and/or female students. The teachers listed their perceptions of students as follows in Table 2:

Table 2. Teacher Selected Students' Characteristics

Female students	**Male students**
1. Net appearance	1. Likely to succeed at higher education
2. Below average	2. Good attendance
3. Does not follow instructions	3. Good in math
4. Lacks interest in school	4. Likely to obtain a good job after education
5. Does not profit from attending school	5. Responsible
6. Family well educated	6. Aware of current events
7. Handle school property carefully	7. Hard working
8. Quiet/submissive	8. Above-average work
9. Very emotional	9. Scholarly
10. Disruptive behavior	10. Leadership qualities

Source: Biraimah, 1980, p. 200

Teachers' perceptions of girls permeate messages boys receive from schoolteachers about girls in the classroom. In a UNICEF study on gendered and sexual identities in some African countries, for example, boys received the following messages from their teachers during an HIV/AID awareness session:

- "Girls can bring diseases to us."
- "Don't have sex because of HIV/AIDS."
- "Boys start looking for women and can be infected."

(*Finding Our Voices: Gendered and Sexual Identities and HIV/AID in Education UNICEF*, 2003, p. 55.)

Boys also learn the same lessons from parents and grandparents about HIV:

- "Avoid sex with girls, which is a shame and can bring diseases."
- "Sex is bad manners or habits— you should not have a girlfriend."
- "Do not choose girls who are sexy because they may have diseases."

(p. 55)

Sending such messages about girls in the classroom shapes boys' perception of girls as a danger to avoid. It keeps boys and girls away from each other, and reinforces beliefs that boys and girls must not be too close (Pattman, 2005).

Teacher-Student Interaction

Evidence from studies of teacher-student interaction in the classroom in some African countries has documented how boys control talk, time, and space in the classroom (Miske, 1997). Viewed as assertive, aggressive, competitive, and outspoken (FAWE, 2005; Strompquist, 2007), boys have their own way of getting teachers' attention. Therefore, they tend to receive more attention, criticism, and feedback than do girls ((Fennema& Peterson, 1985; Eccles & Blumenfeld, 1985; Sadker & Sadker, 1986; Delamont, 1990; Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1991) in Strompquist, 2007, p. 11). Biraimah (1980), for example, noted teachers' preference for boys in the classroom in Togo. She recorded her findings as follows in Table 3:

Table 3. Actual Classroom Participation Rates (%)

	ARTS		SCIENCE		ALL	
Item	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Boys**	**Girls**
Chosen to answer	25	14	6	1	13	6
Chosen to read/recite	7	8	3	2	6	5
Allowed to ask questions	4	2	8	1	6	2
Positive academic reinforcement	8	6	2	1	4	3
Negative academic reinforcement	12	11	1	0	6	5
Negative behavior reinforcement	2	4	2	0	2	2
Class maintenance	2	10	1	3	2	6

Source: Biraimah, 1980, p. 203

As shown in Table 3, teachers called more frequently on boys than girls during both arts and science classes. Girls are chosen more than boys—particularly in science—to read or to recite, an activity that requires little intellectual challenge. Teachers' barely veiled preference

for boys reveals their perception of girls as less gifted for schooling. For this reason, most likely, "they pose the more difficult and reasoning out questions to boys and only direct-recall type of questions to us" (FAWE, 2001, p. 9).

Moreover, the higher percentage of boys chosen to read/recite in Science probably indicates girls' exclusion from science classes. Boys are allowed to ask questions more than girls particularly in Science. Girls are silenced and excluded from classroom events. Boys get more feedback for poor academic performance than girls while girls get more reprimanded for behavioral problems. Teachers care more about boys' learning while they complain more about girls' behavior. In terms of class maintenance, an activity related to housekeeping, girls by far outperformed boys', which sends messages about the gender division of labor, with the role of household keeper assigned to girls.

In another study of students' participation in the classroom conducted in Nigeria, Biraimah (1989) found that level 2 primary school teachers had positive instructional interaction with boys and girls equally, but noted a variation in teacher's interaction with level 6 students. At this level, the study reports an increase of teachers' positive instructional interaction with boys from 18 to 27 percent while positive interaction with girls remained at 19 percent. According to the same study, in level 2 classes teachers reprimanded boys as often as girls, but by level 6 the number of teachers' reprimands of boys decreased while negative responses to girls' behavior remained unchanged (Biraimah, 1989). The Nigeria case study confirms findings from the Togo study, undertaken almost a decade earlier. Discriminatory practice against female students increases as they move to higher grades.

These changes in the quality of teachers' instructional interactions with students and the frequency of rebuke of boys and girls as they move to upper level classes carry significant

cultural meaning. As boys and girls grew in age, the need arises for teachers to make them aware of gender roles and identities and the expected cultural behaviors that go along with these roles. Nigerian teachers are socializing agents, and school is a socializing institution. By being harsh on girls and flexible on boys, Nigerian teachers adopt a patriarchal attitude of gender segregation that prescribes the use of force to keep women under control (Dobash and Dobash, 1979).

Discriminatory practices against girls in the classroom are not limited to teachers' higher frequency of interaction with boys than with girls. They also come in the form of teachers' negative feedback to female students. In a study of 36 Kenyan schools, for example, Mensch and Lloyd (1998, see FAWE, 2001) found that teachers directed questions mostly to boys (UNICEF, 2003) and that they gave negative feedback to girls who attempted to answer their questions. A teacher in one the studied schools, for example, **"**constantly told the class that girls do not use common sense and that they will not make good salespersons" (FAWE, 2001, p. 11**).** Also**,** when girls gave wrong answers, the teacher would tell the class: "girls do not use their heads," or "if you are not ready to learn, go get married" (FAWE, 2001, p. 11), which suggests that girls are only good for keeping children**.** In any case, the teacher takes advantage of any opportunity to enforce gender stereotypes on girls. "Even if a girl lifted her hand to answer a question, the teacher would point at her reluctantly because he wasn't sure she could give the right answer" (FAWE, 2001, pp. 10-11). When girls answer correctly "some teachers referred you to the boys or said yes, you are right, but you could have said…. Like so and so, in most cases a boy" (FAWE, 2001, p. 11).

Teachers use boys as the reference to evaluate girls' performance in the classroom. In some cases, the teacher would simply ignore the girls who raise their hands to answer

questions. In a class on female circumcision in Guinea, Leavitt et al (1995, in Miske, 1997, p. 4) report the following:

> The sole girl raised her hand and held it as the teacher continued to call on boys. Eventually, a boy sitting behind her repeatedly pulled her hand down. She, however, persisted raising her arm and rising in her place. When the teacher finally called on her, she told her that her views were less valued than the boys' (Leavitt et al., 1995, p.11).

FAWE (2001) documented other forms of discriminatory treatment of girls by school administrators, teachers, and boys in Kenyan schools. She reported the humiliation girls experience in a Kenyan school on Wednesdays, known as inspection day. On this day, the school administration requests girls (not boys) to lift their dresses in order to have their petty coats inspected for cleanness. This socializes boys to show disrespect for girls/women and girls to accept their inferior status compared to boys. Some girls prefer to stay home on this particular day to preserve their dignity, at the risk of falling behind in their schoolwork. Indeed, female subordination in the school setting forces girls into truancy, which, in turn, influences girls' academic performance.

Describing girls by their physical appearance represents another form of disrespect. "A girl's physical appearance is often used to describe her. A girl with thin legs is called hockey sticks and one with fat ones is called Michelin" (FAWE, 2001, p. 8).

The discriminatory, humiliating, and disrespectful treatments girls receive from their teachers ultimately create an environment of discouragement, which negatively affects girls' learning. In their own voices, girls expressed their frustrations in a FAWE report on *Girls' Education in Africa*:

> In the class, the teacher discourages the girls so much. If you do not answer a question correctly, the teacher tells you, "if you are not ready to learn, go get married." This is never said to boys. (FAWE, 2001, p. 11)

Perceived as less capable than boys, girls end up building a negative self-image, which turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy. In answer to a question about why she still chose not to return to school even though someone offered to pay her school fees, a Ghanaian dropout girl responded:

> *"I'm not intelligent and that makes me feel shy."* (Stephens, 1998, p. 7)

This girl's evaluation of her own academic ability and intellectual capacity is influenced by the meaning of "being intelligent" as defined by the school culture at her school**.** Stephens (1998) gives us a hint of what it means to be academically successful in the Ghanaian school culture:

> Academic is defined clearly as knowing something and being able to respond well to a teacher's questions. Children who cope up in class are 'brilliant,' the ones who don't are weak and un-academic. Predictably, a number of girls' dropouts fitted in the latter category. (p. 124)

Girls also complain about the distraction teachers often cause to their studies:

> You are usually sent in the afternoon, skipping one or two last lessons. You go to the market, buy whatever you are asked, then take the items to the teachers' home and . . . cook for them. (FAWE, 2001, p. 12)

As well as causing a distraction to the girls' studies, sending the girls shopping and having them cook for teachers also socializes them for their gender roles as housewives and future mothers. Invariably, "teachers' and students' assumptions that girls' primary role and ambition was to be wives and mothers strongly influenced teacher-student conversations and interactions" (Miske & VanderBelle-Prouty, 1997, p. 6). In some of the coeducational classrooms observed, for example:

> The differentiated lines of work and authority are so clearly demarcated that [one would think] girls take part in an apprenticeship for marriage. In this apprenticeship, girls model and internalize roles, responsibilities, and relationships of power and authority that will pervade their future roles as wives and mothers. (Miske & VanderBelle-Prouty, 1997, p. 6)

A good example of girls reproducing and internalizing "relationships of power and authority" learned from their culture comes from Malawi schools. Here, girls reportedly "assume the customary stance of going forward on their knees when turning in work or receiving punishments" (Davison & Kanyuka, 1990), "a posture usually assumed in many African cultures in deference to an elder or somebody in authority" (Miske& Prouty, 1997, p. 6).

In short, the gender practices that teachers exhibit in the school setting reinforce unequal gender relations and perpetuate the notions of male superiority and dominance (Dunne et al., 2006). Leach and Machakanja (2000) and Dunne et al. (2006) summarize examples of such practices:

> Teacher tolerance of male students' domination of classroom space at the expense of girls' participation in lessons; the celebration of masculine competitiveness; the allocation of more public and higher status tasks and responsibilities to male students and teachers, and private domestic-related ones to female students and teachers; the acceptance of bullying and verbal abuses as a natural part of growing up; and teachers' unofficial use of free student labor, especially that of girls. These taken-for-granted, routine practices of schooling all too often teach children that masculinity is associated with aggression, while femininity requires obedience, acquiescence and making oneself attractive to boys. (Leach, 2008, p. 30)

Such attributes as obedience and acquiescence assigned to female students relegate them to an inferior status and inspire and encourage the boys to treat them with disrespect. They make school an institution of cultural transmission and males in the school setting agents of cultural transmission. Based on these attributes, the boys construct themselves in opposition to the girls.

Boys' Perceptions of Girls

In previous studies on boys' perceptions of and attitudes toward girls in the school environment of Africa, boys generally treat girls in exactly the same way that they see teachers treat female students (Leach et al. 2005; Miske, 1997). Boys' attitudes towards girls in African

school settings reflect the way in which they define themselves in relation to girls, which, in most cases, they learn from home (Izugbara, 2005). The following extract supports this view.

> It's better to be a boy. Even my sisters respect me. When my father confides in me they envy me. My mother tells them to serve me food. They do all the chores. They fear me. I know they wish they were me. All girls wish to be boys. . . . Being a boy means you have to be tough and fearless, my father tells me. . . . I don't wish to be a girl. Girls are weak, lazy, and fearful. (Izugbara, 2005, p. 13)

We learn two important lessons from this statement: First, boys feel naturally superior to girls, and, second, they learn such beliefs from their parents. Asked why they liked being boys, Kenyan teenage boys responded:

> Wakesa: "Girls respect you and I will inherit from my father."
> Chege: "Boys are brave and girls keep on laughing—I hate that."
> Gichinga: Boys "are not easily raped."
> Kagai: Boys "don't get pregnant."
> Mbui: Boys "will be head of the house." (UNICEF, 2003, p. 38)

In this short interaction, the Kenyan boys clearly expressed their perceptions of girls. Phrases like "easily raped" and "get pregnant" denote perception of girls in terms of their biological sex. By contrast, "respect" indicates the social construction of girls as subordinate to boys. Moreover, based on their perception of girls as weak and lazy, boys often humiliate them. For example, girls complain about being "subjected to endless ridicule and bullying as they regard us as dumb, naïve, and pretty" (FAWE, 2001, p. 10). Additionally, girls get laughed at when they answer the teacher's questions wrong. The following interaction between two students from Zimbabwe and an interviewer provides an example.

Sekayi (B):	"Girls—you don't have self-confidence, so you think you are treated differently."
Interviewer:	"Do you girls agree? Do you not have self-confidence?"
Nehanda (G):	"Yes, it is true. Sometimes when a girl knows the answer she does not raise her hand, so the teacher thinks she does not know."
Florence (G):	"Yes, it is because the boys laugh at us if we get the answer wrong."
Interviewer:	"But do you boys laugh when other boys get the answer wrong?"
Boys:	(Inaudible murmur)

Nehanda (G): "They only laugh at girls."
Banga (B): "That's not true."
Nehanda (G): "All the boys laugh when we get the answer wrong, even those who do not know the answer also laugh." (UNICEF, 2003, p. 59)

Girls' lack of confidence, as Sekayi mentioned above, stems from their exclusion from classroom activities:

> "Exclusion . . . denies girls the opportunity to gain self-confidence and self-respect, which comes from competent performance, recognition, and visibility in the classroom. (Stromquist, 2008, p. 11)

Overall, meaning is central to understanding boys' perceptions of girls. The meaning that boys associate with the word "girl" explains their behavior toward female students. For these boys, girls "are easily raped," which makes them easy to prey on. This mindset explains why boys sexually harass girls. However, other reasons may account for the sexual harassment of girls by boys.

Sexual Harassment as Girls' School Experience

Findings from Rossetti's (2001) survey of 560 students in Botswana, for example, revealed 67% reporting sexual harassment by teachers and 20% also reporting having been asked by teachers for sex. Forty-two percent (42%) of the 20% had granted the teacher's sexual requested for fear of reprisals.

An investigation into the lived school experience of 105 girls in Zambia's schools by Cornell University Law School (2012) revealed similar findings to those from this study. The study involved girls from different schools. As in Benin, the girls in Zambia reported teachers abusing their authority to harass and to abuse girls sexually, including raping them. As in Benin, Zambian teachers harass and abuse girls sexually in exchange for good grades, exam answers, and money. Sixty (60) of the 105 girls interviewed (57%) reported having experienced sexual

harassment or knowing a friend who had. Fourteen percent (14%) reported having personally experienced sexual harassment or abuse. According to the girls, teachers harass girls even in the classroom, through embarrassing sexual comments, as in the following report by a 14-year-old ninth-grader:

> I took off my jersey, and my shirt was a little bit open. The teacher stared and said, "Wow, you have nice boobs." I said, "How can you say those things? I'm young." He kept quiet but continued approaching me, telling me that I was pretty, asking me out and offering to take me here and there. (Cornell University, 2012, p. 19)

Teachers also used deceitful means to lure their students into having sex with them.

> A teacher forced my friend to have sex with him. He called her and said, "Come to school. Your friends are here." When she arrived, she did not find anyone there. The teacher told her, "Go to the computer room and get a bottle of water." He followed her and started asking her questions like: "Do you love me?" He said that if my friend didn't say yes, she couldn't go home. "Prove your love," he said. "Kiss me." She did what he asked her to do because she wanted to go home. She became his girlfriend. (Cornell University, 2012, p. 20)

Practices like the one noted in this quote often go unreported and, consequently, are unknown to school authorities. Therefore, teachers get away with it. In the example above, the student eventually became pregnant, dropped out, and returned to her family's village. Meanwhile, the teacher got promoted as a "qualified secondary teacher" (Cornell University, 2012, p. 20).

Exam "leakages," or leaked exam answers, and the awarding of undeserved good grades also cause girls to submit to teachers' requests for sex. The offer of sex for academic favors sometimes comes from girls:

> When you're in grade 12 and getting towards exams, girls start looking for leakages. They start getting along with male teachers and sleeping with them. I've heard of three male teachers who do this. When we have to write our grade 12s, lots of girls go wild because they want to pass. (p. 22)

However, teachers also coercively advertise grades for sex:

> During my grade nine exam, the teacher told me, “I want to have sex with you so I will show you how to do the exam.” I said, “No, let me pass with only my brain. You are not a God.” He told me that I was going to suffer. (p. 22)

Indeed, Zambian girls suffer reprisals for rejecting teachers’ requests for sex. A Zambian girl tells her story:

> My geography teacher proposed to me, and I refused. After that, when I tried to answer a question in class, he wouldn’t call on me or would send me out of the classroom. When the noisemaker made noise, he would beat me. He used a stick on my hands and buttocks. . . . When this happened, I was discouraged at school. When I woke up in the morning, I didn’t want to go to school because I knew that the teacher would beat me. I stayed home for one week until my mother got me changed to another school. (p. 23)

A ninth-grader at another school told a similar story about a friend who denied the teacher’s request for sex:

> Because she refused, [the teacher] beat her. At school, the whole class was making noise, and he would just beat her. He beat her with a stick maybe seven times. She would go outside of the class whenever she could. She never used to concentrate, never used to learn. This happened for something like a month. Finally, she got her dad to agree to send her to a different school but she never told him what had happened. (p. 23)

The Zambian girls also complained about sexual harassment and sexual abuse by boys. Like teachers, boys terrorize girls with retaliation if the girls refuse to grant their sexual demands. At times, the boys use violence to submit girls to their sexual desires.

> In public, the boys will threaten girls and say things like, “I am in 12G or B. If you fail to see me there, you will be in a problem.” They do that a lot. And when he calls you, you think, “He can beat me,” so you go there and say, “Oh, I love you.” (p. 25)

The following example also shows that boys sometimes violently force themselves on girls:

> I was dating a boy who wanted me to have sex with him. I should say that he tried to kill me. He squeezed me so hard on my neck that I couldn’t breathe. When he was hurting me and squeezing me on my neck, I just stood there quiet, my tears were rolling. Finally, he stopped that. I told him we are done. . . . (p. 25)

In the worst of cases, girls are gang raped. A female student told the story of a friend who went through this experience: “There is this class that only had one girl, and she was abused sexually. Four boys abused her. They raped her. All of them did; it happened in the classroom after the teacher left” (p. 25).

In sum, girls suffer sexual abuse from both teachers and boys. As shown in the girls’ accounts of their school experience, sexual harassment and abuse represent real obstacles to girls’ schooling. This obstacle is compounded by the lack of support from the school administration to girls, particularly to victims of sexual harassment. A study by Aboh (2006) on girls’ perception of their experience in a school setting in Benin supports this claim. The findings from this study revealed girls’ complaints about being denied attention and support by the school administration. The girls expressed their frustrations with the administration of their school in many different ways. A dropout girl shares her experience:

> When I was there, I had the impression that they did not care much. Their behavior was clearly telling. You may be there or you may be out. It is not their problem. How do you stay in such environment when you know that the people who are supposed to help you succeed in life could care less if you disappear today? (Aboh, 2006, p. 12)

Another girl was reported as saying:

> If you have a problem with a teacher, you might as well solve it with him/her and accept the outcome. It’s a waste of time to try to see an administrator about it. They will just make it worse because they will always take the teacher’s side against you. It seems that the motto around here is “the teacher is always right.” (Aboh, 2006, p. 14)

Denied the support and attention they need, the girls end up dropping out. For this dropout girl in Aboh’s (2006) study on girls’ perception of schooling in Benin, experiencing disrespect, humiliation, discrimination, and lack of support in the school environment was just unbearable: “It was a very difficult situation and when the time to leave came, I had no regret” (p. 12).

Gender Practices in Pre-Colonial and in Colonial Africa:

A Background to Gender Practices in the Post-Colonial African School

Gender Practices in Pre-Colonial Africa

This section focuses on gender practices in the pre-colonial Yoruba societies of Nigeria because Benin and Nigeria share a common cultural background. The Yoruba ethnic group is a dominant social group in both countries.

Male authority and control over most aspects of women's lives, according to Gordon (1996, p. 7), "is located and exercised through the extended family [e.g. the African family] a pre-capitalist unit of production, which continues into the present time." This might suggest tracing the origin of African women's subordination back to pre-colonial Africa. Gender inequality in post-colonial African societies is a hotly debated and highly controversial topic. This section reviews the plurality of views expressed, the interpretations given, and the approaches taken to understanding gender inequality in post-colonial Africa. Women's empowerment, a sine quoi non for national and international development (Nussbaum, 2005), has been the focus of research; national and international forums; and United-Nations-sponsored conferences. Gender inequality has been identified as a major obstacle in the way of developing countries to achieving economic progress and social welfare (FAWE, 2003; Stromquist, 1990). Much has been said about the power imbalance between men and women in post-colonial Africa, but the question still remains where gender inequality originated. Contradictory views are held on this issue. For some individuals, gender oppression is a reality grounded in African culture. Others believe that gender inequality is a colonial import imposed on African countries. In her comment on women's subordination in colonial Africa, Robertson (1984, p. 111), for example, argues that colonial sexism was often imposed on an "already in egalitarian societies that contained the

seeds of sexist ideology which flourished with colonial nurturance," In a similar comment, Ogundikpe (1985, in Bakari, 2003, p. 2) explained: "It is through the institution of marriage that [Nigerian pre-colonial Yoruba] women, who become properties in their husbands' lineages, lose all property rights and self-identity." This may suggest that Yoruba women preserved their rights in the other institutions of pre-colonial Yoruba societies, including in their own family home. For Sudarkasa, (1987), Oyewumi (1998), and Nzegwu (2001), although pre-colonial African societies may have their own forms of inequality and social stratification, sexual differences were not the basis for social organizing. They argue that pre-colonial African women enjoyed some power, including economic, political, and spiritual power (Makinde, 2004). For these writers motherhood also confers some power to women (Acholonu, 1995). As mothers, women were a symbol of fecundity and fertility and were worshipped accordingly. Amadiume (1987) emphasizes the matrilineal dual-sex systems established in pre-colonial Nigerian Igbo societies, which made it possible for women to enjoy some autonomy, power, and privileges that were taken away from them with the colonial advent. Afonja (1990) repudiates Amdiume's argument. She argues that "any apparent power or authority women may have within matrilineal systems is merely symbolic and tangential to the formal power of men" (see Bakari, 2003, p.12). Okome (2001, p. 6) makes insightful remarks about women's power in pre-colonial Yoruba societies. For her, pre-colonial Yoruba women exercised power as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, grandmothers, mothers in law, political official, owners of capital, monarchs, nobility/aristocracy, deities, religious leaders. She explains how, as mothers, pre-colonial Yoruba women were the symbol of fruitfulness and fecundity. They were both respected and worshipped as such. She further argues that as wives, women in their own patrilineage have superior rights over their husbands (regarded as outsiders) who lose their rights as males to all

the members of his wife's family (the extended family), including women. As outsiders, men who marry into a family only participate in decision making through the agency of their wives who are part of the family. Additionally, there are social obligations that men, outsiders to their wives' family by virtue of being married into it, must perform. By the same token, a woman loses her rights within her husband's family for being an outsider to that family. However, as members of a family into which an outsider woman marries, women are regarded as husbands and enjoy a great deal of power associated with it. Yoruba women also enjoyed spiritual power according to Okome (2001). She cited Oya as one of the principal deities of the Yoruba. She further explained:

> As deities and ritual leaders, there is no gendered difference in the social experiences of men and women. Many Yorùbá deities combine male and female properties and qualities. There are even examples of one and the same deity being designated as male in certain localities within Yorùbáland and as females in others. (p. 13)

Okome's perspective suggests that pre-colonial Yoruba communities operated on a gender flexible ideology. In support of Okome (2001), Abiodun (2001, in Murphy and Sanford, 2001) emphasized the power of Osun, a Yoruba goddess, the primary deity in Osogbo (Nigeria), admired for her kindness and her gracefulness; and feared for her toughness and ruthlessness (Abiodun, 2001). In the Igbo society of Nigeria, Idimeli represented another example of powerful goddess. She is the supernatural, the greatest goddess worshipped in Igbo society (Amadiume, 1987). Washington (2005) brings further evidence in support of the Yoruba female spiritual power. For her, all Yoruba women, girls included, are believed to have the power of the word (*ofoase*), a natural birth right of women, while men receive *ofoase* as a consequence of initiation. The force that confers such power to women, Washington (2005) argues, is known as Ajè, a powerful force "central to the formation of the earth and credited with the creation of existence" (Washington, 2005, p. 20). As a result of wielding the power of the word, it is

believed in Yoruba culture that an utterance of curse by a naked woman in a kneeling position—a position that is assumed at the moment of birth-carries severe consequences for the victim (Abiodun, 2001; Washington, 2005).

With the flexible gender ideology practiced in pre-colonial Yoruba societies, it is hard to pin down the governing principles of the gender dynamics in these societies. Under these circumstances would it be fair to label pre-colonial Yoruba societies as inherently and strictly patriarchal?

Female Political Power in Pre-Colonial Africa

Amadiume's (1987) account of the political administration structure in pre-colonial Igbo society brings evidence of female political power in the pre-colonial Igbo society; it also lends support to the gender flexible ideology that prevailed in that society. For her, the political administration was embedded in the religious structure, and patriarchal and matriarchal ideologies were juxtaposed in the political structure of the society with two distinctive levels: "the descent level, where the defining and integrating force was the cult of ancestral spirits" (p.53) was guided by a patriarchal ideology of which maleness and authority were an integral part. The extra-descent level, comprising members of title societies (including women), priests, and messengers constitute the ultimate political organization deriving their power and authority from Idemili (a female deity), "the all-abiding force" (p. 53). At this level, the maleness embedded in the patriarchal ideology gives way to matriarchal notions (Amadiume, 1987).

Female Economic Power in Pre-Colonial Africa

In terms of economic power, Awé (1992) and Okome (2001) emphasized the valuable contribution of pre-colonial women in the economy, particularly their active role as long distance caravan traders. Commenting on the economic power and freedom of pre-colonial Yoruba women caravan traders, Larymore (1911, p. 106) observed: "There is not much that

indicates subjection or fear about these ladies, sitting at graceful ease among their loads, or strolling about in the hot sunshine." Larymore's comment presents pre-colonial Yoruba women's economic activities as neither controlled, nor circumcised by men. Leith-Ross's (1965) portrait of pre-colonial Yoruba women speaks to Larymore's comments. For her, "speaking in general, the Yoruba women of Nigeria are seldom of the chatty type and correspond little to the widely held idea of the down-trodden slave or unregarded beast of burden" (p. 19). Rockel (2000) commented on pre-colonial caravan women in other parts of Africa in similar terms:

> Among the Bete of the Guinea forest, for instance, all aspects of trade were dominated by women. They managed all stages of kola production and marketing. The big female merchants controlled large numbers of dependents including apprentices, female porters, and hired porters. . . . . Nineteenth century Yoruba caravans were also predominantly women's affairs. Women dominated trading activities. (p. 754)

Rockel (2000) further explained: "The rich European sources on caravan porterage are frequently silent about women because of the prejudices of Victorian times" (p. 750). For Callaway (1987), by remaining silent about women's economic power "colonial officers project the gender representations of their own society on their perception of African gender relation; they assumed African women to be in a dependent and subordinate position to men even in areas where women were noted for their independent trading activities" (p. 52). Callway's (1987) comment confirms the point Rockel (2000) previously made about the "rich European sources on caravan porterage." As in Yoruba society, pre-colonial Igbo women enjoyed tremendous economic power (Amadiume, 1987). Women's activity in pre-colonial Igbo society was subsistence farming:

> Gardens, where the subsidiary crops were grown, were exclusively a female domain: wives worked them and controlled the produce. Farmland was worked by both men and women. The produce from this farm was shared by both husband and wife with men controlling the distribution of yam (p.35).

Women's industriousness (productivity) was encouraged in pre-colonial Igbo societies (Amadiume, 1987). For example, the Ekwe title, only taken by women and associated with the goddess Edemili "had a strong association with a woman's economic abilities" (Amadiume, 1987, p. 42). Any woman could win the Ekwe title and takers of this title become influential and highly respected by all- men included-in society. The council of Ekwe title holders participates with men in political decision-making at the extra-descent level of the political administration system (Amadiume, 1987, p. 53).

To summarize thus far, the social, economic, political, and administrative organizing system put in place in pre-colonial Yoruba and Igbo societies allowed women some privileges, autonomy, and power. This made it possible for women to make their voices heard and their presence visible and acknowledged. The colonial advent and the new social order put in place marked new beginnings for the pre-colonial African woman.

Gender Practices in Colonial Africa

In her book *Gender, Culture, and Empire*, Helen Callaway gave an account of gender practices in colonial Nigeria. Based on evidence drawn from diaries, letters, and reports from British colonial officers' wives residing in colonial Nigeria with their husbands, Callaway (1987) makes an indictment of colonial gender practices in colonial Nigeria. She denounced the gender oppression of both African women and colonial officers' wives. This extract from a letter by Emily Bradley, a British officer's wife in colonial Nigeria, articulates the subservient role of officers' wives in the colony:

> You must be happy to be alone, yet glad to put everything aside and be at everyone's disposal. . . . You may shed the light of your charming personality on the company, but more often sink into a shadowy corner, still, anonymous and non-existent, concerned that these creatures are fed and refreshed, with everything arranged so that your triumphs are unnoticed and you are utterly taken for granted. (Bradley, 1950, in Callaway, 1987, pp. 119–120)

MacDermot (in Callaway, 1987) recounts her introduction as a junior administrative officer in colonial Nigeria:

> On my first evening at the Kaduna Club, X said to me in a very direct and forcible manner (I remember the exact words), "I do not like women in offices. I think women are alright at home and Nowhere Else." (Callaway, 1987, p. 46)

For MacDermot (in Callaway, 1987, p.47), "this superior attitude toward women reflects the outlook *at that time* of many who had been educated at the public schools of London"; a hidden recognition of school as an institution of cultural transmission, and women's oppression, as a Western import to colonial Africa. Callaway (1987) further corroborates this view: "The dominant model of separate spheres for male and female, generally accepted by European women for the most part of the colonial period in Nigeria, had its roots in the nineteenth century" and reflected "Victorian thought on the topic of women" (Callaway, 1987, p. 32). To this effect, Emily Bradley informed prospective colonial wives that if a wife is "'given a job' (not 'finds' or 'takes'), this is likely to be a very junior post, probably clerical, and she must not show her talents or assert herself" (Callaway, 1987, p. 44). Bradley further warned: "I need not remind you that you are even more unlikely to receive equal pay for equal work than you would in England, regardless of your qualification" (Callaway, 1987, p. 44). Gender discrimination in jobs and wages still survives in today's post-colonial Africa. Further evidence suggests a decline in African women's social status with the colonial advent. According to Mba (1982):

> Although in pre-colonial time women in some of the diverse societies of Nigeria had been important leaders, when the colonial administration was extended throughout the country in 1900, it was as though women had been rendered invisible to the exclusively male colonial administrators. (In Callaway, 1987, p. 52)

Colonization brought a new gender ideology that widened the gender gap between men and women; deprived women of the rights, power and privileges they enjoyed formerly; and confined them to the household while promoting male dominance. In other words, the colonial

experience brought profound changes to the existing indigenous structures of pre-colonial Africa that left marks on contemporary Africa. However, one must acknowledge that some of these changes, for example, the end of tribal wars, had positive impacts (although post-colonial Africa still experience tribal wars whose origins go back to colonization, e.g. the Rwandan genocide). Others, in contrast (e.g. the erosion of women's power, autonomy, and privileges), had negative impacts. As Okome (2001, p. 3) suggested, "whatever we observe in Africa today is a combination of pre-colonial culture overlaid by elements absorbed as a result of the experience of colonization". The culture born from this encounter between pre-colonial Africa and colonization is what is referred to as dominant culture in this study. In the last analysis, it is this culture, particularly the one that keeps women in the household and men in the public arena that still survives in post-colonial Africa. It is this culture that also influences school culture and shapes gender practices in the Sub-Saharan school today. This culture is perpetuated through the patriarchal system.

Patriarchy

Walby (1990) defines "patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (p.20). Patriarchy operates both inside and outside the household to perpetuate the subordination of women. Inside the household, it legitimizes women's subordination through social norms of male dominance over female. Outside the household it institutionalizes women's subordination through a process of socialization. The legal system, religion, the economic system, schools, universities, the political system, and the media are all institutions of the patriarchal system outside the household (Sultana, 2010). Through these institutions, patriarchy socializes individuals to accept male domination over female by promoting hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Cultural Hegemony

The concept of hegemony is often associated with the Italian Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony finds its roots in the Marxist assumptions about the material origins of class and the role of class struggle and consciousness in social change. According to Carnoy (1984), Marx and Engels (German philosophers) wrote in *The German Ideology* that "the class which is the ruling material force [economic force] in society, [that is, the capitalist state and its coercive apparatus], is at the same time its ruling intellectual force" (Marx and Engels, in Carnoy, 1984, p. 69). Put another way, the class that has the means of material production at its disposal uses its coercive power to win the consent of the subordinate classes. For Gramsci, force could not explain the consent that the ruling class enjoys among the subordinate classes (Carnoy, 1984, p. 69). Fiori summarizes Gramsci's thoughts:

> The strength [of the ruling class] does not lie in the violence or the coercive power of its apparatus, but in the acceptance by the ruled of a "conception of the world" which belong to the ruler. The philosophy of the ruling class passes through a whole tissue of complex vulgarizations to emerge as "common sense": that is, the philosophy of the masses, who accept the morality, the customs, the institutionalized behavior of the society they live in. (Fiori, 1970, in Carnoy, 1984, p. 68)

To sum up so far, both Marx and Gramsci believe in the civil society is an important factor to consider in historical development but have divergent views of the civil society. Marx sees the civil society in terms of relations of production (economic structure) between the dominant classes and the subordinate classes in civil society while Gramsci emphasizes ideological superstructure (ideological and cultural relations). For Gramsci, the ruling class gains the active consent of the other classes through consensus and not through coercive means. The emphasis on ideological superstructure over economic structure and the primacy of consensus over force form the defining characteristics of Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Gramsci's hegemony has two principal meanings: first, "it is a process in civil society whereby a fraction of

the dominant class exercises control through its moral and intellectual leadership over the allied fractions of the dominant class; the dominant class does not impose its own ideology upon the allied group" (Carnoy, 1984, p. 70). Rather, it "represents a pedagogic and politically transformative process whereby the dominant class (fraction) articulate a hegemonic principle that brings together common elements of the world views and interests of allied groups" (Giroux, 1981, p. 418).

Secondly, hegemony, in Gramscian terms, "involves a successful attempt [through consent] of the dominant class to use its political, moral, and intellectual leadership to establish its view of the world as all inclusive and universal and to shape the interests and needs of the subordinate group" (Carnoy, 1984, p 70). The consent relationship mentioned in this quote, however, is not static (Buci-Glusckmann, 1974, Mouffle, 1979, Giroux, 1981); it is in constant change "in order to accommodate the changing nature of historical circumstances and the demands of reflexive actions of human beings" (Giroux, 1981, p. 419). Buci-Gluskmann (1974, p. 64) further describes Gramsci's hegemony as a concept expressed in society through apparatuses that form the hegemony apparatus. These include "the school apparatus (lower and higher education), the cultural apparatus (the museums and the libraries), the organization of information, the framework of life, [and] the church and its intellectuals."

The theoretical concept of hegemony is particularly relevant to the present study. It presents the post-colonial African school system in its role as an apparatus of hegemony. In this role school serves as a tool for the dominant group (men) to use their leadership and privileges to establish their gender cultural views and to shape the needs and interests of the subordinate group of (women). Previous research on post-colonial Africa emphasized the manifestation of

consensual hegemony in male-female power relations in the African society. Afonja (1986), for example, articulated:

> The inequalities embedded in the social relations between men and women in western Nigeria, many of which are hardly perceived because they are culturally legitimized; probably also because male dominance over women has been achieved through a consent relationship with the subordinate group, women, and so has become a fact of life to members of this group. (p. 122)

The patterns of male dominance over women observed in the civil society in post-colonial African society are reproduced and maintained in the school setting (FAWE, 2001, 2003). In not so very dissimilar terms, Gramsci (1971) emphasized the role of traditional intellectuals (e.g. those working in universities and schools) in the transmission of the dominant culture. For Gramsci, traditional intellectuals help produce, maintain, and circulate the ideologies of hegemony. Likewise, (Stromquist, 1990; Mead, 1956) describe school as the reflection of the gender codes of the dominant culture. Admittedly, school is an institution of cultural transmission. In post-colonial African school settings, the dominant group includes male teachers, school administrators, and male students, and the subordinate group, schoolgirls and female teachers. Here, hegemonic masculinity has won the consensual submission of the subordinate group (females) through a hidden curriculum (Wren, 1993) that prescribes deference and submission to males in the school setting. Wren defines the hidden curriculum as:

> An unwritten curriculum made of social norms of training and behaving that all students must internalize in order to function effectively as members of a smaller society, the school, and later on as a productive citizens of the larger . . . society. (Wren, 1993, p. 3)

Two conclusions follow from Wren's definition: one, the hidden curriculum serves as a hegemonic instrument for winning the consent of the female subordinate group in the school setting; and, two, this consent is achieved through the socialization process whereby students implicitly learn social rules of behavior; interaction; and relationships as prescribed by the

culture of reference**.** As participant observer, the researcher in this study was attentive to the processes whereby Beninese teachers, school administrators and male students reproduced, maintained, and circulated the power relations of gender inherent in Beninese cultures; and the processes whereby the elements of the dominant culture become naturalized as commonsense among girls. The concept of hegemony also provided a relevant framework for understanding the processes whereby the post-colonial African state won citizens' consent about the importance of education for individual citizens and for the nation. In particular, this theoretical construct helps understand how the consent relationship established between the state and citizens about education is not static (Buci-Glusckmann, 1974, Mouffle, 1979, Giroux, 1981). It underwent constant shifts over time in order to accommodate the changing nature of historical circumstances (Giroux, 1981, p. 419).

One of the arguments developed in the present study is that the institutionalization of schooling in post-colonial Africa as key to economic growth and social progress helped promote the idea that school yields nothing but benefits. Promoting such ideas kept citizens, including the state, from seeing girls' school experience as part of the obstacles confronting girls' education. It kept them from understanding that formal schooling, since it was established, carried with it obstacles to girls' education. In post-colonial Africa, the state (the dominant group) successfully won citizens' consent about the importance of education using its political, moral, and intellectual leadership (Carnoy, 1984) to establish its views of the world about education; and to shape the interests and needs of citizens accordingly (Hallinan, 2000). These views of the world about education are informed by worldwide shared beliefs about the benefits of education for development (Chabbott and Ramirez in Hallinan, 2000).Although in African countries the state hegemony in education originated in the colonial era (Lavan, 2005),

this literature review considered state hegemony in the post World War II period. Within this period, the review focuses on the period running from the 80s to the 90s for its relevance to girls' education.

State Hegemony

Since the end of World War II, the United Nations committed to promoting education as a human right (Hallinan, 2000). The United Nations' Sciences and Culture Organization (UNESCO) was then created in an attempt to help the Allies rebuild their education systems shattered by the War (Jones, 1990). The United Nations' approach to education since the post war period, according to Jones (1990), established a causal link between education and development. Several factors have contributed to the rise and expansion of the new ideology of educational development (Cox, 1968), including: the provision of a link between education and development (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1963); the U.S. support for economic research and for research in education and development in other countries (Berman, 1992); the expansion of the actions of international development organizations in developing countries (McGinn, 1996);and the creation by UNESCO of a common educational development vocabulary and goals. The United Nations (UN) promotes its ideology of educational development through UN-affiliated agencies such as UNESCO, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Organization (UNDP), and the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Since the beginning of the post-war period, the nation-states' educational priorities have been determined by the educational development discourse of the decade, which in turn is determined by the UN decade development discourse (Hallinan, 2000). According to Hallinan, there has been a constant shift in the UN development discourse since the post war period.

The decade development discourse for the 80s, for example, promoted a neoliberal[1]agenda as a means to reduce poverty in developing nations (Sen, 1999). Neo-liberalism is defined as a set of market-based, liberal economic policies (Sen, 1999).The development of this agenda followed the 1970 and 1979 OPEC oil crisis which affected these nations, non-oil producing countries in particular (Kanbur, 2009). The crisis led to a rise in the dollar resulting in the increase of the debt repayment burden of developing countries mostly dollar dominated (Kanbur, 2009). Unable to sustain the increasing debt burden, poor countries had to sign up for structural adjustment loans with the World Bank and the International monetary Fund. The drastic pre-conditions set by donors to qualify for these loans further impoverished these countries. Eventually, the structural adjustment loans initially designed to strengthen the borrowers increased poverty.

The decade beginning in the1990s saw a shift in development discourse and a corresponding shift in educational discourse and educational priorities. Sustainable human development became the development discourse for the decade for the purpose of alleviating poverty in the world's poor countries; and for improving the social dimensions of adjustment. This was to be achieved by meeting the basic learning needs of citizens (the educational development discourse) and by promoting quality learning and girls' education. National development was defined in terms of individual welfare rather than solely in terms of economic growth (as in the 1960s). Universal formal primary and secondary education, particularly for

[1]"Neoliberalism is a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be served by freeing individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills. It also emphasizes strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to facilitate and create an environment appropriate to such practices" (Ball, 2012 in Ochwa-Echel, 2013, p. 4).

girls, became the educational priority of the decade, a measure of both individual welfare and national development.

The devastating impact of structural adjustment conditions on the poorest countries led to the development of a new approach by the multilaterals: Poverty Review and Strategy Paper[2] (PRSP) (Kawashi & Wamala, 2006). Spearheaded by the so-called Washington Consensus[3] (Dani, 2006) PRSP's are linked with the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative (Kawashi & Wamala, 2006) taken at the Cologne Summit by some European Leaders (Kawashi & Wamala, 2006). The initiative offered the remittance of international loans. To qualify for debt cancellation, governments had to produce a well-develop comprehensive plan to reduce poverty and use the money saved toward implementing this plan (World Bank & IMF, 2005, p. 1).

During that decade, human resources development (the educational development discourse for the decade) was perceived as a prerequisite to development through promoting quality learning. Formal primary and secondary education became the educational priorities.

The beginning of the second millennium (2000) marked a new shift in the UN development discourse. Representative from all over the world met in Dakar, Senegal, for a summit. The meeting culminated in the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of states (United Nations' Development Program,

[2]"PRSPs were introduced by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in September 1999 as a new requirement for countries to receive concessional funding and debt relief. PRSPs are national planning frameworks, and describe a country's macroeconomic, structural, and social policies and programs to promote growth and reduce poverty, as well as associated external financing needs" (Wamala and Kawashi, 2003, p. 1).

[3]A term coined by John Williamson to summarize key economic policy commonalities between IMF, World Bank and U.S. Treasury Department.

2008). MDGs are eight goals (that respond to the world's main challenges) to be achieved by 2015. According to Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, MDGs "encapsulate the development aspirations of the whole world" (Millennium Development Goals Reports, 2008, p. 3). Two goals set for education figure prominently among MDGs: achieve universal primary education and promote gender equality, and empower women. These two goals ultimately shaped the educational development discourse for the decade starting from year 2000 and set educational priorities for nation-states with particular emphasis on universal primary education; gender equality in education; and women empowerment through girls' education. Since the start of this decade, empirical research in education has provided strong evidence in support of girls' education. Abu Ghaida and Klasen, (2004), for example, provided "ample evidence that higher female education reduces child mortality" (p. 12). Likewise, Schultz (1994 in Abu Ghaida and Klasen, 2004) finds that a 1-year in adult female years of schooling will reduce fertility by 13%. The World Bank identified several compelling benefits associated with girls' education, including the reduction of child and maternal mortality; improvement of child nutrition and health; lower fertility rates; enhancement of women's domestic role and their political participation; improvement of the economic productivity and growth; and protection of girls from HIV/AIDS, abuse and exploitation (Girls' Education in the 21st Century, World Bank, 2008). Nussbaum (in Friedman, 2005) articulated the importance of female literacy:

> Literacy is crucial, too, for women's access to the legal system. Even to bring a charge against someone who has raped you, you have to file a complaint. If your father or husband is not helping you out, and some legal NGO does not take on your case, you are nowhere if you cannot read or write. (Friedman, 2005, p. 196)

Nussbaum then went on to comment on the empowering impact of female education on women's lives:

> Especially important is the role that female education has been shown to have in controlling population growth . . . as women learn to inform themselves about the world, they also increasingly take charge of decisions affecting their own lives. And as their bargaining position in the family improves through their marketable skills, their views are more likely to prevail. (Friedman, 2005, p. 196)

For Rihani (2007), girls' secondary education equips students with critical thinking skills, increasing civic participation and democratic change (social benefits); empowers girls to access additional works and produces high returns in terms of economic growth (economic benefits); and reduces the risks of AIDS infections among girls. Research findings in Zambia, according to Rihani, find that AIDS spreads twice as fast among uneducated girls compared to educated girls.

The advantages associated with girls' education are reflected in international development discourse articulated by the United Nations' agencies at development conferences; and ultimately reinforces the UN hegemonic influence on nation-states, and the state hegemony on citizens, and defines educational priorities for each country. Girls' education thus becomes a prerequisite for achieving development goals. Concerns over the urgent need to fulfill these goals keep public attention, including the state, from seeing girls' school experience as an obstacle to girls' education.

Cultural Transmission

Research conducted in the social sciences confirmed the important role of schools as institutions of cultural transmission (Spindler, 1982; Blair, 2002, Bourdieu, in Swartz, 1974**;** Bowles & Gintis, 1976)but voices are far from unanimous on the relevance of cultural transmission to education (Dekker, 1992). Yet, the daily routine on school settings, the interaction between teacher, students, and school administrators bring evidence of the role of schools as agents of cultural transmission (Dekker, 1992). This section discussed theory on cultural transmission. Drawing on the discussion of the various views held of cultural

transmission in education, the study highlights its impact on students; and proposes ways that the transmission of the culture at school could better be handled to serve the interest of students and their communities.

Culture: A Definition

Burke (2012) defined culture as "a system of shared beliefs, values, practices, perspectives, folk knowledge, language, norms, rituals, and material objects and artifacts that members of a group use in understanding their world and in relating to others" (p. 389).

Schooling and Education

Schostak (2005) defines schooling as

> a form of domesticating people, molding them, shaping them, and fashioning their minds, bodies, and behaviors to whatever the demands of the social group into which they were born and live are. (p. 1)

In schooling, therefore, the child's role in the knowledge transmission process is to conform, through imposition, "to norms of behavior and thinking that have been legislated by authorities (governments, examination boards, 'traditions' etc.)" (p. 2).Schostak views education as

> a process of exploring alternative ways of thinking, doing, believing, and expressing oneself. It is the process through which one forms one's own judgment independently of those who set themselves up to (or are set up institutionally) to be the judges of others. (p.2)

Thus defined, education stands in contrast with schooling with its strong emphasis on conformity to prescribed norms and rules of conduct.

Is that enough reason to dichotomize between schooling and education? As Schostak(2005) rightly suggested, if the fast-moving world we live in requires creative thinking (through education) in order to reflect upon and to transform the knowledge we gain from our daily experience, it is through schooling that one gets the information that one needs as a basis

for reflection. Therefore, the apparent contrast between schooling and education also suggests a dialogic relationship between them.

Cultural Transmission in Anthropology

Cultural transmission (Spindler, 1982; Blair, 2002) may be defined as "the intentional efforts of a culture to reproduce itself in the next generation, including the reproduction of gender roles and relationships, class stratifications, and ethnic hierarchies" (Bennett and LeCompte, 1990; MacLeod, 1996). Three main assumptions underpin this theory. First, school is a cultural institution; secondly, teachers and school administrators are active transmitters of the dominant culture (Spindler & Spindler, 1990 in Blair, 2002); and thirdly, girls' schooling experience is one of subordination (Blair, 2002). Spindler and Spindler (1990 in Blair, 2002, p. 22) noted that schools are "an enmeshed part of a larger culture" while Blair (2002, p. 22) presents schools as gendered and gendering institutions; institutions that reproduce and maintain the gender codes of the dominant culture. This anthropological perspective on cultural transmission summarizes the main concern of the topic of inquiry of this study.

Girls' Education in Colonial Dahomey

This section provides background information about girls' education in Benin. It traces the challenges that girls have faced in pursuing education from the colonial era until the present. The colonial enterprise is not entirely responsible for all the ills that plague girls' pursuit of education in post-colonial Benin; however, the colonial attitudes, the ideological and cultural orientations given to colonial schools, and the oppressive gender practices observed in the colonial school settings and the wider community has shaped girls' education in post-colonial Benin.

The French West African colonies' teacher-training school for girls opened thirty-five years after the teacher-training school for boys opened in 1903 in Gore (Senegal). Prior to this

date, girls' education received little attention from the colonial administration and was almost entirely left to the initiative of Catholic schools. Most of these schools were in Senegal and Dahomey. It is possible to imagine the excitement the opening of this new school generated among girls, who, for once, were officially given a chance to pursue a higher level of education and the jobs and privileges it offered (Barthélémy, 2003). Prior to the school's opening, girls seldom moved beyond the *ecole primaire superieure* (Moumouni, 1998). Those who graduated from this level of instruction usually had two options: enroll in visiting-nurse training at medical school or pursue a career as a monitor (the lowest rank in the teaching profession), secretary, or clerk (Barthélémy, 2003).

Despite the enthusiasm about the new teacher-training school for girls, it is impossible to view the decision to open the school without suspicion. Why the sudden interest in girls' education—hardly a high priority previously—by the colonial administration? The colonial authorities must have felt there was much at stake. Several reasons were put forward to justify the importance of promoting girls' education in the French West African colonies. First, the colonial administration presented its decision to support the female-education project as a way to redress the injustice done to the indigenous woman: "It is a pain to notice the increasing number of educated young men and the small number of uneducated women we put by their side" (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 375). Seeking to render justice,

> France has made enlightened units, not enlightened families. It has taken care of the indigenous man and has done little for the indigenous woman. Yet, the individual alone has little strength but the couple alone is stronger. France wants to get Africa into world civilization, and it can make this happen only by elevating the mentality of the African woman, the heart of the indigenous society. (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 375)

Colonial schools were created to instill into young people the values and ideas that the colonial administration believed were necessary to usher Africa into world civilization. In the

eyes of the colonial administration, the African woman was necessary to accomplish this goal because of the centrality of her role in the African household (Barthélémy, 2003). The colonial administration believed that, due to the indigenous woman's central role in her household, an indigenous man's education was useless if the woman did not relay the French cultural beliefs to their children (Barthélémy, 2003). It is clear that the main objective in educating girls in colonial West Africa was:

> "to train devoted teachers most of all good mothers, loyal spouses, and devoted housewives capable of relaying French culture from their husband to their children in order to ensure that French values are kept alive and passed on from one generation to the next. (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 372)

To accomplish this mission, "the indigenous woman needs no scientific knowledge; it is just enough to train good housewives" (colonial notice cited in Barthélémy, 2003, p. 374). Bunche (1934) corroborates this idea. He quotes an annual education report on colonial Togo (a former French West African colony located west of Benin): "School will only seek to prepare girls for their role as housewives" (Annual Report from Togo, 1927, pp. 21-22, in Bunche, 1934, p. 90). To this end, "the native girl will be taught to wash and iron, cook and sew" (Bunche, 1934, p. 90). The content of the curriculum at the teacher-training school for girls, the constraints of school instruction (too much to learn within too short a time), and the militaristic atmosphere that prevailed throughout the training process denote the low quality of the training provided for the girls. Moreover the girls, recruited between 14 and 15 years old, graduated between 18 and 19 years old—too young to withstand the hardships of life and to face the challenges of the teaching profession. The graduates' youth and inexperience caused severe consequences for the entire female-education project.

Thus "the early policy of the French government was direct assimilation; the educational process was geared toward the dissemination of French culture among the native populations

expected to become black Frenchmen just like the native populations of the Antilles" (Bunche, 1934, p. 79). To this end, the colonial administration created the teacher-training school for girls just a few miles away from the teacher-training school for boys. Close to each other, boys and girls could interact and build lifelong pair bonds that would continue to spread French values after completing their training. This educational system used schooling primarily as a tool of cultural transmission and reproduction. The weekly class schedule at the girls' school shows this clearly. Comparing the weekly class schedules of the girl's school with those of the boy's school shows that the Rufisque teacher-training school for girls was created by the colonial administration in order to prepare girls to serve as mothers and wives; and to promulgate French culture. The weekly schedules make it clear that gender inequality in education (FAWE, 1999, 2000, 2001) originated from the colonial era.

Table 4. Weekly Schedule at the Rufisque Girls' Teacher-Training School in 1938

Subjects	**1st year**	**2nd year**	**3rd year**	**4th year**
Morale	1h 30	1h 30	1h 30	1h 30
French	6h	6h	6h	6h
Math	3h	3h	3h	3h
Natural and Physical	1h 30	1h 30	1h 30	1h 30
Science	1h 30	1h 30	1h 30	1h 30
History-Geography	1/2h	1/2h	1/2h	1/2h
Writing	4h	4h	4h	4h
Drawing, Music, and	5h	5h	5h	5h
Singing	-	-	-	1h
Domestic Instruction	3h	3h	3h	3h
Pedagogy				
Physical Education				
Total	**26h**	**26h**	**26h**	**26h**

Source: Barthélémy (2003),Ordinance 2403/E July 21, 1938, "Instituting Girls' Teacher Training School in French West Africa Territories," published by the French West Africa official newspaper on July 30, 1938.

The course schedules above call for two broad comments. First, apart from the subjects that boys and girls took in common, subjects such as domestic economics was reserved for girls only.

The domestic-economics class had two components: decoration and cooking (Barthélémy, 2003). In addition to the domestic economics class, the 1940 cohort had to take

the domestic instruction class throughout their training. Eight hours a week were devoted to that class. These facts confirm the tendency to focus girls' education toward domestic work. Surprisingly, little time, a must for teachers-to-be was taught only in the fourth year for a maximum of two hours a week. This neglect of pedagogy casts serious doubt on the school administration's seriousness in preparing the girls for teaching careers.

Secondly, while the content of morale classes was the same for boys and girls, the teaching of physical and natural sciences differed considerably (Barthélémy, 2003). The teaching of sciences for both boys and girls followed specific directives prescribed by the central colonial administration. For girls, "the teaching of physical and natural sciences will be intimately linked with domestic lessons and will impart practical knowledge deemed necessary for girls in their future lives as women" (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 379). For boys, in contrast, science was "to develop observation and reasoning skills and to identify students likely to acquire the knowledge and skills required for success in scientific employments" (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 379). It is apparent that boys were prepared for a profession while girls were prepared for the household. The domestic-economics, domestic-instruction, and hygiene classes listed on the girls' class schedule further support this hypothesis. In these classes girls learned shopping skills, how to write a menu (taking into account food items and their cost), food conservation, cooking, washing, and ironing (Barthélémy, 2003; Bunche, 1934). Most importantly, the teaching of observation and reasoning skills in boys' classes clearly indicates that boys were trained to be in charge, while girls were trained for submission.

The Learning Environment

The Rufisque Girls' Teacher-Training School in Senegal was a free, but compulsory boarding school. Its students were recruited from multiple countries throughout West Africa. The boarding-school system enabled the school authorities to control the students and ensure

that they complied with the institution's moral code of conduct and rules for appropriate female behavior. The tightness of the control and the strict discipline exerted over these girls ultimately earned the institution the nickname of "laic convent" (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 380). To make the control system work better, teachers (all females) were instructed to establish close relationships with their students from the very first day in order "to influence their behavior by instilling in them good habits expected of a Rufisque trainee" (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 382):

> Teachers will strive to get to know their students well, to penetrate their intimate lives, to share their joys, their sorrows, their endeavors, their struggles. How well teachers succeed in this task depends on how much trust they build in their relationship with their students. Therefore, teachers should create opportunities for casual chats; they will be good friends to their students, good listeners, and understanding. (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 382)

Daily life at the boarding school was regulated by complex lists of rules. For example, "trainees have the obligation to attend all classes and face sanctions for breaking the school rules. They will speak only French and will sew their own uniform" (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 381). The girls were taught how to behave, including, sometimes, how to walk (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 381). A trainee at the girls' boarding school stated:

> As you walk, if you see a teacher coming, you must bow….like this…and continue walking. . . . The least common mistake like making a noise while dragging a chair at the refectory, and you get a bad grade in conduct. If you make a noise with your fork while eating from your plate, you get a bad grade in conduct. (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 381)

The school authorities at the Rufisque boarding school kept girls' contact with outside world under tight control. Girls were allowed correspondence with the outside world only twice a week and only with individuals whose names were on a list signed by the girls' parents or guardians. The boarding-school director would open and read any foreign correspondence (Barthélémy, 2003). Boys did not face similar regulations. Girls were allowed to visit their guardians or relatives the first Sunday of every month if they were picked up from the boarding

school. Contact with the opposite sex was also kept under tight control. Even though one of the reasons for creating the girls' training school just a few miles away from the boys' training school was to encourage marital unions, the students were only permitted to form such bonds after graduation (Barthélémy, 2003). The rare contact allowed between the opposite sexes during the training year was strictly regulated. The end-of-the-school-year celebration, for example, was one such rare occasion during which boys and girls met and put on theatrical plays. Despite the parochial system at the girls' boarding school, the boys and girls still managed to see each other. As a former student (class of 1941-1945) recalled long after graduation:

> Genuine love affairs, pure idylls, and romantic correspondences tied us together. . . . They would walk from the boarding school to see us. They were our first loves. (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 381)

The secret bonds formed during the school year grew stronger during the long vacation voyage back to the students' homes, and sometimes the girls were pregnant when they resumed school (Barthélémy, 2003). Some were even pregnant prior to their recruitment. Between 1938 and 1942, seven girls were expelled from the training school because of pregnancy and one for attempting abortion (Barthélémy, 2003). These occurrences, in addition to the frequent transgressions of the school rules, were wake up calls about the mismatch between boys' and girls' expectations and the school's rules and ethos. By seeking to enforce foreign values of behavior and alien modes of thinking on adolescents, the colonial education system soon revealed its limits and exposed the whole girls' education project to the risk of failure. Gemaine Le Goff, first director of the Rufisque boarding school, foresaw future failure. Years later, she recalls with bitter disappointment:

> As they prepare to graduate, one senses in these girls a fear to live sometimes. Some of them commit blunders in their sentimental relationship and while trying to hide them commit worse blunders… humble dramas that suddenly shatter the hope for a peaceful

> life in a peaceful home. It is often so hard, even impossible, for them to make the dreamed home of the school days. (Barthélémy, 2003. p. 383)

Follow-up studies on the girls' post-school lives revealed frequent disappointments in love and relationship break-ups (Barthélémy, 2003, p. 382).

The girls' education project in colonial French West Africa exhibited traits of cultural transmission and reproduction, keeping the project from reaching it desired goals. First of all, the instruction focused too much on coercing the girls to conform to French norms of behavior and thinking (Schostak, 2005). This emphasis on instruction, taught the girls to obey, not to think. Worse still, the artificial and unrealistic boarding-school setting prevented the girls from experiencing real life and made them feel unprepared for life after school. Their isolation from the outside world probably explains the "fear to live" that Le Goff noticed in the girls as they prepared to graduate (Barthélémy, 2003). Secondly, the colonial education system forced the girls to internalize cultural values for which they had received no prior socialization. Imparting foreign values of purity, morality, and chastity while devaluing the girls' culture created mistrust between the girls and the school authorities and fostered resentment against the authoritative colonial school system. The girls consequently manifested their frustrations by challenging the rules prohibiting close contact with boys. As the girls were between 13 and 20 years old when recruited—an age range when their unschooled counterparts married—some of them were already in relationships prior to starting boarding school and managed to continue the relationships throughout their years at school (Barthélémy, 2003). Others started relationships while at boarding school (Barthélémy, 2003). The school's intrusion into this process disrupted the girls' cultural norms. As a result, the colonial administration failed to realize its marital goals for its female students; however, the achievement gap between boys and girls, the exclusion of girls from scientific subjects, the discriminatory perception of girls in the school setting, the

teacher-centered methodology, and a residue of knowledge gained from the colonial-school experience remain in West Africa today. These products of the colonial legacy, reinforced by some African cultural practices, are still transmitted from teachers and school administrators to students.

While the colonial girls' education project was designed, no doubt, with good intentions, it suffered from poor results. The colonial administration's hope of using the Rufisque boarding school for cultural transmission and to promote marital unions among Western-trained students failed. The girls used the knowledge they gained to pave the way for the emergence of an African feminine elite, not for the purpose of spreading some French cultural values. These female intellectuals played an inspiring vanguard role—in conjunction with their male counterparts—in the march toward national independence (Chadya, 2003). Ironically, despite the great contribution that African women made to the struggle to end colonial rule, independence brought few benefits to African women (Chadya, 2003). For the post-colonial African woman, it was a transition from foreign domination to domestic tyranny and the patriarchal system.

This literature review summarized the categories often used in the literature on girls' education to describe girls' school experience. The sources cited in the review are unanimous that categories such as the formal curriculum; teachers' messages to students; teachers' perception and expectation of students; and teachers' attitude towards students represent instruments of socialization in the school setting. These sources also share a common view that the harmful gender practices that girls experience in post-colonial African schools create an unfavorable environment for academic success. Despite providing useful background information on the obstacles to girls' schooling, these sources reveal some gaps that need to be

addressed. For example, previous findings on the gender socialization in African schools presented teachers as transmitters of the cultural knowledge and students as passive receivers. This top-down approach to socialization misses the fact that student play an active role in the socialization process. The proposed study will address this gap.

Another shortcoming identified from previous studies relates to the reproduction of cultural beliefs and values through the message students receive in interaction with their teachers. First of all, the studies cited in this review made little mention of student-student interaction. Instead, they focus almost exclusively on teacher-student interaction. Yet, interactions between boys and girls are critical to understanding how they construct their own identity through the messages they send to each other. Secondly, the teacher-student interactions discussed in the review occurred mostly in teacher-centered classrooms. This situation poses two main problems in reference to this study. The first lies in the nature of classroom interaction. By its very true nature, the structured characteristic of teacher-student interaction in a teacher-centered classroom makes it unsuitable for a meaningful two-way interaction to take place (Harmer, 1983). The teacher is in control and his presence imposes restrictions on what students can say. In a typical teacher-centered classroom, the teacher initiates the talk, controls it, and asks questions for which he already knows the answer (Widdowson, 1986; Harmer, 1983). The students, on their part, provide answers that the teacher expects to hear, not what they, as human beings want to say (Harmer, 1983). This mode of interaction gives little consideration to individuals' subjectivity, which is much needed to enable the girls in this study to state the meaning their experience holds for them. The second problem relates to the opportunity to interact denied girls in the classroom. In terms of the current study, this situation leaves the researcher observing only teachers' and male students' in

interactions. The findings reached from such an observation leaves out of account the girls, the primary focus of this study.

Finally, girls' reactions to the hardships they experience in the school environment received little attention from the studies discussed in the literature review. According to these studies, girls react to their lived experience by dropping out of school (Aboh, 2007; Rossetti, 2001), or by skipping classes (FAWE, 2001). Lee et al. (1996) also listed, as avoidance behaviors, a few strategies that victims of sexual harassment adopt in reaction to their experience. These strategies include: "staying home from school", "cutting class", "dropping out of a course", or "changing route going home." These forms of passive reactions lack engagement and commitment to react against a system of oppression. They suggest that girls have remained passive victims of male domination in the school environment. This point needs further investigation.

Theoretical Framework

The key categories that emerged from the review of past studies include the following: gender practices in the past history of Africa; gender socialization in post-colonial African secondary schools; gender perception (the way that students are perceived); patriarchy; attitude toward girls (sexual harassment, abuse, humiliation, retaliation, disrespect, the ignoring of girls; and gender discrimination); girls' perception of school experience; gender expectation, gender inequality; girls' space in the co-educational setting. These points form the substantial theoretical framework guiding the present study

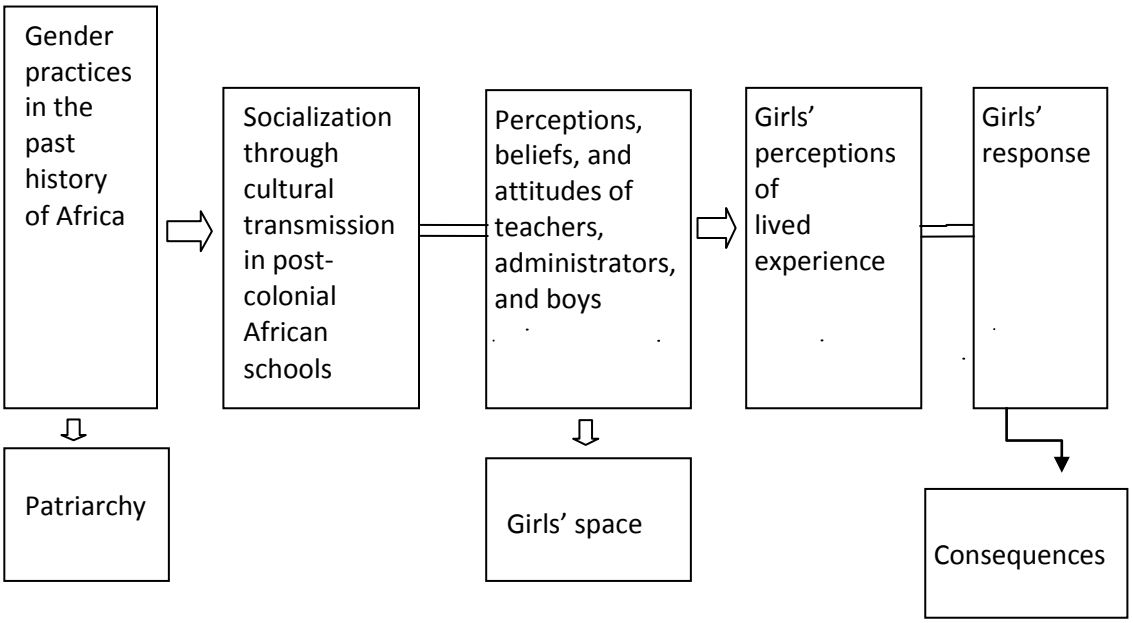
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework developed for this study was informed by the substantive and theoretical literature. It draws on evidence gathered from past studies on obstacles to girls' education and girls' school experience discussed in the literature review. The key categories

emerging from these studies are listed above under theoretical framework. Some of these categories, not explicitly mentioned in the conceptual framework, are part of the main categories listed in the framework. For example, sexual harassment, abuse, humiliation, retaliation, disrespect; the ignoring of girls and gender discrimination fall under attitude towards girls. The framework is articulated around the key concepts emerging from the literature review. Gender practices in the past history of Africa refer to cultural beliefs and practices about men and women and the perceptions held of them based on their biological sex. The socialization of boys and girls through cultural transmission refers to the reproduction and transmission of cultural values to boys and girls in post-colonial African schools. The perception of girls, the expectations held of them and the attitudes toward them touches upon the way that teachers, school administrators and boys perceive and treat girls; patriarchy, refers to a system of society controlled by men. Patriarchy serves as a cultural basis of women's subordination in patriarchal societies. Girls' space refers to the space attributed to girls, considered intruders in the coeducational setting. Girls 'perception of their own experience relates to the meaning that girls' lived experience holds for them. Girls' response to their lived school experience pertains to girls' strategies to deal with the hardships experienced in the school setting. The conceptual framework provides a linkage between these concepts in the following way. Gender practices in the past history of Africa find their roots in patriarchy. These practices inform socialization and gender practices in the school of post-colonial Africa. Socialization influences the way that girls are perceived and treated, which results in the abstract construction of girls' space. The perception of girls and attitudes towards girls ultimately influences girls' perception of their lived experience. Girls' response to their lived experience results from their perception of this experience. This response carries consequences for the girls. The conceptual relationships

among these points are shown in the diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework, succinctly presented below for purpose of content and clarity. The concepts included in this framework were used to formulate the research questions for the study in such a way that these questions accurately reflect the purpose of the study. In this way, the conceptual framework helped to refine and to clarify the research questions and to provide a theoretical basis for them. It provided both a boundary and a focus for data collection and analysis; a reference point against which the researcher checked the analysis, the report and discussion of findings.

Conceptual Framework



The nature of the concepts included in the conceptual framework informed the choice of the methodology used for this study. As these concepts relate to the subjective reality of lived experience as perceived by participants; the qualitative interpretive methodology was employed

for the study. According to Blumer (1969), the qualitative interpretive approach allows for the direct examination of participants' empirical social world. The focus of the study on gaining meaning from participants' perspectives on their lived experience provides another justification for the use of the qualitative interpretive approach. Gaining meaning from participants' perspective is the best way to gain access to participants' insiders' perspective (Punch, 1998). The choice of this methodology has informed the choice of the instruments of data collection, the method of data analysis, and the interpretation of findings. The next chapter provides more details about the methodology and the methods chosen for the study. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How do girls perceive their school experience?
- How do teachers, school administrators and boys perceive girls?
- What aspects of the dominant culture do the girls experience in their relationships?
- What factors influence the girls' perception of their school experience?
- How do the girls react to this experience?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

Chapter 3 explains the theory and methodology used to address the key questions in this study. The chapter begins with the epistemological and ontological approaches taken for the study, and then turns to the theoretical perspectives and methodology followed in the study. The researcher next discusses the sample strategy, the methods of data collection, and the methods of data analysis. The chapter ends with a section on verification and the limitations of the research design. The following questions guided the study:

- How do girls perceive their school experience?
- How do teachers, school administrators and boys perceive girls?
- What aspects of the dominant culture do the girls experience in their relationships?
- What factors influence the girls' perception of their school experience?
- How do the girls react to this experience?

With respect to research design, Levy (2006, p. 3) has suggested that "the nature of any research should drive the methodology adopted." According to Myers (1997), "Before undertaking a research exercise an understanding of the underlying assumptions behind valid research is essential in order to justify the methodologies and methods to be employed in the research design" (in Levy, 2006, p. 3).

In the same line of thought, Crotty (1998) suggested that "justification of the methodological choice should relate to the theoretical perspective that underpins the research" (in Levy, 2006, p. 3). Crotty (1998) defined theoretical perspective as "something that reaches into the assumptions about reality that we bring to our work. To ask about these assumptions is to ask about theoretical perspective" (in Levy, 2006, p. 3).

Further, Levy (2006) noted:

> In addition to the theoretical perspective, justifying methodological choice also reaches into the understanding of what constitutes human knowledge, what kind of knowledge will be attained from the research and what characteristics this knowledge will have. These issues relate to the epistemology informing the theoretical perspective and the type of methodology governing the choice of methods. (pp. 3–4)

Epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods, therefore, constitute the four pillars of research design. The next section discusses these elements of the study.

Epistemology

According to Crotty (1998), "Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate" (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p. 4).

Otherwise stated, epistemology has to do with how one acquires knowledge (Mack, 2010). Ontology, on the other hand, is concerned with our view of reality. While several epistemologies are used in research, the ones that are most often encountered in the field of research are objectivism and constructivism (Levy, 2006, p. 4). Objectivism posits that "meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists apart from the operation of consciousness" (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p. 4). In other words, for objectivists "it is possible [for human knowledge] to discover objective truth" in research (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p. 5). In contrast, constructionists contend that "There is no objective truth waiting to be discovered. Truth, therefore, exists only through interaction with the realities of the world. This view assumes meaning "is constructed rather than discovered" (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p. 5).

In other words, "different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p. 5). As an epistemological approach,

constructionism was best suited for the present study because it enabled the researcher to address the topic of inquiry from different perspectives. It enabled participants in the research study to construct reality based on their perception of their own lived experience. As Crotty (1998) noted, constructionism "permits the researcher to explore the views and comprehension of the different participants within the subject context and recognizes that each may have experienced a different understanding of the same situation, flexibility not available to objectivists" (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p. 5).

Theoretical Perspective

Crotty (1998) defined theoretical perspective as "the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p. 6).

Each of the epistemologies identified earlier—objectivism and constructionism—has a corresponding theoretical perspective. Positivism relates to objectivism while interpretivism relates to constructionism. Positivists hold the view that "it is possible to obtain hard, secure objective knowledge about the external reality" (Carson et al., 2001, p. 14). In contrast, researchers with an interpretivist orientation hold a different view: "Individuals do not have access to the real world, suggesting that their knowledge of the perceived world (or worlds) is meaningful in its own terms and can be understood through careful use of interpretivist procedures" (Carson et al., 1998, p. 14).

Otherwise stated, the interpretivists acknowledge the existence of multiple realities. They believe that:

> It is impossible for any theory in social science to be . . . precise because the world we live in and people's multiple perspectives and interpretations of events make theories

> complex and chaotic. So many variables affect different events and people's actions that it is impossible to determine the absolute truth." (Mack, 2010, p. 10)

The interpretivist approach was chosen for this research study not just for its consideration and respect for individuals' subjective interpretations of facts. It also recognizes the fact that in the quest for reality, "complete objectivity and neutrality are impossible to achieve" (Smith, 1983), because

> the experiences of people are essentially context-bound; that is, they cannot be free from time and location or the mind of the human actor. Researchers must understand the socially constructed nature of the world and realize that values and interests become part of the research process . . . [that] . . . the values of researchers and participants can become an integral part of the research. (Smith, 1983, in Holloway & Wheeler, 2002, p. 8)

It follows from Smith's (1983) perspective that researchers have an active role to play in the research process; they "are not divorced from the phenomenon under study. It means reflexivity on their part; they must take into account their own position in the setting and situation, as the researcher is the main research tool" (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002, p. 8). The question then arises: How does the researcher become an integral part of the research without his or her own assumptions shaping reality? The researcher returns to this question in the section on phenomenology.

Interpretivism's Ontological Assumptions

- Reality is indirectly constructed based on individual interpretation and is subjective.
- People interpret and make their own meaning of an event.
- Events are distinctive and cannot be generalized.
- There are multiple perspectives on one incident.
- Causation in social sciences is determined by interpreted meaning and symbols (there are no causal links between the elements of nature).

Interpretivism's Epistemological Assumptions

- Knowledge is gained through a strategy that "respects the differences between people and the objects of natural sciences and therefore requires the action of the social

scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman, in Grix, 2004, p. 64) (allusion is made here to the active role of the researcher in a social science research study).

- Knowledge is gained inductively to create a theory.
- Knowledge arises from particular situations and is not reducible to simplistic interpretation.
- Knowledge is gained through personal experience.

The researcher applied the principles of interpretivism/constructivism by valuing the subjectivity of participants' presuppositions, personal views, perceptions, and stories as forms of knowledge. This included knowledge of how participants constructed themselves and of their social construction of reality.

Methodology

Crotty (1998) defined methodology as: "The strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes" (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p.10).

Qualitative methodology

The present study used qualitative methodology—a combination of grounded theory and the phenomenological approach—to investigate girls' perceptions of their lived school experience in Benin (though at one stage in the data analysis, for reasons this paper will return to later, the researcher performed a quantitative analysis of the qualitative data collected from the participants). What is qualitative research? Broadly defined, qualitative research is "primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among categories" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993, p. 479).This is to say that in qualitative research, data and meaning emerge from the research context. For Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 17), qualitative research refers to "any kind of research that produces findings

not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification." Merriam (2002) summarizes the rationale and assumptions of qualitative research in six points:

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with *process* rather than outcomes of products.
2. Qualitative researchers are interested in *meaning*—how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.
3. The qualitative researcher is the *primary instrument* of data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.
4. Qualitative research involves *fieldwork*. The researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behavior in its natural setting.
5. Qualitative research is *descriptive* in that a researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.
6. The process of qualitative research is *inductive* in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details (Merriam, 2002, pp. 18–20). The process involves moving from specific to general.

The qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study, first because it involves identifying and understanding "what is happening or being experienced [by participants], rather than measuring how much of something exists or focusing on the way changing one thing produces changes in another" (Hancock et al., 2007); the second reason for choosing a qualitative approach for this study lies in the distinctive features of qualitative research that form the credo of qualitative researchers, and for the relevance of these features to the issue under investigation in this research. These features include the focus of qualitative approach on meaning (this varies from one participant to another and from one situation to another), on perspective and understanding, and on natural settings (in order to reach the innermost meaning of facts), as well as an emphasis on process and an inductive analysis and grounded theory (to allow reality and theory to emerge from the data) (Woods & Pratt, 2006).

The variety of qualitative research designs or strategies requires that one be specific about the approach used for a given study. This study used a basic interpretive qualitative design based on grounded theory and phenomenology principles.

Basic Interpretive Approach

Basic interpretive qualitative study, according to Merriam (2002), is a qualitative study

> in which the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as an instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive. . . . Data are collected through interviews, observations, or document analysis. (p. 6)

The basic interpretive approach is suited for the ongoing study because the study primarily seeks to understand participants' perceptions of their lived experience and the meaning they assign to this experience. To this end, the study employed methods of data collection, including semi-structured interviews, observations, and focus groups.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory may be defined as "a qualitative strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study" (Creswell, 2009, pp. 13, 229). Therefore, grounded theory is a process of theory generation, not theory testing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, in Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374). This may involve multiple stages of data collection and a process of identification, refinement, and integration of categories. To conduct this process successfully, researchers use key strategies, including constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and theoretical coding (Bernard, 2002; Rossman & Ellis, 2003; D'Onofrio, 2001). Aldiabat (2011) summarized some of the assumptions of grounded theory as follows:

1. Theory about the symbolic world (meanings) is generated from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

2. Grounded theory assumes that persons act on the basis of meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
3. Perspectives and social perceptions are defined, developed, negotiated, and contested through interaction (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).
4. Grounded theory reflects the complexity and variability of phenomena and of human action (Aldiabat, 2011).
5. Grounded theory involves understanding and explaining how participants develop meanings and how those meanings are influenced by, among other things, events and organizational, psychological, and social factors (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The researcher used the full version of grounded theory to understand the ways in which participants' interactions with teachers, school administrators, and schoolboys influence their perception and understanding of their lived experiences. The choice of this version for the study also lies in the possibility it allows for the collection of further data to refine and to integrate emerging categories in the analysis process. In his way, the theory emerging from the analysis will reflect the full diversity and complexity of the data from which it originates.

The emphasis that grounded theory places on perception, meaning, action, and interaction underscores its relevance to this study. Further, it confirms claims about the roots of grounded theory in symbolic interactionism (Jeon, 2004; Klunklin & Greenwood, 2006; Wuest, 2007, in Parker & Myrick, 2011, p. 76).

Symbolic Interactionism

The foundation of symbolic interactionism rests on three major premises (Blumer, 1939). "The first premise is that human beings act towards things based on the meaning these things have for them" (p. 2). These things include everything noted in a person's world, ranging from "physical objects, such as trees or chair [to] human beings, such as a mother; and [to] institutions, such as a school . . . [to] guiding ideals, such as independence or honesty" (p. 2). "The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from or arises out of the social interaction that one has with one's fellows" (p. 2). The third premise is that "these

meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things that he encounters" (p. 2). In short, the message that we receive through interaction with the world surrounding us shapes the meaning that we place on this world; eventually, it defines our behavior toward this world. The interpretive activity that leads to this end involves a formative process of adjustment and readjustment, revision, and refinement of the message that we receive from others in order to translate it into meaning that informs our behavior.

The present study used symbolic interactionism as the philosophical underpinning of grounded theory for the relevance of the compatibility of the study goals to the topic of inquiry. Throughout the study, the researcher applied the principles of symbolic interactionism through a holistic exploration of participants' experience, what this experience means to them, and how this meaning shapes their behavior toward others in their empirical world. The process involved using a balanced approach to constructing meaning from participants' experience, keeping in mind the interconnectedness of participants' perceptions with the real world in which they live. For example, for questions requesting girls to state their perceptions of their lived school experience, boys and teachers were also requested to state their perceptions of girls. This enabled the researcher to see if elements of teachers' and boys' beliefs and attitudes toward girls shape girls' perceptions of their school experience.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is rooted in 20th-century European philosophy (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Two prominent figures, Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher and mathematician, and his student Martin Heidegger, also a German philosopher, are credited with the launching of the discipline (Woodruff, 2011). Phenomenology was defined as

> the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2003, p. 2)

In layperson terms, phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1990). It studies the world as we experience it pre-reflectively, rather than as we conceptualize it or reflect on it (Van Manen, 1990). In Husserl's phenomenology, we describe a type of experience just as we find it in our own (past) experience, in pure or transcendental consciousness, setting aside questions of any relation to the natural world around us (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy).The risk of anything independent of human consciousness interfering with pure consciousness (pure reality) probably explains why Husserl (1931) suggests bracketing personal assumptions in a phenomenological research. Bracketing refers to the suspension of all judgment from the true nature of reality (Masten, 2008). As Husserl (in Scott, 2003) notes:

> Phenomenology is a theory of pure phenomena; it is not a theory of actual experiences. Essential being must be distinguished from actual experiences. Phenomenology is a science of pure consciousness. Psychology is a science of empirical facts. . . . The bracketing of empirical data from further investigation leaves pure consciousness, pure phenomena, and pure ego as a residue of phenomenological reduction. (Scott, 2003, p. 64)

In opposition to Husserl, Heidegger argued that the "observer cannot separate himself from the world (and so cannot have the detached point of view that Husserl insists on)" (Mastin, 2008, p. 2). Heidegger's phenomenology, therefore, highlights "the importance of understanding the individual in his existential world" (Mastin, 2008, p. 2), that is, the world surrounding him/her; further, it reinforces the belief that "knowledge and understanding are embedded in our everyday life . . . that truth and understanding of life can emerge from people's life experiences" (Byrne, 2001, p. 1). Heidegger's phenomenology implicitly recognizes

the active role of the researcher in research. Heidegger's phenomenology is also hermeneutical. It studies "interpretive structures of experience, how we understand and engage things around us in our human world, including ourselves and others" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, p. 2). The other forms of phenomenology have been purposely not taken into account.

Assumptions of Phenomenology

Barker (2002) discussed four assumptions of phenomenology:

1. Perception is a key to understanding phenomenology. "Our perceptions give rise to what we do, think, and feel. Hence, perceived meaning is more important than objective reality, fact, or event" (p. 79).
2. Multiple perspectives: "Each person's perspective has its own validity; therefore, multiple, differing perspectives are equally valid and of interest to study" (Barker, 2002, p. 79).
3. Understanding: The researcher can "produce explanations of a person's experiences; actions in terms of intentions; purpose, and meaning" (p. 79) only by showing empathy to that person.
4. Empathy: ability to understand and share the feelings of others (p. 79).

One way that the researcher treated participants in this study with empathy was by listening to their perspectives with an open mind, while avoiding allowing his own assumptions to interfere with the process.

This study took a phenomenological approach aligned with Heidegger's phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of 30 female students within a Benin secondary school. The main reason for this choice is the active role this approach assigns to the researcher in the research process. The focus of the study was on the girls' perceptions of their lived school experience and what this experience meant for them. Data were collected through individual interviews. The themes that emerged from the study reflect participants' perceptions of their lived experience.

Summary of the Methods Used in This Study

Participant observation was used throughout the study to collect data on aspects of the dominant culture participants experience in their relationships; and to document girls' response to their lived experience. Free listing was used to elicit from the 30 female participants in the study, the categories they associate with their lived school experience. Survey questionnaires were distributed to 30 teachers to collect data on their perception of girls, and to 30 boys to collect data on their perception of girls. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 30 female participants in the study. The researcher used semi-structured interview to collect data on girls' perception of their lived experience; aspects of the dominant culture that girls experience in their relationships; influencing factors of girls' perception of their lived experience; and girls' response to their lived experience. Focus group discussions were conducted with the 30 female students for the same purpose as the semi-structured interviews. The table below summarizes the methods used to collect data for each research question, and the samples used for data collection.

Table 5. Methods and Samples

Method	Participant Observation	Free Listing	Semi-Structured Interviews	Survey Questionnaires	Focus Group
Sample	Class School	Girls	Administrators Teachers Boys	Girls	Girls
Q1 Girls' perceptions		X		X	X
Q2 Perception of girls			X		
Q3 Aspects of culture experienced	X			X	X
Q.4 Influencing factors				X	X
Q.5 Girls; reaction	X			X	X

Research Limitations

The study is a qualitative, in-depth analysis of the lived experience of 30 girls in a secondary school in Benin. Therefore, it did not employ statistical tools for the data analysis, nor does the researcher claim the representativeness of the chosen sample.

- From the methodological point of view, the non-probability sampling method and the small sample size (30 girls) used for the study reduced the external validity of the research findings. In other words, the extent to which these findings would apply to girls both inside and outside Abomey-Calavi Secondary School requires further investigation. This limitation could not have been avoided given the aim of the study to explore the lived experience of a specific population. The uniqueness of lived experience precludes the researcher from making broad generalizations based on specific situations-it is hard to prove that under similar circumstances; the other girls at Abomey-Calavi Secondary School and girls in Beninese schools at large would have gone through a similar school experience as participants in the study.
- Lack of data availability represents yet another limitation for the study. The limited number of previous studies conducted on girls' school experience in Benin limited the researchers' ability to make comparisons based on previous findings. This limitation accounts for the exploratory design of the study. To compensate for the lack, the

researcher made use of the few available data on girls' school experience in Africa and elsewhere.

- Finally, the initial research design made provision for the inclusion of dropout girls in the study for a balance approach to investigating into girls' lived school experience. However, unfavorable ground realities rendered the initial plan hardly feasible. The researcher did contact a few dropout girls, many of them in apprenticeship to become hairdressers or seamstresses. Most of them declined joining the study for several reasons. For some girls, enrolling in the study evokes sad memories from the past. The girls in this group recalled with a mixture of bitterness and regret their time in school. They recalled painful memories from corporal punishment, disrespectful attitudes towards girls, and the sexual harassment of girls. They also expressed feelings of regret for the missed opportunity to become 'somebody' through schooling. Other girls could not participate in the study due to conflicting schedule between training hours and interview time. Five dropout girls finally agreed to join the study. Despite their small number, the input received from these girls brought a balanced perspective to the study.

The Sample

The proposed study was conducted at CEG Abomey-Calavi (Abomey-Calavi Secondary School) in southern Benin. This is a coeducational government public day school in existence since 1982. The population of interest in this study includes 30 secondary school girls, aged between 17 and 19, from three grade levels, different ethnic origins, and varied socioeconomic backgrounds. The research focused on a small sample of 30 girls primarily because of the exploratory nature of the study and the uniqueness of participants' experience. A lived experience being unique, the findings from the study will not apply to the larger population of female students in Benin.

Involving human participants in a study, according to Hulley at al. (1988), requires that descriptive data be provided about the demographic profile of the sample chosen for inclusion in the study. While the schoolgirls are the population of interest for the study, the research also targeted teachers and schoolboys for reasons related to the purpose of the study. The study sought to investigate girls' perceptions of their lived school experience and the meaning they

attach to this experience. In a coeducational setting like the one chosen for the study, interaction with the opposite sex influences the way that girls define themselves, the way they perceive their lived experience, and what this experience means to them. Further, the inclusion of teachers and schoolboys in the research ensured the inclusion of multiple voices in the quest for authenticity. It brought new perspectives to the gender debate between female students and their male counterparts in the school setting.

Why school as a research site? For a study that focused on girls' lived experience in the school setting, the participants' natural setting (school) is probably the most relevant place to conduct fieldwork: The data collected makes sense primarily within the confines of the participants' real world. It is here that actions, practices, and interactions unfold on a daily basis. It is also here that the external factors influencing the reality of participants' daily lives shape their perception of their lived experience. Other than that, the setting affects the nature and the quality of the responses you get from participants. The researcher conducted his fieldwork in the selected location for four main reasons. First, there was a need to collect data from students in their final years of high school and from junior high school students. At these levels, students usually accumulate the number of school years judged sufficient to experience the phenomenon under investigation in the research study. The second reason relates to the research topic. Like most school in Benin, Abomey-Calavi Secondary School is grappling with the perennial problems of girls' poor school performance, grade repetition rate, and dropout rate. These problems represent major obstacles to girls' participation in school. Next, with its 4,000 students, its class size (50 students on average per class), the school environment, and the common issues confronting girls' education in Benin and in Africa in general, CEG Abomey-Calavi is a typical Beninese secondary school. Despite these obstacles, CEG Abomey-Calavi has established a good

record of success for itself in national exams. The school culture at Abomey-Calavi shows traits common to the school culture in other schools in Benin. Here, a culture of male dominance informs gender practices in the school setting.

Finally, the school principal and the researcher have known each other for years both as classmates and as colleagues. This enduring friendship allowed the researcher easy access to the school and to the resources needed to conduct the fieldwork. The researcher discussed his research plans with the school principal during his stay in Benin in January 2008. The latter showed interest in the project and felt honored that his school had been chosen as a site for conducting this groundbreaking research.

Research Location

The studied site (Abomey-Calavi Secondary School) is at Abomey-Calavi, a suburb of Cotonou, the capital city of Benin. Abomey-Calavi is located in the Atlantic Department, approximately 18 km from the city center of Cotonou. The city grew from a small unattractive village to a busy center. Its expansion began when Benin established its first university (the National University of Benin) there in the 1970s. Back then, many students established residence at Abomey-Calavi, conveniently located two miles away from the university campus. The years that followed the opening of the university saw a slow but rapid expansion of the city as houses were built to accommodate the flow of incoming university students. Prior to that, Ganvie, a small lake village located on the outskirts of the city, attracted visitors from the outside world to Abomey-Calavi. The important flow of people to this tourist site earned it the name “The Venice of Africa.” Today, although still a rural area by Benin standards, Abomey-Calavi has the attributes of a city. Landmarks such as hospitals, government offices, restaurants, banks, pharmacies, hotels, and vocational schools are located within the school catchment area.

Despite these landmarks, Abomey-Calavi Secondary School is the only public secondary school within the catchment area.

The population at Abomey-Calavi is predominantly Fon, a major West African ethnic and linguistic group (Fon is the main national language of Benin), but citizens from other parts of Benin also live there. A working class (65%) and a middle class (25%) live side by side. Fishing and farming represent the main economic activities undertaken by men. However, options for vocational professions such as hairdressing and tailoring (for women) and mechanics, plumbing, carpentry, and masonry (for men) also exist. Abomey-Calavi operates on a gender-segregated social organizing system with a clearly demarcated gender division of labor. Men as breadwinners take care of the family, while women as housewives work in the household.

Role of the Researcher: Reflexivity

The researcher in the current study entered the field fully aware of his role both as an individual and as a researcher. As an individual, his decision to investigate the topic of inquiry grew out of concerns for the challenges confronting girls in their day-to-day experience in the school setting of Benin and a desire to raise public awareness on practices that slow down girls' school progress. It is unusual for men, particularly from patriarchal settings like the researcher's own, to show so much interest in gender issues as to become involved in research seeking to combat women's subordination. However, having served in the Beninese school system for over a decade, the researcher witnessed and may even have taken part in practices that prevent schoolgirls from achieving their goals through schooling. Taking a critical look back at his experience as a teacher, he feels the need to revisit cultural practices that adversely affect girls' educational performance in the school settings, to raise the awareness of policymakers on the need to pay more attention to girls' day-to-day school experience, and to suggest strategies for promoting a positive and safer psychosocial school environment for girls to thrive.

As a qualitative interpretative researcher, the researcher identified himself as the primary instrument of data collection. He achieved his own identification as a native son of the culture under study. With that in mind, he conducted this study with a constant awareness that the values, preconceived notions, and past experiences that he brought to the research could interfere with his own interpretation of facts. Therefore, he made a "deliberate, thoughtful assessment of his own values and assumptions in all aspects of the study—not to eliminate bias, but to be aware of conflicting realities" (Black, n.d., p. 15). In particular, the researcher understood that researchers bring the sum of their experiences to the research field, that they cannot remove these experiences from the process of understanding facts in the research fields, and that they cannot know all about reality (Black, n.d.). Most importantly, the researcher understood that access to reality is a joint social construction between the researcher and the researched.

Participants

Schoolgirls

The study involved 30 female students recruited from three (fifth, sixth, and seventh) of the seven class levels comprising the secondary school cycle in Benin. Participants in this group came from large low-income families in which the father is either a farmer (55% of participants), a middle-class civil servant (15% of participants), or a skilled tradesperson (25%). In most families, the father is the breadwinner and the mother a housewife. Some participants live with relatives (uncle, aunt, or distant relatives). On average, participants in this group are 19 years old. Sixty percent (60%) were 18 and 19 years old, and 40% were 19 and 20 years old. They belong to different ethnic/linguistic groups, including Fon, Yoruba, Mina, Goun, Dendi, and Bariba, the most spoken ethnic languages in Benin. Most of the girls (70%) belong to the Fon ethnic group. However, they can all speak the Fon language. Some girls come from other parts

of Benin and live with close or distant relatives, often in difficult conditions. To meet their practical needs, some girls take part-time jobs selling foods in restaurants or school supplies for local Chinese companies established in Cotonou, the capital city. The girls commute from home to school. Some live close to school, while others commute from a longer distance. In terms of school experience, the female participants enrolled in the study have spent at least five years in the secondary school system. The time spent enabled them to possess the experience judged sufficient to participate in the study.

Five young women who had dropped out of school participated in the focus group discussions. Two of them, one age 25 and one age 26, had dropped out of primary school many years earlier; both trained as hairdressers and own a hairdressing workshop. The other three girls, 21 and 23 years of age, completed five years of secondary school, dropped out, and are currently training to become nurses. The five girls share the same cultural background as the 30 schoolgirls enrolled in the study. Two of the five girls belong to the Fon ethnic group in south Benin, two to the Mina ethnic group (southwest Benin), and one to the Dendi ethnic group (north Benin).

Schoolboys

Participants in this group are of the same age range, 18 to 20 years old, as their female counterparts. The boys were recruited from the same class levels as their female peers. They too come from low-income families where the father is either a farmer (55% of the participants), a middle-class civil servant (15% of participants), or a skilled tradesperson (25%). In most families, the father is the breadwinner, and the mother a housewife. Like the girls, some participants come from the other parts of Benin and live with relatives (uncles, aunts, or more distant relatives), generally in difficult social conditions. To make ends meet, participants in this group have to take part-time jobs during school breaks. They too belong to a variety of ethnic

groups, including Fon, Yoruba, Mina, Goun, Dendi, and Bariba, which are also the most spoken ethnic languages in Benin. Most (70%) belong to the Fon ethnic group, although all can speak Fon. All participants were born in Benin and grew up in Benin's cultures. They share the same social and religious backgrounds as their female counterparts. Like the girls, some boys have to commute from distant locations to school while other live close to school. Some walk to school while others come by taxi or motorbike. None of the participants owns a car. In terms of school experience, the boys enrolled in the study have also spent at least five years in the secondary school system, a time deemed sufficient to possess the required school experience to participate in the study.

Teachers

Participants in this group (30 teachers, 85% males and 15% females) were between 30 and 55 years old. Fifty percent (50%) were 30 years and older, an estimated 30% were aged 40 to years, and 20% between 45 and 55 years of age. In terms of teaching experience, the sample includes teachers with five to 30 years of experience, the majority of participants (60%) having 10 years of experience in the profession. Eighty-four percent (84%) of the teachers worked full time and 16% were part-time teachers. Approximately 67% of the male participants were married, while 33% were unmarried. In contrast, about 87% of the female teachers were married, while 13% were unmarried. Both male and female teachers shared the same cultural beliefs and values as their students.

Sampling Method

The study used a purposeful sample of 90 participants divided into three groups: schoolgirls, schoolboys, and teachers/members of the school administration. It was decided that the best sampling method was purposive or convenience sampling:

> The purposive sampling technique is a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within. Purposive sampling may also be used with both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. (Tongco, 2007, p. 147)

The focus of study of the current research was primarily on the domain "being a girl in a school setting in Benin." It sought to identify the aspects of this domain that participants share and how this affects their own perception and understanding of their lived experience. In purposive sampling, "the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience" (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006, p. 124). Just like all non-probability sampling methods, purposive sampling "contributes more to internal validity than external validity" (Tongco, 2007, p. 154). Put differently:

> In purposive sampling, interpretation of results is limited to the population under study. To be valid over a greater realm or to form the basis for a theory, the study may be repeated for confirmation in a different population, still using a non-probability method. (Bernard, 2002, pp. 182–184)

Another drawback associated with purposive sampling is that the researcher puts faith in the informant, on whom all the data rest (Tongco, 2007, p. 154). Godambe (1982, in Tongco, 2007, p. 154) warns about the need to ensure the knowledge and skills of the informant in purposive sampling, as "inappropriate informants will render the data meaningless and invalid." Despite these limitations to the use of purposive sampling, the researcher in the current study preferred this sampling method to randomized probability sampling for reasons inherent in the two sampling methods. Whereas purposive sampling seeks to include as many voices in the study as possible (Tongco, 2007, p. 154), random sampling focuses its study on a number of participants and then generalizes the results to an entire population. Zeidlitch (1962, in Tongco, 2007) warns against one of the drawbacks associated with randomized sampling:

> To insist on randomized samples every time is to run the danger of losing efficiency and failing to recognize the existence of different types of information which can be extracted from a community in more than one way. (p. 154)

Likewise, Marshall (1996) gave three reasons against the use of random samples in qualitative research:

> First, samples for qualitative investigations tend to be small. . . . Even if a representative sample was desirable, the sampling error of such a small sample is likely to be so large that biases are inevitable. Secondly, for a true random sample to be selected the characteristics under study of the whole population should be known; this is rarely possible in a complex qualitative study. Thirdly, random sampling of a population is likely to produce a representative sample only if the research characteristics are normally distributed within the population. There is no evidence that the values, beliefs and attitudes that form the core of qualitative investigation are normally distributed, making the probability approach inappropriate. (p. 523)

The research included multiple voices in the search for accuracy, consistent with the ontological and the epistemological foundations defined for the study. Another reason for the preference for purposive sampling relates to the goal assigned to the study. The research focused on the study of the specific cases of 30 schoolgirls. The intent, therefore, was not to generalize the findings to a larger population. However, the researcher believed that some kind of generalization could take place in the research process. For example, one could learn from the experiences of the 30 girls involved in the current research, and use that knowledge to anticipate what they might find in similar situations (Eisner, 1998, p. 103). Simply put, one could extrapolate the findings from a qualitative study to a larger population through a process of "naturalistic generalization" (Eisner, 1998, p. 103). Eisner (1998) differentiated between what he termed "formal statistic generalization" and "naturalistic generalization." "Statistical studies," according to Eisner (1998), "are based on random samples that, in theory, formally generalize to the greater population of that sample" (p. 103). In contrast, studies of particular cases seldom use random samples (Eisner, 1998, p. 103). The danger in using random samples, according to

Trembly (1957), is that "the random member of a community may not be as knowledgeable and observant as an expert informant (Tremblay, 1957, in Tongco, 2007, p. 154).

Having given careful consideration to the advantages and drawbacks associated with purposive sampling, the researcher established the criteria for selecting the participants. Eligibility criteria required potential participants to be available for the study, to have completed five years of secondary school education, to be able to tell about their lived experience in a way that is understandable to others, and to be willing to share stories about their lived experience with anyone, including a male researcher. Requiring that participants have completed five years of secondary school education was crucial. Given the focus of the study (girls' lived school experience), it was anticipated that only participants with substantial school experience could have stories to share. Eligible participants who matched the selection criteria were identified with the help of the school director and the director of studies of the studied site. Potential participants were briefed on the purpose of the study. They were also told about the potential for the findings from the study to influence future actions toward an improvement of girls' schooling in Benin's education system. Then, to ensure maximum adherence to ethics of interviewing (informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of participants against harm), participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary, that they could choose to participate or not to participate without fear of retaliation, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without fear of retaliation.

Finally, the researcher informed participants of the risks usually associated with participation in this type of study, namely the risks of disclosure of participants' statements and participants' identities. Relative to these risks, the researcher reassured participants. He informed them of the precautions taken to protect their identities and to ensure confidentiality.

Of the 42 students invited to participate in the study, 37 met the criteria of eligibility, five were unavailable for interviews, and two decided not to participate. The 30 students who were ultimately recruited filled out and signed the written consent forms. As a precautionary measure, the researcher informed the 30 female participants that signing a consent form by no means implied making a commitment to participate in the research. Participants were told that they could still withdraw from the study at any time.

Thirty male students (10 from each of the three class levels that the girls were recruited from) also participated in the study. No interviews were conducted with these participants. Since their participation was limited to filling out survey questionnaires, the criteria for selection were willingness to participate and availability to fill out the questionnaire. Ten boys from each of the three class levels immediately volunteered to participate in the study. Survey questionnaires were also distributed to 30 teachers/members of the school administration purposively selected with the help of the director of studies of the studied site. The criteria for selecting the male students (willingness to participate and availability to fill out the questionnaire) also applied to teachers.

Methods

Research method in this study is defined as the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question (Crotty, 1998, in Levy, 2006, p. 36). It is shared belief in the field of research that the philosophical and the methodological orientations taken to investigate a research problem guide the choice of the methods of data collection and data analysis. Consistent with the grounded theory approach to the ongoing study, and given the constructivist and interpretivist orientation of the study, the most appropriate instruments for collecting data included five research methods: free listing, participant observation, survey questionnaire, semi-structured interview, and focus-group discussion.

The process of data collection involved the collection of qualitative non-numerical data in three phases. In the first phase, the researcher collected free listing data from the female participants and administered a survey questionnaire to teachers, school administrators, and male students on their perceptions of schoolgirls; girls were also surveyed in this phase on their perceptions of their lived school experience. In the second phase, the researcher administered semi-structured interviews to the female participants. The assistant researcher conducted the focus group discussions in the third phase. Participant observation was ongoing throughout the study.

Participant Observation

Data collection for this study began with participant observation, which "involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives" (Bernard, 2002, p. 322). Participant observation is most relevant to the current research because the study is an investigation into girls' lived experience in the school settings of Benin and how this affects the lives and the school performance of female students. The best way to achieve this goal, in the understanding of the researcher, is to observe the studied group in its setting: school. Additionally, participant observation allowed the researcher to learn about both the explicit and the tacit aspects of the culture (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002)—both the culture of reference and the school culture—of the participants involved in the study. Learning about both aspects of participants' culture enabled the researcher to confront his outsider's knowledge (etic) of reality with participants' insider's knowledge (emic) of their culture, including the hidden aspects of participants' own culture often unknown to them (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002). Further, participant observation is a way to discover similarities and gaps between what participants report and what happens in practice.

As a participant observer, the researcher established residence in Abomey-Calavi, the studied site for this research. He made frequent visits to the studied school in order to become familiar with the school environment and to establish rapport with teachers, as a way to get a feel for how people "do things around here" (Bernard, 2002). During the field observation, the researcher made a systematic written record of interactions, conversations (both formal and informal), and details that helped him understand girls' perceptions of teachers, school administrators, male students, and the types of interactions that transmit gender subordination in the school setting. The researcher was attentive to recurrent themes in interactions, and to elements of the school culture that needed further investigation. He observed participants in the schoolyard, where they engage in natural interactions and are less aware of the researcher's presence, and in the classroom, in order to witness how the gender dynamics influence girls' school performance. After each field observation, the researcher produced "a systematic written account of the things he heard, saw, experienced and thought in the course of the observation" (De Votto, 2000, p. 304). These notes helped the researcher to remember and to explore the process of the observation. Observation was ongoing throughout the study.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher informed participants of the purpose of the observation. He conducted observations during breaks, between two classes, before the classes begin, and after classes, when students engage in naturally occurring interactions. Initially, the researcher planned to conduct as many classroom observations as the circumstances would allow for. However, teachers' attitude on the ground did not allow for it. Fully aware of the purpose of the observation the observed teachers avoided teaching a real class. Every time the researcher scheduled a class visit, they involved the students in an activity that required little classroom interaction. Examples include scoring students' quizzes, having students copy a lesson in their

notebooks, or entering students' score averages in the scorebook. The only opportunities for students-students classroom interactions available to the researcher for observation occurred only during study hall hours when left on their own students interacted freely.

The researcher took field notes on the spot during observations in order to preserve the accuracy of the information gathered and to document his first impressions of events. However, whenever he participated in interactions, he delayed note-taking until the end of the observation. At the end of the day, he reviewed his notes for emerging themes and for specific questions to include in subsequent semi-structured interviews. He supplemented observations with interviews and verified the information gathered during interviews through observations. A total of 50 observations were conducted.

Free Listing

The purpose of the collection of free list data was, first, to determine the boundaries of the study by identifying the categories that girls used to describe their lived experience and, second, to find out the elements of the cultural domain "being a girl in a Benin school setting" that participants shared in common. These elements represented the meaning that the girls collectively gave to their lived experience.

In cognitive anthropology, free listing is a technique for eliciting from participants in a study a list of items contained in a cultural domain using open-ended questions (Weller, 1998; Weller and Romney, 1988, p. 9). A cultural/cognitive domain is defined as a "set of items or things that are all of the same type or category (Lounsbury, 1964; Spradley, 1979; Weller & Romney, 1998, in Borgatti, 1998). According to Borgatti (1998):

> A cultural/cognitive domain is a mental category like "animals" or "illnesses." It is a set of items that are all alike in some important way. Humans in all cultures classify the world around them into cognitive domains, and the way they do this affects the way they interact with the world. (p. 1)

Weller and Romney (1988, p. 9) defined a cultural/cognitive domain as "an organized set of words, concepts, or sentences all at the same level of contrast that jointly refer to a single conceptual sphere." The assumption with cognitive/semantic domain, according to Senha (2003), is that "there is something common to people's understanding of that domain (i.e., user understanding is not completely idiosyncratic); free-listing is a good way to explore that common understanding of the domain" (p. 1). Defining the cultural/cognitive domain also helps to define the content and boundaries of the subject matter—the first step in any study, according to Gravlee (1998). Free listing is suited for this study because of the relevance to the study of some of the advantages associated with it. Free listing helped explore participants' common understanding of the studied cultural domain: "being a girl in a Benin school." It helped achieve a better understanding of the way that girls are treated in the school setting, including their own perception of teachers, school administrators, and male students. Additionally, free listing helped define the categories that girls associate with "being a girl in a Benin school": what items belong and what items do not belong to this cultural domain. Even though experience is unique to each individual, humans share things in common in the way that they describe their lived experience of their daily lives (Gravlee, 1998); free listing helped explore this common understanding of participants' experience. Next, the items generated from the free list revealed the characteristics of participants' culture (and school culture); Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 50) noted that the theories people use to perceive are not culture-free. Most importantly, the elements that participants included in the cognitive domain definition helped identify the items to include in semi-structured interview questions and in focus-group discussions later in the course of the study.

Finally, given that one of the attributes of ethnographic research is "the commitment to defining the subject of study in emic terms—using the language, concepts, and categories of the people being studied" (Gravlee, 1998, p. 1), generating a free list from participants enabled participants to define the studied domain in their own language (Weller & Romney, 1988). This lends validity to the proposed study, whose focus is on participants' lived experience. It is also "the best way to ensure that the anthropologist is dealing with culturally relevant items" (Bernard et al., 1986, in Gravlee, 1998, p. 1). Quinlan (2005, p. 220) defined the assumptions of free listing in the following way:

- People tend to mention items in order of familiarity (order of mention is indicator of salience)
- People who know a lot about a subject list more than people who know less (more "competent" informants have longer lists)
- People that most participants list indicate locally prominent items

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher collected free lists from 30 female participants (a sample size judged sufficient for collecting free listings (Weller & Romney, 1988, p.14) on the items they associate with "being a girl in the school setting." Free listing does not require random sampling (Weller & Romney, 1988), so the researcher chose participants purposefully in order to ensure heterogeneity of the sample in terms of age and grade level. Free listing can be administered orally or in written form (Quinlan, 2005). According to Bernard (2000), "in free list, you ask informants to 'list all the X you know about' or 'what kinds of X are there?'" (p. 282).

Survey Questionnaires

Questionnaires are not commonly used in qualitative research because "they require participants to respond to a stimulus, and thus they are not acting naturally" (Woods, 2006, p. 17). However, a questionnaire can be useful in qualitative research. For example, "where certain

clearly defined facts or opinions have been identified by more qualitative methods, a questionnaire can explore how generally these apply" (Woods, 2006, p. 17). Then, "they would be a qualitative check on a sample of questionnaire replies to see if respondents were interpreting items in the way intended" (Wood, 2006, p. 18).

Data Collection Procedure

A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 30 girls participating in the study, 30 schoolboys, and 30 teachers and school administrators purposefully chosen. The schoolboys and the schoolgirls responded to the same sets of questions, and the teachers and the school administration responded to the same questions. Both the questionnaire for girls and the questionnaire for boys included two open questions. The questionnaire for teachers and school administrators had three open questions and two closed questions and focused mainly on their perceptions of schoolgirls and boys. Girls were requested to report their perceptions of teachers, male students, and the school administration; boys stated their perceptions of girls, teachers, and the school administration. However, the analysis of data for girls and boys focused only on girls' perceptions of boys and teachers and boys' perceptions of girls. A semi-structured interview was performed afterwards to check for consistency in girls' views and opinions emerging from the free listing and the questionnaire. For the purpose of this study, the semi-structured interview was administered only to the 30 schoolgirls. These participants represent the targeted population for the study.

Questions for Girls

- What is your perception of teachers?
- What is your perception of male students?

Questions for Boys

- What is your perception of teachers?
- How do you perceive female students?

Questionnaire for Teachers and the School Administration

- What is your perception of your students (girls and boys)?
- Who has more aptitude for school, boys or girls? Why?
- Who shows more interest in school? Girls or boys? Why?
- What aspects of Benin's culture do you transmit to your students?

Semi-Structured Interviews

Exploring how participants perceive and make sense of events that affect their lives requires a flexible data collection instrument, one that allows participants to tell their stories without interference from the researcher and enables the researcher to enter the participants' world and to explore it in detail. A semi-structured interview is suited for this purpose: "This form of interviewing allows the researcher and participant to engage in a dialogue whereby initial questions are modified in the light of the participants' responses and the investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise" (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Smith and Osborn summarize the advantages of the semi-structured interview in the following way: "It facilitates rapport/empathy; allows a greater flexibility of coverage and allows the interview to go into novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data; it reduces the control the investigator has over the situation" (p. 59).

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the 30 schoolgirl participants involved in the study to complement information collected from the free list and the questionnaires, to clarify specific aspects of the data collected, and to check for consistency in

participants' views and perspectives on their lived experiences. Examples of points related to participants' lived experience include their perception of teachers, school administrators, and male students. The main goal of these semi-structured interviews, however, was to have participants state in their own words their perceptions of their lived school experience and the meaning they attach to it. The interview questions were tested on five participants prior to the interview in order to check the wording and to prepare for unanticipated difficulties that may arise in the course of the interview (Bernard, 2002; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Participants answered the following questions:

- What can you say about your teachers, the school administration, and male students?
- What strategies do you use to overcome the challenges that you face in the school setting?
- How does the school administration assist you when you have a problem at school?
- How would you summarize your school experience?

The interviews took place in the school setting of CEG Abomey-Calavi (the study site) in a room allocated to the researcher by the school director. Each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes to one hour. Prior to each interview, the researcher reminded the participants of the purpose of the research as well as of the voluntary nature of their participation in the study. In this respect, the researcher reminded participants to feel free to pass on any question that they judged embarrassing or inappropriate. He also informed participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time during the study without fear of reprisals. Participants were asked to state their perceptions of teachers, the school administration, and their male peers. The interview questions were open-ended in order to explore the depth and richness of participants' lived experience and the social life in which this experience occurs (Strauss, in Aldiabat, 2011). The researcher made use of probing as needed in order to get as much information as possible from participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission, but the

researcher also took notes of important details that otherwise would have been lost in the midst of data from the audio recording or would have escaped notice. As Bernard (2002) notes, "human memory is a poor recording device, especially for the kind of details that make the difference between good and so-so ethnographic research" (p. 368). Three kinds of field notes were used in this study: jottings, descriptive notes, and analytic notes (Bernard, 2002). Jottings were used to record quick details to remember later. Descriptive notes were also taken to capture the details of participants' behavior or details about the environment that helped the researcher to understand "what's going on" regarding the events being observed or studied (Bernard, 2002, p. 376). The researcher used analytic notes as a device to "lay out your ideas about how you think the culture you are studying is organized" (Bernard, 2002, p. 376). These analytic memos were reflective notes summarizing the researcher's interaction with the data (Rossman and Ellis, 2003). The researcher wrote these memos using his theoretical sensitivity, defined as the researcher's ability to listen to the data and to understand the data's meaning (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The core category that helped build the substantive theory emerged from the analytic memos.

Focus Group

Focus group, according to Khan (1991), is an in-depth discussion in which:

> A small number of people (usually 8–12) from the target population, under the guidance of a facilitator (moderator) discuss topics of importance for a particular study/project. It is basically a qualitative method in which the moderator, with the help of predetermined guidelines, stimulates free discussion among the participants on the subject of inquiry. (p. 1)

For Davidson (1975, in Fern, 1983, p. 121), "a focused group interview is a qualitative tool for collecting information in which a number of respondents simultaneously discuss a given topic under the guidance of a moderator."

A focus group was suited for this study because of the flexible nature of this method: "The informal homogeneous group setting and the open-ended nature of questions encourage the participants to feel free from various constraints to which they are subject during individual interviews" (Khan, 1991, p. 3). The focus group can be used for multiple purposes as an idea-generation tool, in conjunction with other methods, and as a primary source of data collection (Khan, 1991, p. 1). In the context of this study, however, it was used not as a primary source of data collection but in conjunction with other qualitative methods as a verification tool. As such, it has served the purpose of explaining, expanding, illuminating, and confirming participants' views and perspectives on their lived experience (Khan, 1991, pp. 1–2). Experts commonly hold several assumptions about focus groups. For example, supporters of this technique see focus groups as a provider of greater synergism among participants (Hess, 1968, in Fern, 1983, p. 122), of stimulation (Goldman, 1962, in Fern, 1983, p. 122), of spontaneity and candor (Hess, 1968 in Fern, 1983, p. 122), of release of inhibition (Merton, 1956, in Fern, 1983, p. 122), and of higher security (Hess, 1968, in Fern, 1983, p. 122). However, Fern (1982) "found that individual interviews produced more ideas and ideas of higher quality than focus groups" (Fern 1983, p. 122). The second assumption puts the ideal group size for a focus group at between 8 and 12 participants (Fern, 1983, p. 122). The third assumption highlights the importance of the moderator's expertise (ability, knowledge in social or clinical psychology, past focus-group experience, and product or problem knowledge) in promoting group interaction (Axelrod, 1976; Caruso, 1976, in Fern, 1983, p. 122). The fourth assumption "thinks the group will be more productive if members are socially and intellectually homogeneous—specifically in terms of age, education, culture, social class, and occupation" (Merton, 1956; Axelrod, 1976; Wells, 1974, in Fern, 1983, p. 123).

Data Collection Procedure

Focus group discussion for the current study was moderated by the research assistant, a female with reliable past experiences in focus-group discussion. The focus group included the same 30 girls involved in the semi-structured interviews and five schoolgirl dropouts. The study's initial plan was to include a greater number of schoolgirl dropouts, but most of the girls targeted were unavailable. The questions that guided the semi-structured interviews also guided the group discussions. However, participants were unaware of this until the discussions started. It was crucial for a female to lead the focus group discussions. Given the sensitive nature of the discussion topic—girls' lived experience—the researchers assumed that the girls were more likely to open up to a female moderator than to a male, particularly on matters pertaining to their intimate lives. The participants were divided into three groups of 10. The 10 members in each group were selected from the same class levels in order to maximize homogeneity. The discussions were audiotaped and proceeded in the absence of the main researcher (a male). In addition to recording the discussion, the moderator also took notes of details deemed important to remember. The discussions were held in French, the medium of instruction in Benin, and were spread over three days. Each discussion lasted one hour. In the end, the moderator submitted a report on the discussions, the notes taken, and the recorded audio material to the researcher for cross-checking. The researcher provided an English translation of the focus-group report. Given the purpose of the focus-group discussion (verification), the analysis of the data collected consisted of a comparison of the themes that emerged from the discussions with the themes identified from the semi-structured interviews. The moderator was unaware of the themes previously identified from the semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Plan

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data collected from semi-structured interviews, participant observation, focus group discussion, free listing, and survey questionnaire. The analysis consisted in identifying, examining, and recording themes that is patterns, across data sets that are important to the description of the phenomenon associated with each research question. For the analysis of data collected from semi-structured interviews, grounded theory was used to identify the themes. The analysis was conducted using categories listed in the theoretical framework and conceptual framework, including but not limited to: girls' school experience; gender socialization; gender inequality; gender perception and expectations; attitudes towards girls; male dominance; and oppression. The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- How do girls perceive their school experience?
- How do teachers, school administrators and boys perceive girls?
- What aspects of the dominant culture do the girls experience in their relationships?
- What factors influence the girls' perception of their school experience?
- How do the girls react to this experience?

Analysis of Free-List Data

The purpose of the analysis of data collected from the free list was to determine the most salient items in the cultural domain "being a girl in a school setting in Benin" that participants shared in common. These items represented participants' main concerns in the research study, that is, their lived school experience. To determine the most salient items on individual participants' lists, the researcher and his assistant used the method recommended by Smith (1993). The author suggested using the frequency of occurrence of an item in a list and its

order of occurrence as measures to calculate the listed items' salience index; an item's salience varies from 0 to 1, 1 being the highest index. There are two steps to the process:

> First, find the salience index of listed items (S) for each individual. Here, you rank items on an individual's list inversely (final item listed equals one, and items increase by one moving up the list). Then you divide the rank by the number of items the individual listed.
>
> Next, tabulate a composite salience value (or mean salience value) for each item listed in all free lists of the domain. Here, you sum all salience scores for that item and then divide by the number of informants. (Quinlan, 2005, p. 8)

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the data analysis of the free-list data.

Analysis of Survey Questionnaire Data

Survey questionnaires were used to collected data from Girls on their perception of teachers, school administrators, and boys; from teachers on their perceptions of boys; and from boys on their perception of girls.

Questions for Girls

- What is your perception of teachers and the school administration?
- What is your perception of male students?

Questions for Boys

- How do you perceive girls?

Questionnaire for Teachers and the School Administration

- What is your perception of your students (girls and boys)?
- Who has more aptitude for school, boys or girls? Why?
- Who shows more interest in school, girls or boys? Why?

How Do Girls Perceive Teachers, Boys, and School Administrators?

The purpose of the analysis of this open-ended question on the survey questionnaire was to identify the categories that participants used to describe the way in which they perceive teachers, boys, and the school administration. To this end, the researcher used the abbreviated

grounded theory (Willig, 2013). In this version of grounded theory, "the researcher works with the original data only. He does not leave the confines of the data set to broaden and refine the analysis" (Willig, 2013, p. 73). The researcher chose this version of grounded theory because the purpose of the analysis here was not to develop an explanatory theory about the phenomenon under investigation; rather, the researcher sought to identify the categories that girls used to describe their perception of male members of the school community. Therefore, there was no need for a broadening of the analysis or for a refinement of emerging categories. A full account of the analysis is given in the findings section.

How Do Boys Perceive Girls?

The purpose of this questionnaire was to document boys' stands on the gender debate prevailing in the school setting in the hope that their stories would help explain and make sense of the girls' complaints about boys' attitudes toward their female peers. The survey questions asked boys to state their perceptions of teachers, members of the school administration, and their female peers. For the purpose of this study, the data analysis was limited to the question that requested that boys state their perceptions of female students in their school. The unit of analysis for the data collected was boys' perceptions of female students. The data collected were transcribed and presented in a table. The researcher and his assistant worked separately on the data to identify emerging themes and to cross-compare these themes with the themes previously identified from the analysis of data collected from the survey of the girls. During the analysis process the researcher and his assistant paid close attention to the categories that boys used to state their perceptions of their female peers to see if these categories confirmed girls' complaints about the ways that boys perceived them and treated them.

How Do Teachers And School Administrators Perceive Girls?

In an attempt to explore teachers' perceptions of their students (male and female), 30 teachers, including school administrators, completed a questionnaire on their perceptions and expectations of female students. The questionnaire included three closed questions involving a collection of numerical data and one open-ended question about teachers' perceptions of their students. It was anticipated that the response to this questionnaire would shed more light on males' attitudes toward female students in the school setting. Additionally, it would reveal whether the respondents' perceptions of girls confirm or disconfirm the charges of abuse and disrespect that the female students lodged against them. One hundred percent (100%) of the respondents surveyed completed the questionnaire. The data collected were transcribed and displayed in a table with comments added to them as needed. The researcher and his assistant used a grounded theory approach for the data analysis. First, they immersed themselves in the data in order to comprehend what the data meant. Next, they identified the main categories emerging from the data with careful attention given to recurrent categories. Recurrent emerging categories were then grouped (Black, 2007, p. 15).

Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews Data

The semi-structured interviews explored the female participants' perceptions of their lived school experience and the strategies the girls use to process their main concerns in the school setting. The researcher conducted the data analysis for this question using the full version of grounded theory.

How Do the Girls Perceive Their Lived School Experience?

This question sought to find out the female participants' perceptions of teachers, the school administration, and male students (as did the survey questionnaire). Although participants had previously stated their perceptions of teachers, male students, and the school

administration in the survey questionnaires, the question came up again in the semi-structured interviews for triangulation purposes. The purpose was to look for consistency in participants' accounts of their lived experience. The following questions guided the semi-structured interviews.

- What can you tell us about your teachers?
- Tell us about the administration in your school.
- What can you tell us about the boys at your school?
- How would you describe the impact of the treatment that you receive?
- What do you do to manage your frustration when you feel disrespected?
- How would you summarize your school experience?

The data collected were transcribed and coded. The codes were developed using the initials of the categories that emerged from the data, or by using the prefix/suffix of these categories, or a combination of all of the above. For example, the category "power abuse/sexual harassment" was coded PWASH, and the category "being ignored" was coded BIGNOR. The data were transcribed on tables with comments related to the text of the transcript added to them. After the codes were developed, the transcripts were read one more time with close attention paid to the frequency of occurrence of specific codes. The codes in this case were used as a measurement device to serve the purpose of indexing (Bernard, 2002, p. 382); the codes with a high frequency of occurrence indicated the main themes emerging from the data. The data were coded using the grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory is a method of data analysis that seeks a continuous interplay between data collection and theoretical analysis. The idea of grounded theory is for the analysis "to become grounded in the data and to allow understanding to come from close study of texts" (Bernard, 2002, p. 464; Rossman& Ellis, 2003). The technique involves six steps, according to Bernard:

> First, produce transcripts of interviews and read through a sample of text; next, identify potential themes (analytic categories) that emerge; then, as categories emerge, pull all

> the data from those categories together and compare them; then, think about how categories link together; use the relations among the categories to build theoretical models, constantly checking the models against the data—particularly against negative cases; and, finally, present the result of the analysis using quotes from interviews that illuminate the substantive theory. (2002, p. 463)

The key to conducting data analysis in grounded theory is constant comparison.

Constant Comparison

In the constant comparison method, "each piece of relevant data is continually compared with every other piece of relevant data in order to generate theoretical concepts that encompass as much behavioral variation as possible" (Glaser and Strauss,1967 in Khiat, 2010, p. 12). The method involves four stages: "(a) comparing incidents applicable to each category; (b) integrating categories and their properties; (c) delimiting the theory and (d) writing the theory" (p. 105). Strauss and Corbin (1998) underline the importance of constant comparison, which, they write, enables

> the collection, coding, and analysis phase [to] work in tandem from the start to the end of the investigation. This allows the gradual development of the data from the lowest level of abstraction to a higher one of theoretical conception. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, in Khiat, 2010, p. 12)

The researcher achieved constant comparison in this study by constantly checking the categories previously identified against new data collected as the study proceeded.

Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity moves the researcher from a descriptive to an analytical level of analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1990) define theoretical sensitivity as "the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't" (p. 42). Theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) is defined as "the ability of the researcher to identify the important features of the collected data, perceive the concepts, categories,

properties and their interrelationships that arise and finally give meanings to them" (in Khiat, 2010, p. 13).

Strauss and Corbin (1998, in Khiat, 2010, p. 13) argue that in the course of the data analysis, certain aspects of the study may escape the researcher's notice; but, as the analysis proceeds and the researcher becomes increasingly aware of what the data say and mean, his/her theoretical sensitivity opens his/her eyes to new ways to see the events as they unfold. The researcher, therefore, could use his/her theoretical sensitivity to recode and to reanalyze certain events in light of the new insight developed from his/her theoretical sensitivity. The researcher in this study formed and enhanced his theoretical sensitivity through past research experiences, by exploring the extant literature on the current subject of investigation and by immersing himself in the life-world of the participants.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling involves the collection of further data in light of categories emerging from previous stages of data analysis(Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of collecting more data is to cross-check emerging categories against reality in order to prove, disprove, or elaborate on the researcher's analysis of events. Put another way, theoretical sampling means refining existing data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the course of the data analysis in this study, the researcher made a note of aspects of emerging categories that required clarification, designed interview questions on this basis, and went back to the field for more interactions with participants until no new categories could be identified and variations of existing categories ceased to emerge-as outline by (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The purpose of this analysis was to develop an explanatory theory that helped achieve better understanding of participants' main concerns, the factors influencing the perceptions of these concerns, and what participants do to resolve these concerns. In other words, the analysis

sought to understand the basic social processes studied in the environment in which they took place (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the patterns of relationships among the elements of these social processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Creswell (1998) suggested the following steps for data analysis in grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

The themes that emerged from the data analysis helped provide a better understanding of the meaning participants attached to their lived experiences; these themes also helped to provide an understanding of the factors that influenced participants' perceptions of these experiences. The researcher proceeded with the data analysis, bearing in mind that data analysis is an eclectic process (Tesch, 1990). In other words, it uses individual elements from varied sources. It occurs simultaneously and iteratively with data collection, data interpretation, and data reporting (Creswell, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1984); this process allows for making comparisons as new findings emerge (Borgatti, 1996). Data analysis is also based on the data reduction and interpretation—de-contextualization and re-contextualization (Marshall &Rossman, 1998; Tesch, 1990). Data analysis in this study consisted of the generation of concepts through the process of coding. Strauss and Corbin (1990)defined coding as "operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways; it is the central process by which theories are built from data" (p. 57). The coding process followed the three-process approach to coding data in grounded theory mentioned earlier: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Pandit, 1996; D'Onofrio, 2002).

Open Coding

Open coding is the breaking down, labeling, and categorizing of phenomena into concepts (Pandit, 1996). Concepts are "labeled sections of data that the researcher identifies as significant to some facts that the data represent" (Khandkar, 2009, p. 2). Borgatti (1996) defined

open coding as the process of "identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena found in the text" (p.2).

At this initial stage of the analysis, the coding of data was largely descriptive. Descriptive labels were attached to instances of the phenomenon under investigation. The categories identified at this early stage of the analysis functioned at a low level of abstraction as descriptive labels or concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). The researcher read (repeatedly) through the transcripts produced from the interviews with participants in order to make meaning from the data collected.

The open coding was performed on a sentence-by-sentence basis (Khandkar, 2009). Throughout the reading, the researcher developed and applied names and labels (codes) to ideas that raised issues of importance. At this stage, codes of similar content were grouped as concepts. The open coding began with the screening of the data collected from the first group of 10 female participants recruited from the same class. The researcher read through the participants' transcripts to identify emerging concepts for each transcript, then a comparison was made to identify the emerging concepts common to the transcripts for this first group of 10 participants. The researcher went through the same process with the next two groups of 10 participants (for a total of 30 participants). As the open coding progressed, the researcher wrote analytic memos documenting facts of significance to consider in the building of a theory at the selective coding stage (Pandit, 1996). Next, a new reading of the transcripts for the three groups of 10 participants was made to see if the concepts identified within groups were prevalent across groups. Similarities, differences, and idiosyncrasies were identified by means of constant comparison of ideas emerging from data. Then, the researcher made another reading in search of new concepts not discovered in the previous readings. The open coding stopped when no

new concepts emerged, which indicated theoretical saturation (Pandit, 1996; Borgatti, 1996). At that point, the researcher identified verbatim quotes from the data transcripts as supporting evidence for the emerging concepts. Where disconfirming cases emerged, the reasons were considered and sought. Another reading of emerging concepts revealed facts about these concepts that pointed toward the same ideas. The researcher, therefore, grouped these concepts into categories. Table 9 below summarizes the concepts identified from the open coding. The concepts were then grouped in categories; four main categories emerged from this grouping. The findings section presents these categories.

Axial Coding

Axial coding is defined as the process of rearranging main categories and their subcategories in new ways (Pandit, 1996) so as to establish explicit causal relationships among them. Thus, axial coding refers to the process of developing main categories and their sub-categories. (p. 9). It involves relating codes—categories and properties—to each other by establishing "causal relationships" among these categories and properties using "a frame of generic relationships" known as "paradigm model"; "the frame consists of five elements: Phenomenon, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action strategies, and consequences" (Borgatti, 1996, p. 4). The following chart summarizes how these elements relate.

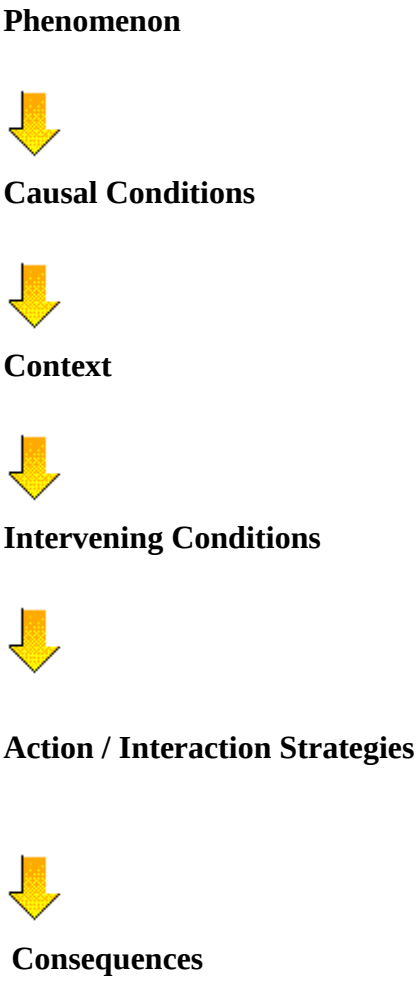


Figure 3. The Paradigm Model

Source: Pandit (1996, p. 8)

Phenomenon in grounded theory refers to the outcome of interest or the subject under consideration (Borgatti, 2006, p. 3). It answers the question: What is the central idea? Causal conditions are the events or variables that lead to the occurrence of the phenomenon (Borgatti, 2006, p. 3); Borgatti (2006) defined context as the specific locations (values) of background variables that lead to the occurrence of the phenomenon; it answers the question: What

influences the causes of the central phenomenon? Intervening conditions are what is needed to achieve change; action strategies refer to what participants do to manage their situation in order to affect change; consequences are the outcome of action strategies developed to deal with the phenomenon of interest.

As the analysis proceeded, the concepts (descriptive categories at a low level of abstraction) identified at the open-coding stage were refined and integrated into higher order analytical categories. The refinement and integration of low-level categories occurred at the axial coding stage. At this stage, the researcher related, in a causal relationship, the categories previously identified by applying a paradigm coding to the data (Borgatti, 1996). The paradigm coding attempted to explain the quality of the lived experience of participants in terms of its wider social processes and its consequences. Then, the researcher established the property, dimension, and intensity for each category.

Selective Coding

The third step in grounded theory analysis, selective coding, involves an integration of the categories previously identified to form a theoretical framework (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This involves writing a descriptive narrative—a story—of the central phenomenon of study, and making a conceptualization—a story line—of this story. The story line, after analysis, becomes the core category (Pandit, 1996). Selective coding, according to Borgatti (1996), "is the process of choosing one category to be the core category, and relating all other categories to that category" (p. 5). Given that the aim of grounded theory is to generate a substantive theory that explains the main concern of participants in a study (Glaser, 1978); one decisive step toward achieving this aim is the delimitation of a core category.

In the previous stages of the data analysis, the process consisted in identifying concepts from data and in grouping them into abstract categories. This process represents the inductive

analysis of data in grounded theory. The identification of the core category represents the deductive analysis in grounded theory. In the present study, the researcher identified the core category in the following way. First, he singled out of the main categories that emerged from the axial coding the one that shares common characteristics with the other categories. Then he related it back to the other main categories by producing a descriptive narrative of the central phenomenon of the study.

Participant Observation Data Analysis

The data collected were coded for the gender values and messages that participants transmit to each other through interaction in the classroom and in the school compound. During the coding process, the researcher identified emerging categories from participants' statements. Categories sharing common characteristics were grouped as themes and compared with similar categories that emerged from the survey questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews. After reviewing the observation field notes the researcher wrote short comments about participants' statements in connection with the themes that emerged from previous data collections.

Verification

One of the criticisms leveled at qualitative research is the lack of scientific rigor in the strategies employed to investigate the central phenomenon of a subject of inquiry (Bitsch, 2005). Scientific rigor, in positivist tradition, refers to the use of criteria, such as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, to evaluate findings in quantitative research (Bitsch, 2005). According to qualitative researchers, the rigor of scientific research is incompatible with qualitative research, given the interpretive nature of the latter (Wheeler & Holloway, 2002). Therefore, evaluation criteria for qualitative inquiry cannot be easily imported from quantitative research (Bitsch, 2005, p. 81). Instead, Guba and Lincoln (1981; 1989, in Bitsch, 2005, p. 82)

developed and detailed the criteria of trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) for qualitative research evaluation. These criteria parallel criteria of internal validity, external validity reliability, and objectivity (Bitsch, 2005, p. 82).

Credibility

In quantitative research, internal validity ensures a match between the research results and the objective reality, that is, the objective truth (Bitsch, 2005, p. 82). According to Popper (1972), "truth or proximity to truth is not provable" (in Bitsch, 2005, p. 82). Therefore, "in a qualitative research context, correspondence with reality is replaced by correspondence of the perspectives of the participants with the description of their perspectives by the researcher" (Bitsch, 2005, p. 82). This is known as credibility. Credibility answers the question "How does one know that the reality of the researcher's interpretation of facts reflects the actual reality of participants' views and perspectives?" Guba and Lincoln (1989) developed six ways to ensure credibility in qualitative research: "(*a*) prolonged engagement, (*b*) persistent observation, (*c*) peer debriefing, (*d*) negative case analysis, (*e*) progressive subjectivity, and (*f*) member checks" (p. 82). The researcher in the current study considered four of the six credibility techniques (prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and member checks) to ensure credibility in the ongoing research.

Prolonged Engagement

According to Bitsch (2005):

> Prolonged engagement asks the question whether the researcher or research team spent enough time on the research site. Have they overcome the effects of misinformation, built the trust necessary to uncover local constructions, and understood the context and its culture? (p. 82)

The time spent on the research site enabled the researchers in the current study to build trust with participants, to gain better understanding of the central phenomenon under

investigation, and to achieve deep insight into participants' perspectives on their lived school experience. Participants (female students) opened up to the researcher and his assistant and readily shared stories of their private lives. The focus-group discussion sessions conducted by the assistant researcher (a female) was an opportunity for participants to reiterate with more confidence their views and opinions previously articulated in the semi-structured interviews. Moreover, being part of the same cultural background as the participants, the researcher was able to use his knowledge of the local culture as a frame of reference to achieve deeper understanding of facts. At the same time, the researcher was careful not to let his prior preconceptions or his prior knowledge of the research context interfere with his interpretation of facts. To prevent this from happening, the researcher gave first priority to participants' lived experience as conveyed in their own words.

Persistent Observation

As a tool for data collection, persistent observation was employed throughout the current study.

> Persistent observation poses the question whether the researcher or the research team have done an in-depth study to gain detail. Have the most relevant characteristics of the situation for the problem under study been identified? Have enough details been gathered? Has sufficient depth been added to the scope, which was gained through prolonged engagement? (Birch, 2005)

Persistent observation enabled the researcher in the ongoing study to gain deeper understanding of the problems under study. Through the use of various methods of data collection, the researcher was able to look at the central phenomenon of the study from different angles. Moreover, the diversification of the sources of data collection (articles, books, literature reviews, participants in the study, human subjects outside the study site) allowed for the collection of details that brought depth to the scope of the study.

Member Check

Member checks seek to find out whether participants agree to the findings, their interpretations, and the conclusions arrived at. Since participants were the providers of the data, it makes sense to hear from them on the interpretation of their views to see if this reflects their actual thoughts. Throughout the current study, the researcher always let participants have a say in the interpretation of findings. He frequently took the interpreted data back to the participants to see if they thought that the researcher's analysis reflected their views at the time of the interview.

Triangulation

Triangulation is another evaluation technique used to assess the credibility of a study. Guba (1981) recommended the use of triangulation to assess credibility and conformability in a study (Bitsch, 2005, p. 87). Four types of triangulation have been discussed in the literature of qualitative research (Patton, 1990, pp.186–189; Denzin, 1978, pp. 291–307; Yin, 2003, pp. 97–99, in Birch, 2005, p. 84): data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation refers to the use of multiple and diversified data sources to ensure looking at the central phenomenon of a study from different perspectives. Investigator triangulation suggests using more than one researcher to ensure listening to multiple interpretations of the same facts prior to drawing conclusions. This enhances the credibility of the research study. Theory triangulation "aims at bringing multiple perspectives to bear on the data set to yield different explanations which can be pursued and tested" (Birch, 2005, p. 84). Methodological triangulation advocates the use of different methods to investigate a topic of inquiry. Three of the four suggested types of triangulation (data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and methodology) were considered in this study.

The data for the current study was collected from multiple sources, including online articles, books, reviews, and human subjects inside and outside the scope of the study. This enabled the researchers to confront multiple views and perspectives before reaching final conclusions. With respect to investigator triangulation, the researcher and his assistant collected and interpreted the data. The final product reflects the consensus between the two researchers. In terms of methodology triangulation, the collection of data using methods including participant observation, survey questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions added value, credibility, and depth to the scope of the current study.

Transferability

Malterud (2001) defined transferability as "the degree to which the results can be transferred to other contexts or settings" (p. 20). According to Bitsch (2005), transferability "parallels external validity and generalizability. It refers to the degree to which research results can be applied to a context apart from where they were gained or with different subjects" (p. 85). Bitsch (2005) further suggested that "the researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through 'thick description'" (p. 85). By "thick description" the author means "not only dense and rich in detail, but an interpretive description" (p. 85). Such description, in the author's opinion, should "include the intentions of the actors and what gives actions meaning from their point of view" (p. 85). This will probably enable users of the final product of the research study to understand that the interpretation of findings reflects only the views of the researcher(s). Additionally, Bitsch (2005) proposes providing potential users of research findings with a database as comprehensive as possible in order to facilitate the transferability of findings (p. 85).

To ensure transferability of judgment for the study, the researcher provided a thick, detailed narrative to make the transfer of information easy for potential users. The clarity of the

interpretation of findings using verbatim quotes from participants' statements left the final product of the study open for users who might wish to apply its conclusions to decide whether to adopt it or to adapt it to other settings. However, it should be borne in mind that the initial intent behind the overall design of the study was not to generalize its findings to a greater population. The exploratory nature of the study forbids that. Rather, the researcher intended to make it possible for potential users of the findings from the study to be able to extrapolate the situations described here to other settings. Eisner (1998) called such ability "naturalistic generalization," which he contrasted with statistical formal generalization. What is the difference? While statistical generalization uses random sampling, naturalistic generalization uses purposive sampling, that is, the selection of participants who can contribute the most to answering the research question (Bitsch, 2005, p. 85). Although naturalistic generalization does not apply to a greater population, it does offer great opportunity for learning from specific cases. The knowledge gained from these cases then becomes experience that could come in handy in future studies. The researcher designed the present research study with this intent in mind.

Dependability

Dependability seeks to verify the stability of findings over time (Bitsch, 2005, p. 86). Otherwise stated, dependability gauges whether research findings would remain the same if the research were replicated at a different time with the same or similar participants in similar contexts. Dependability parallels the concept of reliability in quantitative research (Bitsch, 2005, p. 86). For Malterud (2001), dependability refers to "the degree to which a reviewer can understand and explore the data analysis process and judge the decisions made—and understand the factors that led the researchers to their interpretations of the data" (p. 20). Dependability has also been defined as referring to "the consistency between the data collected

and the findings (Lincoln &Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). To ensure dependability of findings, the researcher in the ongoing study maintained an audit trail of the methods of collection and analysis of data (Seale, 1999). The names of interviewees, interview guides, audio records, and transcripts of interviews were also included in the audit trail (Khiat, 2010, p. 1475). Another way that the researcher ensured dependability in this study was by collecting data using the same interview guides with different methods over an extended period of time. This was done deliberately in order to check for consistency or variations in participants' views and opinions over time. For example, the free listing task was administered in 2010. The findings from the free listing formed the basis for the survey questionnaires administered four months later in 2011. Eight months later in 2012, the semi-structured interviews were conducted using the same interview guide. Three months after the interviews, the focus group discussions were conducted. No variation was noted in the way that participants articulated their views, opinions, and their perceptions of their lived experience.

Confirmability

Data interpretation and findings are normally grounded in individuals and contexts apart from the researcher (Bitsch, 2005, p. 87); according to Bitsch, "findings should be independent of values, motives, or political persuasions" (2005, p. 87). The interpretive nature of qualitative inquiry lends itself to issues of bias and prejudices in a study. Unless the researcher becomes aware of his or her own preconceived ideas and presuppositions and puts them aside, the chances are they will interfere with the interpretation of findings (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). How does one know that the researcher's interpretation of findings does not reflect his or her own preconceptions? One way to know is by having other researchers confirm the research conclusions using the same information that led to these conclusions. According to Merriam (2002), confirmability "refers to the degree the findings can be corroborated by other

researchers" (in Khiat, 2010, p. 1475). "A researcher can improve confirmability by being reflexive" (Merriam, 2002, in Khiat, 2010, p. 1475).Malterud (2001) defined reflexivity as "the researcher's identification and constant awareness of what he or she brings to the research. This includes preconceived notions, past experiences, how he or she is finding meaning in the data collected" (p. 19).

Reflexivity was defined also as "a process of conscious self awareness where a researcher continually appraises the subjective responses and intersubjective relationships within the data in relation to his/her values, experiences, interests and beliefs" (Finlay, 2002; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999).

The researcher's awareness of his own subjectivity, his preconceived notions, his past experiences, and his interests and beliefs represents the common thread running through these two definitions of reflexivity. To improve confirmability in the study, the researcher constantly reminded himself of his past experiences as a teacher in the study setting, his preconceived notions associated with the setting, and, most importantly, his cultural knowledge of the research environment. He was fully aware that being a member of the local culture placed him at a high risk of seeing facts through the lenses of his own preconceived ideas. To prevent cultural biases from interfering with the study, the researcher always sought alternative ways to interpret the data collected from peers with different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the audit trail (Khiat, 2010) mentioned earlier could enable another researcher to understand the logic that guided the interpretation of data in reaching the final conclusions. The documentation included in this audit trail could be used to trace the data back to their sources.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher took every precaution to protect the identity and to safeguard the rights and well-being of the participants in the study. Given the focus of this study, girls' lived

experience in the school setting, he took extra precaution to ensure that anything participants reported remained confidential. To this end, he locked the data collected in a safe inaccessible to anyone but him. He gave participants pseudonyms in order to conceal their identities, and he instructed the research assistants on procedures to ensure confidentiality. However, the researcher let participants know that the need for confidentiality applied not just to the researcher but to participants as well, and that group members (not the researcher) might well disclose appropriate information gathered from group discussions. Therefore, there was a limit to his promise of confidentiality. The researcher's strategy for ensuring the safety of the human subjects involved in the study and the confidentiality of the data collected revolves around three basic ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

Respect for Persons

In terms of respect for persons, the researcher informed prospective participants of the free and voluntary nature of participation in this study and of the right of participants to accept or to decline participating in the study. He also informed them of their right, once involved in the study, to withdraw at any time (without consequences) during the research and the right to refuse to answer any of the questions or to be involved in any of the activities. Consistent with the principle of respect for persons, the researcher provided participants (in a group discussion) with the information needed to make informed decisions about taking part or not taking part in the study. He held the information session in the absence of teachers and school administrators. This ensured that participants' decisions received influence neither from teachers nor from the school administration authorities. Finally, the researcher gave participants the freedom to ask as many questions about the study as needed to ensure the free involvement of participants in the research.

Moreover, the researcher obtained permission to conduct this study from relevant Beninese authorities, and had participants sign an informed consent form prior to the data collection process. The researcher was well aware that some participants might understand signing an informed consent form as making a written commitment (an intimidating thing to do), and might thus show reluctance in participating. Therefore, he reassured participants of the confidentiality of the data they provided and of the protection of their identities. He also explained to them that signing a consent form is a procedure that keeps the researcher safe from being accused of involving participants in the research against their free will. Finally, the researcher asked participants' permission prior to audio-recording any information they provided.

Beneficence

In observance of the principle of beneficence, the researcher minimized the risks of harm and maximized the potential benefits of the study to participants. The first step in this direction was to conduct an assessment of the risks of harm and to ensure that the potential benefits justified the risks. By "risks," the researcher means the possibility that harm might occur during the study. The assessment sought to find out the likelihood that harm would occur and the magnitude of such harm, bearing in mind that harm can be physical, psychological, economic, and social. "Benefit" signifies the positive value of the study to participants' health and welfare. In the context of this research, having participants disclose information about teachers, school administrators, and male students could expose them to the risks of reprisals from the male dominant groups in the school setting. A potential benefit of this study to participants (females) was the likelihood that the findings would draw public attention to girls' school experiences. This, hopefully, would inform decision making in girls' education and eventually lead to the promotion of a school environment conducive to learning for girls.

Justice

The principle of justice posits that those who serve as human subjects in the research should share in the potential benefits (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). By the same token, those who benefit from the research findings should share in the burden of being subjects in the research. In accordance with the principle of justice, the researcher selected participants who understood the purpose of the study and who knew their rights and duties as participants. To ensure a fair distribution of costs and benefits arising from the study, the researcher based considerations for inclusion in the study not on membership in privileged or underrepresented populations but on one criterion that ensures fairness in the distribution of benefits and burdens associated with the study: the recruitment of volunteer participants for the study.

Research Assistant

The researcher hired a female research assistant who graduated from the University of Benin with a master's in social sciences. Since earning her degree, she has been active in the field of girls' education, working on projects with local NGOs and international donor agencies (e.g., UNICEF). Her strong background in qualitative research, her knowledge of the studied context (she speaks four local languages of Benin), and her availability made her the right person for the job. In addition, she has extensive experience with conducting focus group discussions. The researcher gave her 10 days of training in grounded theory, a method she had no experience with. The tasks she performed during the study included data transcription; interpretation, using her knowledge of the local context; and the management of focus-group discussions. The researcher frequently consulted with her on interpretation issues to get her perspective as a key cultural informant and as a female.

The researcher preferred a female assistant to a male for this study because of the targeted population (female students) and the topic of the inquiry (lived experience). Girls are more likely to open up in confidence to a female interviewer and to share their intimate lives because they relate to her.

Data Quality and Limitations

An anticipated limitation of the research design relates to the researcher's positionality. Positionality answers the question: How does who I am influence my knowledge of the world? At an early stage of the research design, the researcher consistently asked himself how his positionality could impact on the quality of the data collected from participants. Three aspects of the researcher's positionality have been identified as potential limitations of the research design.

- The researcher's cultural background (the same as participants')
- The researcher's professional background (a former teacher in Benin's school system)
- The researcher's gender

The first limitation carries the risk of the researcher interpreting participants' views through the lenses of his own cultural and professional biases instead of from participants' views. The second limitation, the researcher's prior familiarity with everyday life in Beninese school settings, increases the likelihood of the researcher's taking for granted hidden assumptions in participants' views. This could have limited his ability to make an in-depth exploration of data. Cognizant of this fact, the researcher has taken two steps to minimize errors and bias in interpretation that might originate from these two limitations. These include consulting with participants to make sure that the researcher's interpretation of facts reflects participants' views and getting input from individuals from different cultures prior to making final interpretations of participants' views. In regard to the second limitation, the researcher

constantly reminded himself that much had changed since the last time he taught in Benin's school system and the time of the fieldwork. Therefore, he had to shed his assumptions about Benin's school system and take a fresh look at the new set of circumstances. The researcher, with respect to his gender, anticipated that the female participants would show reluctance in sharing intimate stories about sexual harassment with a male. Therefore, he hired a female assistant to help with the interviews. Girls will likely reveal themselves more willingly and intimately to a female whom they relate to than to a male.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This section summarizes the findings from the data analysis of the free-list data, the survey data, and the data collected from the semi-structured interviews; the data collected from the participant observation and the focus-group discussions served the dual purpose of triangulation as well as verification of within-participant response consistency. Therefore, the researcher identified just the main themes emerging from the data obtained from these methods of data collection for comparison with data previously identified from the study. These themes were included in this chapter.

Research Timeline

The research covered a period of 2 months, from January 2011 to February 2013. The two-year time frame encouraged openness and mutual trust between the researcher and the participants. During this period, the researcher and his assistant collected data from the participants in three phases. In the first phase, the researcher and his assistant administered the free-list tasks and a survey questionnaire and proceeded with the data analysis. In the second phase, the researcher administered semi-structured interviews to the 30 female participants; he conducted the analysis for these interviews, seeking his assistant's outsider's perspective on specific issues arising from interpretation of facts. During the third phase, the assistant researcher organized the focus-group discussion with the 30 female students, including five who had dropped out of school. From her past relationship with the five dropouts, the assistant researcher judged the five participants' school experience sufficient to qualify them as key informants. A summary table of the research timeline is included in the appendix. The following questions guided the research.

- How do girls perceive their school experience?
- How do teachers, school administrators and boys perceive girls?
- What aspects of the dominant culture do the girls experience in their relationships?
- What factors influence the girls' perception of their school experience?
- How do the girls react to this experience?

Findings from Free-Listing Activity

The free-listing activity asked participants to produce a written list of items that they associate with being a girl in a school setting in Benin. Participants were given paper and pencils and enough time to complete their lists so that they did not feel rushed. Whenever needed, the researchers probed participants by asking them: "Could you think of more items to include in your list?" The researchers collected the completed lists on the spot to ensure that all participants returned their lists. On close look, the first collection of free lists yielded no satisfactory results. Most participants listed their preferences (desires) instead of the actual items they associated with the domain "being a girl in a school setting of Benin." With regard to this, Gravelee (1998) noted that the items on a free list are not about participants' preferences; rather, they are about "something outside [participants] and which they have in common with other members [of the same culture]; therefore, the free lists from different respondents (belonging to the same culture) should be comparable and similar" (p. 1).

With that in mind, the researchers returned to the site a week later in order to administer the free list again. As in the previous free listing, participants were requested to produce a written list of items that they associated with "being a girl in the school setting of Benin." The new collection of free-listing data generated a total of 227 different items that made up the domain "being a girl in the school setting of Benin." With 227 different items to consider for one domain, there was a need to define the boundaries of that domain (through

reduction) in order to identify participants' common understanding of the domain; this process also offered the advantage of reducing the items listed to more manageable elements to include in the later parts of the study (Gravlee, 1998). The researcher, with help from his assistant, studied the new free lists in order to identify the salient items. To this end, the researchers used the method recommended by Gravlee (1998). First, they studied the lists carefully in order to identify the items that frequently appeared across participants as well as their order of mention. Zero (0) was given to items not mentioned and (1) to each item mentioned. Sixteen items were identified as frequently listed (see appendix D for the list).

Next, the researchers made a list of the 16 items, gave each participant a copy of the list, and asked them to rank these items from 1to 16 in an order that reflects their lived school experience. One (1) represented the item that most reflected participants' lived school experience and 16 the item that least reflected their lived school experience. Participants were given the time needed to complete the task. After that, the researchers identified the core items, known as "most salient items" (Smith, 1993), emerging from the list of 16 items that participants share in common. To achieve this, the researchers used the Smith's items' salience index method described earlier. Five items among the 16 scored the highest salience index. The tables below summarize the findings from the free-list analysis.

Table 6. Top 16 Items from Participants' Lists Ordered by Frequency

Rank	Items' names	Frequency	Response %
1	Disrespected	21	70
2	Inferior to boys	20	66
3	Sexual harassment	19	63
4	Teased	23	76
5	Respected if a high achiever	20	66
6	Ignored	17	56
7	Abused	14	46
8	Discriminated against	12	40
9	Suffering	17	56
10	Is never right	16	53
11	Punished	16	53
12	Weak	14	46
13	Less intelligent than boys	13	43
14	Maltreated	12	40
15	Lazy	7	23
16	Domestic chores	14	46

Table 7. Example of Salience Index Calculation Taken from the Study for Illustration Purposes

Items	Inverted Rank/Total Listed	Salience (S)
Teased	16/16	1
Punished	15/16	0.937
Domestic chores	14/16	0.875
Respected if a high achiever	13/16	0.812
Ignored	12/16	0.75

Table 8. Example of Composite Salience Index Calculation Taken from the Study for Illustration Purposes

	Free Listers						
Items	1	2	3	4	5	∑ of Salience Index Scores	Composite Salience ∑/n (n=5)
Weak	0.18	0.18	0.37	0.12	0.93	1.78	0.356
Inferior to boys	1	1	1	0.31	0.43	3.74	0.748
Suffering	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.25	1	2.18	0.436
Disrespected	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.31	3.56	0.712
Maltreated	0.37	0.37	0.18	0.18	0.50	2.34	0.468

Table 9. Composite Salience Index, Frequency, Rank, and Response Rate for the 5 Most Salient Items Identified from the 16 Items in Table 6

Most Salient Items Identified from the 16 Items	Composite Salience Index	Frequency	Rank	Response
Teased	0.72	23/30	1st	72%
Disrespected	0.68	21/30	2nd	70%
Inferior to Boys	0.67	20/30	3rd	67%
Respected if a High Achiever	0.66	20/30	4th	67%
Sexual Harassment	0.63	19/30	5th	63%

Table 7 provides an example of the procedure for calculating the salience index for items in the free-list data. Table 8 provides an example of the composite salience for five items listed by five randomly chosen participants. In Table 9, the researcher presented the composite salience index for the five most salient items identified from participants' lists. In terms of the free-listing method, the five most salient items enabled the researcher to identify participants' views of the domain "being a girl in Benin's school settings." Although these salience indexes say little about participants' individual lived experience, they do provide the researcher with preliminary thoughts about a common way in which participants define themselves in relation to their empirical world. This knowledge afforded the researcher an emic view and interpretation of participants' lived experience using participants' language.

Moreover, the findings from the free listing are consistent with the assumption of the interpretive approach that "access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social

construction such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings" (Black, n.d.). In their own language, participants described their perceptions of their lived experience using the core categories that emerged from the analysis of free-list data. To find these categories, they explored the depth of their day-to-day experience (their consciousness). These core categories represent the shared meanings that participants give to their experience. They represent participants' common understanding of their life-world—that is, the essence of their experience. These findings are also consistent with the findings on girls' school experience discussed in the literature review. A close look on these findings reveals that they relate in some ways. The girls were teased disrespected because they were perceived as inferior to boys. They were only respected when they achieve high quality academic performance. By virtue of being females and seen as inferior to boys, they are sexual harassed. These findings also reveal that the girls perceive their school experience in terms of hardships.

Findings from the Survey Questionnaire

This section reports separately the findings from the open-ended questions and the results of the closed-ended questions. The findings obtained from the open-ended questions consisted of emerging patterns, whereas the findings from the closed-ended questions produced numbers and percentages.

Open-ended Questions

Participants answered the following questions.

- What is your perception of boys? (For girls)
- What is your perception of girls? (For boys)
- What is your perception of your students? (For teachers)

The researcher initially distributed the self-administered questionnaire to the 30 girls, the 30 boys, and the 30 teachers involved in the study. Participants returned the completed

questionnaire the next day. Ninety usable questionnaires were returned, resulting in a 100% response rate. The analyses of data collected from the open-ended questions followed the same process. The survey responses were displayed in tables for each group of participants. The analysis comprised two steps: the initial coding and the focused coding. During the initial coding, the researcher generated codes and identified, through participant responses, data/concepts that relate to these codes. The focused coding consisted in identifying concepts that shared central characteristics in common and in grouping them in categories. Then the researcher identified repeating categories and organized these categories into language that each group used to state their perception of the other group. The unit of analysis for girls was “girls’ perception,” for boys, “boys’ perception,” and for teachers, “teachers’ perception.” Table 8 below summarizes the findings from this analysis.

Table 10. Summary of Findings from the Open-Ended Questions on Girls' Perceptions of Boys, Boys' Perceptions of Girls, and Teachers' Perceptions of Girls and Boys

Girls' Perceptions of Teachers and Boys	Boys' Perceptions of Girls	Teachers' Perceptions of Girls	Teachers' Perception of Boys
• Disrespectful to girls (both) • Sexually harass girls (both) • Humiliate girls (both) • Aggressive (boys) • Think they are superior to girls (both) • Boastful and arrogant (boys) • Mean (both) • Brag (boys) • Underestimate girls (both) • Think girls are lazy (mostly teachers) • Think girls are not meant for school (both) • Discriminate against girls (teachers) • Retaliate against girls (mostly teachers)	• Inferior to boys • Suspicious of boys • Weak • Less able than boys • Too much obsessed with being attractive • Disrespectful to boys • Selfish and arrogant • Give sex in exchange for grades	• Passive • Less wakeful • Lazy • Disciplined • Calm • Shy • Submissive • Unwilling to work • Less able than boys • Like easy ways out	• Active • Wakeful • Hardworking • Disruptive • Committed to school • Willing to work • Aggressive • Talkative • Courageous • Leaders

Notes: The categories listed under "girls' perception" apply either to teachers or to boys, or to both of them.

The findings on girls' perceptions of teachers and boys displayed in Table 10 reflect the views of a majority of participants (95%). However, for categories such as "disrespectful" and "sexually harass girls," about five percent (5%) of the female participants surveyed believe that girls should also carry some of the blame for being disrespected and sexually harassed.

Some of the findings on girls' perceptions of boys are consistent with the way in which boys perceive girls. For example, girls believe that boys "think girls are inferior to boys," which boys indeed confirm in their perception of girls as "inferior to boys" and as "less able than boys." Another aspect of participants' perceptions worthy of attention is how each side perceives the other as arrogant. For girls, boys are boastful and arrogant, while for boys, girls are selfish and arrogant. "Arrogant" represents the central feature that these perceptions share

in common, while “boastful” and “selfish” stand out as distinctive features that add more meaning to the use of “arrogant” by each side. The discussion section explored this meaning in depth.

In other respects, there is a striking commonality between the language that teachers used to state their perceptions of boys and girls and the way in which boys and girls perceive each other. For example, teachers’ perceptions of girls as “lazy,” “less wakeful,” and “less able than boys” parallel girls’ belief that both teachers and boys “think girls are inferior.” Furthermore, that both girls and teachers perceive boys as “aggressive” reveals another striking commonality that raises questions yet to be answered. In general, it is worthy of notice that teachers presented boys in laudable terms, while they stated their perception of girls in less friendly terms. By comparison, boys also stated their perception of girls in similarly unfriendly terms. The discussion of findings returns to this point in depth. Despite the seeming antagonism between the two groups, few boys and girls (5%) expressed positive feelings towards each other. Some girls, for example, refer to boys as ‘our brothers’; they revealed that all they ask of boys is ‘to treat girls as equals’. “We want them to know that we are brothers and sisters”. Likewise, the boys refer to the girls as ‘our mothers and sisters, we must respect them’. The discussion section returns to implications of these disconfirming voices.

To sum up, the findings in this section refers to the category ‘girls’ perception of their lived experience mentioned in the conceptual framework.

Findings from Closed-ended Questions

Teachers/members of the school administration responded to the following closed-ended questions about boys and girls.

1. Who has more aptitude for school?
2. Who shows more interest in school?

Participants had to choose from three options (girls, boys, both) for each questions. The data collected was presented in two separate tables—one for each question. The analysis consisted of identifying the options that scored the highest, the next highest, and the lowest percentage for each question. The charts below display the findings from this analysis.

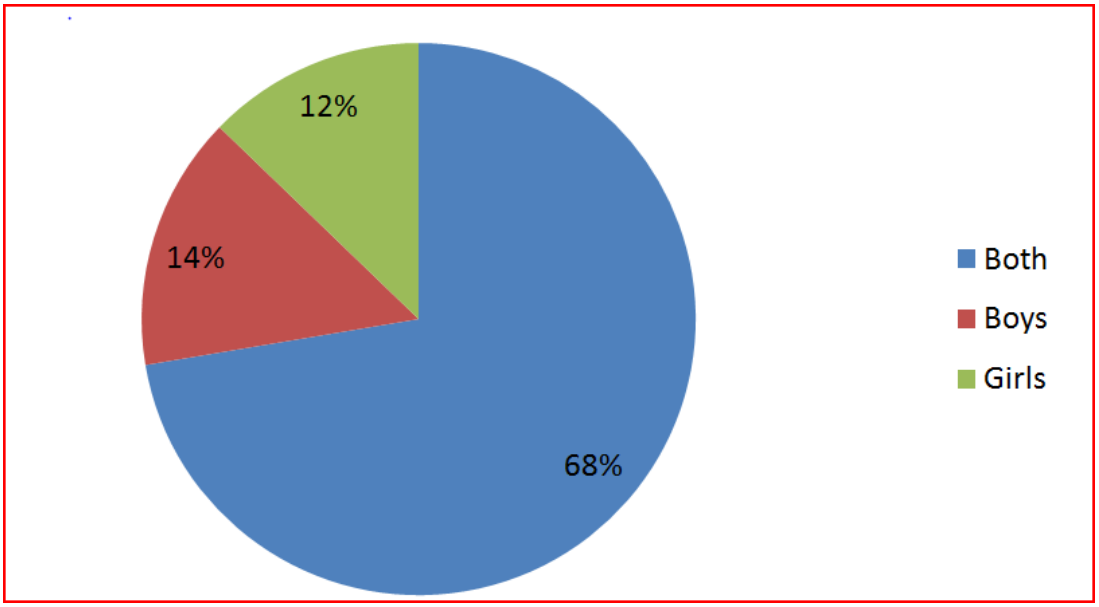


Figure 4. Who Has More Aptitude for School? (n=30)

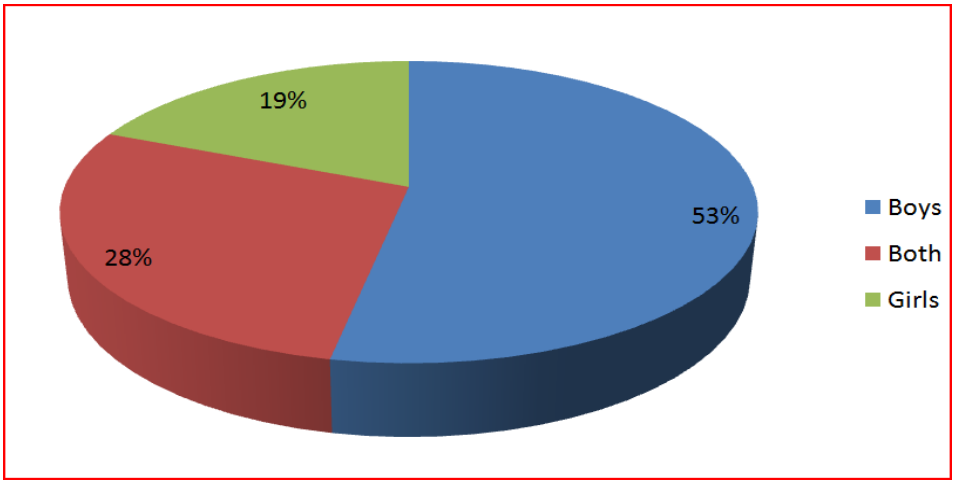


Figure 5. Who Shows More Interest in School? (n=30)

It is apparent from Figure 4 and Table 10 that over two-thirds of the teachers surveyed (68%) agreed that both girls and boys have aptitude for school. Surprisingly, earlier findings (from open-ended questions) on teachers' perceptions of girls indicated that girls were academically "less able than boys." This apparent contradiction might indicate that one needs to view teachers' perceptions of girls with caution.

When asked who shows more interest in school, over half (53%) of the teachers surveyed favored boys. Just under a fifth (19%) of those surveyed indicated that girls showed interest in school. Although this finding corroborates teachers' perceptions of girls as "lazy" and as "unwilling to work," it demonstrates just how important it is to seek the real reason why, according to teachers, girls show "little interest in school" despite having an aptitude for it.

Summary

Overall, these findings provide important insight into the way in which the male community in the school setting perceives and treats female students. In terms of the conceptual framework, the findings link with the category 'perception, expectations, and attitudes towards girls' articulated in the conceptual framework. Taken together, teachers' and boys' perceptions of girls show a commonality in the ways in which males perceive female students in the school environment. These findings are also consistent with previous findings discussed in the literature review for this study.

Findings from Semi-Structured Interviews

This section presents the findings from the analysis of data collected from the 30 female participants. The sequential three-coding process (mentioned above) in grounded theory was used to explore girls' perceptions of their lived school experience and the strategies they used to overcome their main concern in the school setting.

Findings from Semi-Structured Interview Analysis

The tables and figures below summarize the main findings from the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect date mainly on girls' perception of their school experience and girls' reaction to their lived experience (research questions 1 and 5).

Table 11. Emerging Concepts from the Open Coding

Concepts
Request for sex
Beating
Denied attention
Sexist jokes
Treated as inferior
Fear
Resignation

Table 12. Concepts Grouped in Categories

Concepts/Codes	Categories	Categories' Code Names
1. Request for sex	**1**.Power abuse/sexual harassment	PWASH
2. Beating/corporal punishment	Power abuse	PWASH
3. Denied attention	**2.** Being ignored	BIGNOR
4. Sexist jokes	**3.**Being disrespected	DISHUM
5.Treated as inferior	Being disrespected	DISHUM
6. Fear	**4**.Feeling powerless	POWLESS
7. Resignation	Feeling powerless	POWLESS

Table 13. The Four Main Categories and Their Corresponding Themes

Categories	Categories' Code Names	Themes
1. Power abuse/sexual harassment	PWASH	Dominance and subordination through intimidation
2. Being ignored	BIGNOR	Silencing through silence
3. Being disrespected and humiliated	DISHUM	Male supremacy
4. Feeling powerless	POWLESS	Desperation

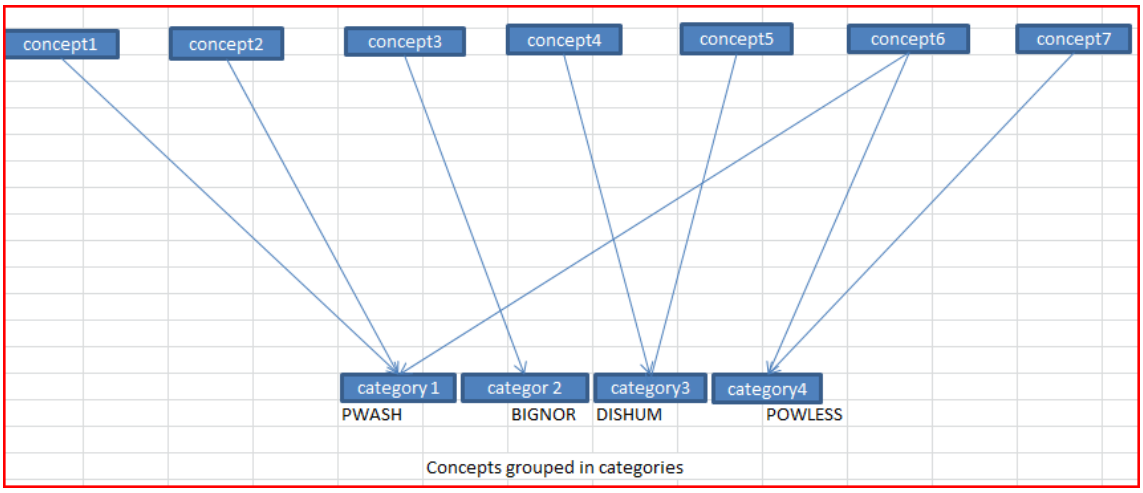


Figure 6. Concepts Grouped in Categories

Table 14. Causal Relationships among the Categories Identified: Causal Relationships for the Category PWASH

Element	Description
Phenomenon of interest: Power Abuse and Sexual Harassment	Participants complained about being subject to sexual harassment by teacher and male students, and to corporal punishment by the school prefect. Participants mostly complained of being subject to retaliatory actions when they reject requests for sex.
Causal conditions	Low performing female students seeking grades to make it to the next class level and compelled to comply with teachers' requests for sex; teachers abusing their power to satisfy their desire for sex; male students using the power conferred on them by the culture of reference to seek sexual favors from female peers; recourse to corporal punishment as a means to reprimand children's behaviors judged culturally unacceptable. Finally,
Context	Sexual harassment occurred in a cultural context of male domination over female; corporal punishment occurred in a cultural context where beating is the preferred way to educate children.
Intervening Conditions	Perception of girls in their (culturally prescribed) reproductive role; perceived girls' need for good grades to make it to the next class level; breaking of school rules; foster respect
Action Strategies	"Don't say yes, don't say no to male requests for sex"; "reject male requests for sex and 'face the music'"; "comply with requests for sex; get what you need but spoil your reputation"; "skip classes in order to escape the fear of retaliation and the embarrassment of humiliation"; "do as you are told by the school rules"
Consequences	Girls who comply with requests for sex ultimately experience low self-esteem born from allowing themselves to be disrespected; the victims of sexual harassment in this study experienced the embarrassment of having to be in an unfavorable environment; girls who reject requests for sex have to suffer blackmail/intimidation, retaliation, and humiliation from perpetrators; with this group the fear of delayed actions of retaliation causes uneasiness and a great deal of suffering.

The causal relationship for the categories Being Ignored Disrespect and Humiliation, and Feeling Powerless

Table 15. Categories and Their Properties and Dimensions

Categories	Code Names	Properties	Dimension
Power abuse-sexual harassment	PWASH	Oppressive	Social institutionalized systematic internalized mild……..severe mild ~~intense~~ covert ~~overt~~ mild----------intense by one person------by a group covert ~~overt~~ mild ~~intense~~ short-lived------long-lasting
		Frightening	
		Disrespectful	
		Persecutory	
		Painful	

(The properties and dimensions for the categories BIGNOR, DISHUM, and POWLESS are included in the Appendix.)

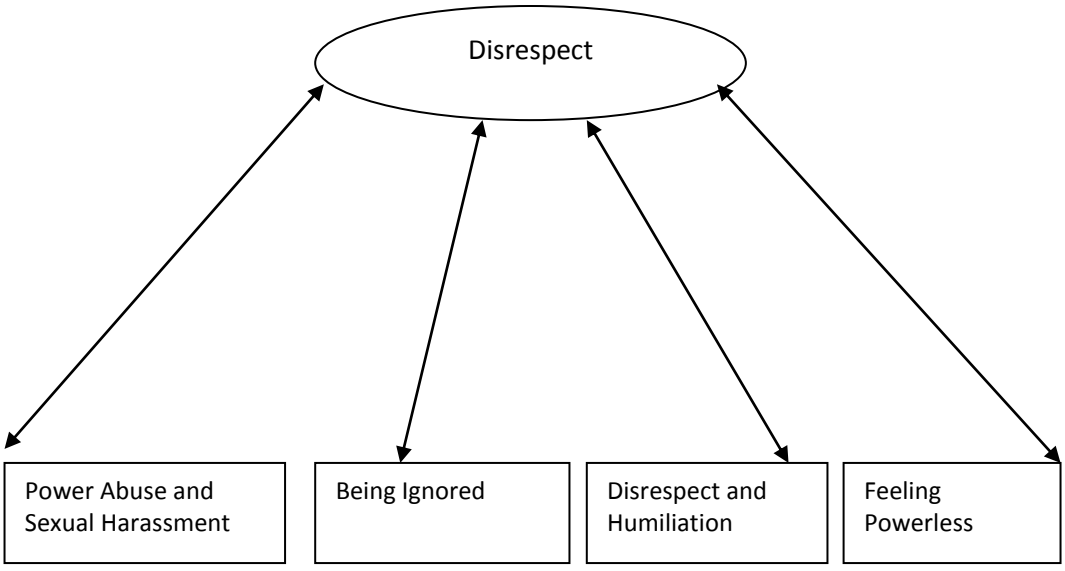


Figure 7. The Core Category

Table 11 presents the main concepts identified from the open coding. Concepts that shared central characteristics in common were grouped in categories and assigned code names. Four main categories emerged from this grouping. Table 12 presents the results of the grouping, and Figure 6 displays the interrelation among the concepts initially identified from the open coding. Table 14 shows an example of the application of the coding paradigm to data. The table displays the application of the coding paradigm to the category Power Abuse and Sexual Harassment (PWASH). The properties and dimensions for the category PWASH are shown in Table 15, while Figure 7 highlights the core category emerging from the interrelation among the four main categories (PWASH, BIGNOR, DISHUM, and POWLESS). Finally, Table 13 displays the main categories and their corresponding themes. Four broad themes emerged from the coding process: dominance and subordination through intimidation, silencing through silence, male supremacy, and desperation. The following sections describe the findings on the research questions related to the emerging themes, including findings from the focus group discussions and findings from participant observation.

Presentation of Findings

Bernard (2002, p. 463) recommended presenting the results of grounded theory analysis using exemplars, that is, quotes from interviews that illuminate the theory. In the next section, the researcher presents the emerging themes from the data analysis based on this recommendation. Semi-structured interviews served as the main instrument of data collection for research questions 1 and 5.

How Do Girls Perceive Their Lived Experience?(Research question 1)

The major goal of this study was to investigate girls' perception of their lived school experience. The theme of girls' subordination and intimidation through power recurred throughout the dataset. In their accounts of the events surrounding their lives in the school

environment, the girls frequently reported that teachers and some members of the school administration abused their authority to harass girls sexually. Likewise, male students reportedly used their male privilege to force girls to comply with their sexual advances. Naj has this to say about male teachers: “Some male teachers adopt a responsible attitude at school, but others just abuse their power to force girls into relationships.” Then, she complained about teachers who abuse their power “to intimidate and oppress girls and to give them bad grades when the latter reject their sexual requests.” Rafl echoed a similar concern about male teachers: “A lot of teachers have no respect for themselves. They make sexual advances to their students; harass them through unwanted phone calls and home visits.” Ella confirmed Rafl and Naj’s statement: “Oh yes! Male teachers, it is in their nature. As a matter of fact, it is in men’s nature in general to seek women…”Talking about her own experience with sexual harassment, Bella said:

> These male teachers intimidate girls; they make us kneel down in the classroom, kick us out for no reason . . . as a prelude to making a request for sex. Then they will come to you afterwards and say, “you know I didn’t mean to hurt you; I was only kidding,” and then they will ask you out.

When asked to state her perception of teachers, Laura, another participant, shared her experience with sexual harassment:

> This year, for example, a teacher asked me out. I told him I had a boyfriend and he said if that is the case, he is stepping back, but I’ve noticed that he is not stepping back. He keeps saying that he wants me to be his girlfriend and at the same time, he wants to have sex with me when the friendship has not even started. I said to myself, this guy mustn’t be serious.

Rolse provided a good example of teachers using their authority to force girls into sexual relationships:

> In my own experience, the teacher asked our class for the class list with the students’ phone numbers on it, ostensibly for the purpose of informing us about make-up classes; but I soon realized that it was rather in his personal interests. In fact, I started getting the teacher’s phone calls asking me out and giving me date pressure.

Nathi, another participant, told a similar story:

> During break time the teacher approached me and asked whether he could borrow my cell phone to make a quick call. He said he was in a rush this morning and he left his phone in his car. I lent him the phone and he placed the call. The next day he gave me a phone call asking for a date. I was kind of surprised when he called. I never gave him my phone number. I then checked the recent numbers dialed. The number it showed was the same as the teacher's. Then it occurred to me that he probably played a trick when he borrowed my cell phone in the classroom. He probably made a call to his own number and the missed call revealed the caller's number (mine). That was how he got my number.

For the female participants, sexual harassment and intimidation are closely related. In their views, perpetrators of sexual harassment resort to intimidation before and after sexual harassment. When experienced after sexual harassment, intimidation takes the form of retaliation. In the extract below, Bella experienced intimidation prior to harassment.

> I've experienced that once. The teacher, prior to asking me out, walked into the classroom and ordered me to kneel down in front of the class under pretense that I didn't stand up like my other classmates when he entered the classroom.

In Taddy's story, retaliation occurs when the girls reject a teacher's request for sex.

> Some teachers just back off with no retaliation; others feel offended and humiliated and, whenever they feel this way, you'd better watch your back in the classroom. You can't even breathe or smile. They watch your every move looking for an excuse to nail you. They also retaliate by giving us bad grades.

Bella made her point about retaliatory harassment in the following way:

> If you ever reject a teacher's advances, you . . . are lost forever! Punishments will start raining down on you, and then bad grades will follow, oh no! (looking sad). That's why many girls just submit to teachers' sexual requests. Imagine a girl in a science class where here science scores counts towards 60% of the overall average scores. If she rejects a teacher's offer the latter threatens with bad grades in science in order to get compliance from the girl.

Rolse corroborates Bella concern:

> "Once they (teachers) see your name on the exam paper or a quiz paper and you, the girl, has an issue with them, they don't bother to read the content. They just put a bad

> grade. And when this happens and you notice the problem and you claim for the missing points, the teacher will resolve the issue only if he wants. As a rule, they find an alibi to justify the bad grade."

Retaliatory actions take several forms as Holas explained: "Male teachers harass girls and when the latter resist their request for sex, they team up with other teachers to make it hard for the girls. I had a similar experience." DK "rejected a teacher's unwanted sex request once and from that day on I never scored an average grade in his subject though my performance was well above average."

The boys also retaliate against girls for denying them sexual favors:

> Some [boys] are aggressive, others, easy to get along with. . . . They harass girls too . . . and they issue threats and could even beat you when you reject their request for sex. I myself, boys threatened to beat me. . . . "We'll meet outside school and I will send guys to take care of you" a boy once said to me.

According to Bella, victims of sexual harassment cannot complain to the school administration because

> The one you are going to complain to also harasses girls. Actually some school admin members also seek girls. This school year, for example, a teacher seized a cell phone from a girl in the classroom and gave the phone to the school prefect. Later, the girl went to take her cell phone back and told the prefect that the phone actually belonged to her boyfriend. The prefect said he would sleep with her before he returns the cell phone.

While most participants agreed that sexual harassment was an integral part of the girls' daily school experience, divergent and often conflicting discourses about this issue emerged from the girls' stories. As Lette pointed out, "Maybe some girls don't respect themselves and consequently are disrespected by male teachers. Some girls disrespect themselves by dressing inappropriately and provocatively in order to attract teachers." Nathi responded to Lette's statement:

> We girls suffer a lot, especially girls who perform poorly because the teacher gave them bad grades in retaliation for rejecting his sexual request. Girls like myself who have strict parents fear how our parents will react at home if we perform poorly at school, which is why we submit to teachers' desires for sex sometimes. We also fear that the teacher will make our life miserable if we reject his request for sex. The teacher knows that we need good grades in order to get ahead in our school work, so he uses his power to take physical advantage of us in exchange for grades. We suffer, really . . . and when you suffer, you are sad; when you are sad, you live in fear. . . .

Humiliation and disrespect represent another recurrent theme that female students experienced on a daily basis. This theme came up in discussions with the girls of their interactions with males in the school setting. According to the girls, teachers, male students, and some members of the school administration resort to humiliation and disrespect of females to assert male dominance. Talking about this issue, a female participant said:

> Teachers devalue girls; they make nasty comments about girls' abilities. For example, they may ask a girl a question they know she cannot answer and when the girl gets stuck, they humiliate her before the class. As for boys, they humiliate girls by calling them names.

This extract shows Thid's perspectives on the issue: "Girls are not really respected. Teachers and male students think that we are meant for the household, but men came to this world through women. They should be thankful to us."

In Nadine's experience, male students "make humiliating comments about girls' physical appearance, supported in this by teachers." For this reason, Bella stays away from the boys: "I don't like them," she said, "because of the way they treat girls. Some are kind, but others are disruptive and arrogant. They make offensive jokes about girls." One thing Naj dislikes about the boys "is their belief that they can treat women just like a rag.." For the boys, and for all males in the school setting, for that matter, men derive their supremacy from a God-given right. A boy articulated this view in the following statement: "God created men first, then women, so men

come first." In Nife's account of her lived experience, "boys think they are more intelligent than girls; judging from the way they underestimate us. They say that men have been stronger than women since the beginning of time. They have been the most powerful in society." Teachers have a similar perception of girls, according to Dena: "Teachers think that we are inferior to them and to male students. They insult us. For example, when we give an incorrect answer in class, teachers treat us as lazy and as a bunch of good for nothing." Dena's account corroborates Laura's comments. She reported male teachers as saying the following when girls give incorrect answers in class: "'this is what we are saying. He who says that sending a girl to school is throwing money away is right'. But when boys give the wrong answer teachers will just say 'you are not good for studies, you'd better try your hand at something else.' They never say that sending a boy to school is throwing money away."

Participants also experienced disrespect through silencing and bullying, as in Bella's statement suggests:

> There are boys in my class who talk to girls as if they were their property. For example, when a girl asks clarification questions in class, they often say "you, we are not here for you alone, you will understand whatever you need to understand when you get back home." How on earth would you expect anyone not to ask questions when they do not understand what the teacher explained? And the teacher does nothing to reprimand these boys when they speak to girls in this way.

The female participants in this study denounced the school authorities' lack of attention to girls' needs in the school environment. According to the girls, only the school director shows support of the needs of female students. They blamed the other members of the school administration for ignoring students in general, and girls in particular. Naj, for example, dislikes

> The way in which the female administration secretaries treat students, girls in particular; they keep you waiting as if you did not exist whenever you see them for administrative paperwork, or they just turn you back just because they are tired and they don't want to work.

According to Taddy, “they do not really help; they listen to us when we need help but they never do what we ask for. They keep saying, ‘come back tomorrow.’ Lack of support for female victims of sexual harassment represents one of the most disturbing finding from this study. Whenever the girls complained about sexual harassment, the school administration did very little to address the problem. As Thid pointed out, “when you have a problem with a teacher and you complain to the administration they don’t care.” Thid and Rolse, in unison, vigorously denounced the school administration’s lack of support for girls: “In particular, when we complain about sexual harassment perpetrated by a teacher, the teacher is always right and the girl is wrong.” Nathi shares the same feelings: “When you are sexually harassed, complaining to the school administration makes it even worse. First, they will not listen to you; next, the teacher will retaliate.” For Holas, “the school administration does not just side with teachers against girls. They also beat girls.” Regardless of the form it takes, ignoring the girls as a way of silencing them represents a key strategy that males often used in this study to submit the girls to male domination.

Summary

The presentation of findings in this section revealed that the girls perceive their lived experience in terms of abuse, subordination, disrespect and humiliation, and disrespect. These findings are consistent with similar findings on girls’ lived school experience discussed in the literature review. The concepts associated with these findings connect with ‘girls’ perception of their lived experience’ and ‘attitudes towards girls’, two categories listed in the conceptual framework.

How Do Girls React to Their Lived Experience? (Research question 5)

Participants adopt several coping strategies to survive the oppressive life of the school environment, depending on the type of disrespect and abuse they experience. From Bella's own experience with sexual harassment: "Just be diplomatic when you reject sexual requests from boys. Turn them down gently and no one gets hurt; but if you give them a sharp 'NO' then they feel humiliated and they become aggressive."

For Laura, "I don't say no and I don't say yes either. Either way, you are in trouble and this will affect your school work. I just play the 'juste milieu.'" Like Laura, Holas believes that "whether you say yes or no you're in trouble. Say no and you suffer retaliation. Say yes and you get your name publicized widely. So, never say yes, never say no."

Rolse revealed her own strategy:

> There is more than one way to do this. For example, you could agree to a date and fail to show up and tell him your parents kept you busy at home. Or, you could show up for the date, eat and drink well the food and drink he offers you, and once you've had enough, ring your cell phone and pretend that you have an urgent call and you have to leave (laughter). . . . Anyway, never say no to a teacher's request for sex

Whenever Rolse feels disrespected, she pretends "that the person who abused me doesn't exist." Thid, for her part, always shows her offenders that women also have some power—motherhood: "I always tell them that men came to this world thanks to women. They should be thankful to us." Another strategy that worked for Thid is to "ignore the offender and make him feel unwelcome in interactions." Girls like Sidi share their frustrations with friends or with parents, while Alsek listens to music. Some girls adopt a rather assertive reaction. Raj, for example, hurls insults at her offenders. Taddy takes a more aggressive stance: She threatens to strike back by returning evil for evil with help from male friends and family. Naj returns humiliation for humiliation. For some girls, however, the key to making themselves respected is

hard work. Girls are respected only when they work hard and achieve good results. Work hard so as not to give any teacher an excuse for advertising grades for sex. Other options available to the girls include: “surrender to sexual harassment and spoil your good reputation”; “reject sexual requests and be prepared to suffer the consequences”; or “do as you are told and stay out of trouble.” Nathi reacts to her lived experience in a different way. She seeks comfort in her spiritual faith: “I put myself in God’s hands. I always put God’s name first. What can you do? You have only a spiritual strength deep down inside that keeps you going.” Finally, she appeals to teachers to “give us the grades we deserve. If they could just stop harassing us. . ! This is a shame! I’m only asking them for one thing: leave us alone.” Both DK and Nadine echoed Nathi’s concerns. DK is “asking the boys to see us as their sisters and to let us work together.”Like DK, Nadine begs the “boys to see the girls as equals and to treat them as such.” Then, DK wishes “teachers could stop harassing us so that we can get ahead in our schoolwork.”

The table below summarizes the coping strategies that participants use to overcome their main concerns.

Table 16. Participants' Reactions to their Lived Experience

Concerns	Strategies
Disrespect/ Humiliation	Ignore the offender. Make him feel he does not count (90% of participants)
Sexual Harassment	Never say yes, never say no if the perpetrator is a teacher Turn the request down politely if the perpetrator is a student Tell male peers that it is better to be friends than to be lovers Grant the request, stay out of trouble, and spoil your reputation Reject the teacher's request and face the consequences (40% of participants) Report to school administration
Verbal abuse	Ignore the offender Confront the abuser and return abuse for abuse Team up with other girls and expose the offender to derision
Threats	Ignore the offender Confront the offender and threaten to seek help from male relatives to deal with him
Teachers' retaliation for denying sexual favors	Resilience Seek support, comfort, and inspiration from trusted person Seek comfort from religious faith
Acts of silencing	Keep a low profile in the classroom (70% of participants) Resist intimidation and speak up (30% of participants)

The findings reported in this section show that the girls react to their lived experience in several ways depending on the nature of the particular experience they have and the way in which they perceive this experience. This suggests a link between perception of lived experience and reaction to experience shown in the conceptual framework. Some of the reactions mention in the findings (confront the abuser, return abuse for abuse, team up with other girls, confront

the offender and threaten to seek help from male relatives to deal with him) are not consistent with previous findings on girls' reactions against male oppression.

Findings from Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussion was used to collect data on the following research questions:

- How do girls perceive their lived experience?
- What factors influence the girls' perception of their lived experience?
- How do the girls react to this experience?

The points listed below summarize the findings.

- Ninety percent (95%) of the participants still in school believe that teachers, males and females alike, do their jobs. The same percentage of participants, including the dropout girls also believe that school girls are disrespected; are victims of sexual harassment, are treated as inferior to boys, are physically abused, and suffered retaliation for rejecting requests for sex.
- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the girls still in school and the five dropout girls complained of being ignored and of receiving no support when girls complain about being sexually harassed
- Ninety percent (90%) of the girls still in school and the five dropout girls unanimously portrayed boys as conceiving of themselves as superior to girls, as boastful and arrogant and as disrespectful to girls: "*They are boastful and arrogant and they tease and harass girls*" Nathi said . *"They think that they have the power to treat girls anyway they want and get away with it"* according to Lette. However, 10% of the girls believe that boys treat you the way that you treat them.
- The participants (over 90%) were unanimous that the treatment that girls receive has negative impacts on their studies. They complained about retaliatory actions by male teachers: *"When you reject a teacher's request for sex,"* Rolse complained, *"the latter uses all means within his power to make your life miserable."*

Girls' perception of lived experience

Disrespectful Practices

- "We are not respected at all. Sometimes you ask yourself why you have come to school," Holas said.
- "The teacher disgraces you in public in the classroom; boys call you names, touch your buttocks and get away with it?" Rolse said.

Sexual Harassment of Girls

- "The prefect who was here two years ago kept bugging me for a date until he left this school," confessed Rafl.
- "Same with me," Laura said. "There is an old man with grey in this school—I won't call names—who's bothering me for an outing. This man must have daughters older than me."
- Hew remembered how "The literature teacher once wrote on my exam paper as he was returning it to me: 'See me after class.' I couldn't believe what I read!"
- "Worst of all, the teacher gives you a bad grade you don't deserve just to punish you for rejecting his request for sex," Nathi said, angrily.

Girls perception of Teachers and School Administrators

- "It's disheartening when you ask the teacher a question and he asks a boy to answer your question," Thid said.
- "Or when you give a wrong answer and he asks a boy to give the correct answer. This tells us that the teacher thinks we are inferior to boys, and the boys keep bragging, and disrespecting us," another girl confirmed.

Girls' Perception of Boys

- "These boys are boastful and arrogant, and teachers encourage them in doing this," according to Alsek.
- "They tell us how we girls are in school only to seduce teachers and have sex with them for grades," Taddy explained.

Feeling of Being Ignored

- "Teachers, school administrators and secretaries couldn't care less about our queries. You raise your hand in class to ask questions, the teacher ignores you," Angelek said.
- "The secretaries are the worst. You would think they hate us girls. First they give you a scornful look, then they tell you bluntly that they are too busy to listen to your query," Lette recalled.
- Taddy argued that "They listen to us when we need help but they never do what we ask for. They keep saying 'come back tomorrow.' So they help, but they are not doing enough."
- "Sometimes, they just don't take our concerns seriously," Rolse indicated.
- Thid confirmed: "Especially when we complain about sexual harassment perpetrated by a teacher, the teacher is always right and the girl is wrong."

The following statements by the school secretaries and the school prefect provide examples of the lack of support for girls.

- "If you guys are waiting to see me, you heard what I told the boys who left, didn't you?" said one of the school secretaries to girls who were waiting to see her, without even looking at the girls.
- "Can't you see that I'm busy?" the school prefect responded to a girl who requested his attention for a problem.
- The school prefect talked to another girl who came to his office in the following way: "I'm not here to solve only your problems. I have problems too."

Girls' Perception of Their School Experience

All the participants described schooling as both a blessing and a curse.

A Blessing

- "School has taught us not to lose hope and that education holds good promises for the future," Dena indicated.
- According to Cathy, *"*When you look around and see uneducated women who cannot even tell right from left, then you realize what they have missed."
- "I do regret not being able to complete my schooling, but I have no regret about leaving school," said one of the dropout girls.

A Curse

- For Rafl, "The way we are treated creates, sometimes, an atmosphere of discouragement and desperation, particularly when you need someone just to listen to you, you turn around, and there is no one to talk to because no one cares."
- According to Rolse*, "*We are afraid and fear comes from the retaliation you suffer for rejecting sexual requests; it comes from the humiliation you suffer in the classroom."
- "It also comes from not knowing what your day will look like when you leave home for school in the morning," DK contended.
- According to Nadine, "You are terrified at the thought that anything could happen anytime during your schooling that might stop your education and shatter your dream to become somebody through schooling."

Summary

A cross comparison of the findings presented in this section reveals commonalities with findings from the survey questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews about the categories that the girls use to describe their perception of their school experience. These categories represent a subset of 'girls' perception of their school experience listed in the conceptual framework. Therefore, they provide a link between the conceptual framework and the findings.

Findings from Participant Observation

Participant observation was used throughout the study to collect data on the research questions listed below. The findings also include evidence in the support of the ignoring of the girls.

- What aspects of the dominant culture do the girls experience in their relationships?
- How do the girls react to their lived experience?
- What factors influence girls' perception of their lived experience?

Aspects of the Dominant Culture Experience

- Disrespect for girls and male superiority: Franck, a participant in the study made the following statement about girls in an interaction involving Kevin, another boy, and Yolanda, a girl: "Girls should be respected as human beings, not as girls" (disrespect).
- Likewise, Kevin said: "Girls must accept that we are stronger than them and they should respect us" (male superiority).
- Belief in women's subordination: A boy said to a girl in an interaction involving 25 boys and 16 girls: "Men do not learn from women. Women learn from men" (aspect of culture experienced/cultural transmission).
- "No greetings today?" a boy said to a girl who just entered the classroom. "Why should I greet you first?" (Girls' reaction) the girls responded. "Girls must greet boys first".
- Expectations for male and female: "Hurry up, girls, hurry up, girls" a physical activity teacher said during a physical warming up session with boy and girl students, even though no girl was lagging behind(aspect of culture experienced/cultural transmission).
- "Not surprising" was a teacher's comment to a girl who scored a low grade on a test (aspect of culture experienced/cultural transmission).
- Gender stereotypes: "You girls take too long to put on your clothes" a boy said to a girl in interaction in the schoolyard (aspect of culture experienced/influencing factors of girls' perception of lived experience/cultural transmission).
- The researcher heard the school prefect talk to a group of girls in the following way: "Girls with their fancy hairstyle. Christmas vacation is over. If I see this hair on your head tomorrow, I will set it on fire" (influencing factors of lived experience/aspect of culture experienced/cultural transmission).

Girls' Reaction to Their Lived Experience

- Yolanda's response to a statement about boys being more intelligent than girls: "That, I don't think so. Some boys may be more intelligent than some girls, and some girls may be more intelligent than some boys. Intelligence is a gift that both men and women can

have because they are human beings. The fact is in this school, there are classes where girls outperform boys and classes where girls come at the top of the class."

- A girls' reaction to a boy' statement that only men are leaders: "That's not the argument. The real question is do we have women leading where men follow? Yes, we do. This country currently has eight women ministers in the government all of them doing a great job, all of them giving orders to men who shake in front of them like a dead leaf."
- "Whenever there is a case of embezzlement of public funds in a state agency, only men are always involved" a girl indicated in response to the statement that women are bad managers.
- "The fact that they are talking doesn't mean they are women. It means not only women talk too much. Men also talk too much," a girl said in reaction to a boy's statement about girls talking too much.

Summary

The findings on aspects of the dominant culture that the girls experience in their relationships provide examples of gender socialization through cultural transmission in post-colonial African schools. These findings bring evidence that clarify the concept 'socialization through cultural transmission in post-colonial African school', a key concept included in the conceptual framework. In short, through the concepts identified from the literature review, the conceptual framework acted as a driving belt between the literature review, the research questions, the collection of data, data analysis, and the findings. Throughout the process of analysis, these concepts provided a reference point against which to check the analysis and the findings.

From a grounded theory perspective, the researcher reached the findings reported in this study through a process of interaction and meaning-making at three levels: the participants, the data, and the researcher himself. Interactions with participants, achieved through interviews and observation, revealed participants' perceptions of their lived experience and the strategies they used to process their main concerns. Interaction with the data occurred through an iterative process of constant comparison involving organizing and reorganizing the data into

levels of abstraction. The meaning achieved from these interactions informed a new reading of the data and action to expand on or to keep the original meaning constructed. In light of the meaning derived from these interactions, the researcher challenged his own preconceived ideas about the phenomenon under study through self-interaction. The whole process led to the researcher's final interpretation of the facts gathered from the data. The process described here shows commitment to symbolic interactionism with respect to the emphasis it places on meaning: Meaning is derived from interaction and modified through interpretation. This process culminated in the development of a theory of lived experience.

From a phenomenological perspective, the findings reported in this study represent participants' essence of lived experience.

For the sake of comparison, a look back at the findings from the free-list analysis revealed commonalities with findings from the semi-structured interviews, the focus-group discussion, and participant observation—but surprises as well. A category like "disrespect," for example, which scored the second highest salience index in the free-list analysis, eventually became the core category emerging from the grounded theory analysis. Likewise, "sexual harassment," initially listed among the five most salient items emerging from the free-list analysis (although with the lowest index), became participants' second main concern in the semi-structured interviews. Surprisingly, "teasing" was absent from the findings from the semi-structured interviews, while it scored the highest salience index in the free-list analysis. In the same way, "respected if she works hard" came out as a surprise among the free-list findings, with a higher index than "sexual harassment." Few participants made mention of this category in the semi-structured interviews. Finally, despite being absent from the free-list findings, "being ignored" emerged from the semi-structured interviews and the focus-group discussions as one

of participants' main concerns. Regardless of these unexpected findings, the findings from three methods of data collection largely confirmed the main findings from the study. In a broader sense, the main categories that girls used to describe their perception of their lived experience in this study match with the concepts drawn from existing literature discussed in the literature review section. For example, categories such as sexual harassment; disrespect; abuse; humiliation; silencing of girls; retaliation; and ignoring of girls emerging from this study are included in the main concepts drawn from previous studies, listed at the end of the literature review, and summarized in the conceptual framework. These concepts fall under six main categories as follows: cultural transmission in schools, perceptions and expectations of girls, attitude towards girls, girls' perception of their lived experience, girls' reaction, and consequences.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived school experience of 30 girls within a secondary school in Benin, the meaning of this experience for the girls, and how it shapes their perception of and their behavior toward teachers, male students, the school administration, and the school community. In particular, the study seeks to understand what, from participants' perspectives, represents their main concerns in the school setting and the strategies that the girls use to overcome these concerns. This section discusses the findings from the study using supporting evidence, verbatim quotes from participants' stories, quotes from participant observation, and findings from previous research. The discussion is organized around the research questions, restated below for convenience.

- How do girls perceive their school experience?
- How do teachers, school administrators, and boys perceive girls?
- What aspects of the dominant culture do the girls experience in their relationships?
- What factors influence the girls' perception of their school experience?
- How do the girls react to this experience?

How Do Girls Perceive Their School Experience?

The major finding from this study is the disrespect and abuse that the participants experience from male members of the school community. In their own voices, 96% of the girls involved in the study told stories of their experience with disrespect and abuse in the school setting. They experienced disrespect in many different ways, including the deliberate attempts to undervalue girls' abilities in the face of their male peers; the acts of silencing, teasing, and sexist jokes. They experience abuse through retaliation, intimidation (power abuse), and sexual harassment. They also experienced neglect, through the lack of support to girls' concerns; In

response to the question about their own perceptions of their lived school experience, most participants raised concerns over the abusive use of power by the school authorities. They denounced endemic sexual harassment as a widespread practice involving teachers, some school administrators, and male students as culprits. In particular, they denounced teachers abusing their position of authority to demand sexual favors and to retaliate against girls when they reject this demand. That being the case, why do power abuse and sexual harassment relate to each other in this study? The fact that a sizeable portion of the girls involved in the study experienced sexual harassment, mostly by teachers and the school administration, raises the question of power differentials in the school setting. It shows that because teachers and the school administration occupy a position of authority over the girls, they abuse their organizational power (power associated with a position of privilege in organization) to harass them. When one adds to the organizational power the power that teachers and the school authorities enjoy as males in a patriarchal society, the centrality of power abuse in understanding sexual harassment in this study becomes evident.

The girls involved in the study experienced both forms of sexual harassment from teachers, male students, and school administrators judging from the stories they shared about their lived experience; according to these girls, teachers should carry most of the blame for the sexual harassment of girls. The interviews with these female students turned into an indictment of their teachers. Complaints against teachers ranged from dissatisfaction with the strategies they put in place to approach girls to open attacks on girls for failure to grant requests for sexual favors, to the recourse to retaliation to obtain compliance from girls. The girls described such practices as unprofessional and disrespectful. They used words such as “disrespect,” “tough,” “intimidation,” “retaliation,” “insult,” “ignored,” “boastful,” and “arrogant” to describe their

perceptions of the treatment of girls by male members of the school community. Virtually every girl had a story to tell about experiences with sexual harassment either as a victim or as a witness. Rolse, for example, described how her teacher invaded her privacy through deceitful means. The teacher requested the class list with the students' cell phone numbers on it, ostensibly for academic purposes, while the real hidden reason was to get Rolse's contact information. This is an unprofessional attitude for a teacher to adopt. As mentioned in the finding section, the teacher used the same deceitful means as in Rolse's case to gain possession of Nathi's phone number in violation of her right to privacy; this is disrespectful.

The victims of sexual harassment in this study also experienced intimidation and humiliation, forms of power abuse and disrespect. Bella, for example, explained how her teacher made her kneel down before her classmates under the pretense that she had not stood up like everyone else when he entered the classroom. In Bella's case, the teacher resorted to emotional abuse and psychological control to force Bella into a relationship through intimidation and humiliation. By making Bella kneel down before her peers, the teacher sought to weaken her psychologically in the hope that the fear of retaliation would make her more willing to grant his request. On this particular point, Ganesan (2001, p. 1) argued that:

> Being humiliated by a male teacher will be more traumatic for the girls than for the boys. . . . Being humiliated in a mixed sex class will be more traumatic for both the sexes than in a single sex class. . . . The trauma will be more severe and longer lasting on girls than on boys. (Ganesan, 2001, p. 3)

The girls involved in the study were in a mixed-sex class situation, and the trauma of humiliation was probably more severe and longer lasting on them than on anyone else in their situation. Therefore, one would expect these girls to take revenge on their perpetrators. Unfortunately, the only form of revenge available to them was resisting the request for sexual favors and suffering the threatened harm that resulted from it. The threatened harm often took

the form of retaliation. As the findings revealed, participants experienced various forms of retaliation for rejecting teachers' sexual advances. In some cases escape is the only option available to the girls. In the story of Rafl's experience, for example, she was offered the choice to either submit to a teacher's sexual request or repeat her grade level. She chose to repeat her grade level and changed schools the following year.

Participants in the study also identified male students as perpetrators of sexual harassment, though to a lesser extent than teachers. In general, the female participants from lower-level classes reported a higher incidence of sexual harassment perpetrated by boys and teachers. Do boys retaliate when girls reject their request for sex? According to Bella when the boys get 'no' for an answer to a request for sex, they feel humiliated, they insult the girls, and the matter ends there.

The question then arises: Why is there a high incidence of sexual harassment by teachers? Some girls argue that teachers harass girls partly because low performing schoolgirls offer sexual favors in exchange for grades. Is that a good excuse for harassing girls? One thing is for sure: There is an offer of sexual favors from some girls because there is a demand for it. Had teachers adopted a hostile attitude to the offering of sex for grades, they would probably have discouraged such practices. The findings on sexual harassment in this study corroborate previous findings by Rosseti (2001)—cited in the literature review—on sexual harassment in a Zambian school.

Teachers may also harass girls in order to boost their own egos or to maintain their privileges as males and as teachers. Fear of reprisals also makes girls vulnerable to sexual harassment. Girls who fear retaliation for rejecting teachers' requests for sex surrender to their

offenders. As Nathi pointed out, the girls fear the consequences of rejecting teachers' sexual requests. Therefore, some girls grant the request in order to stay out of trouble.

One could also interpret sexual harassment by male students as a means of control of the public space of the school setting (Leander, 2002, p. 43). The boys consider the coeducational school exclusively a male domain and regard female students as transgressors in this domain. Over 80% of the boys surveyed expressed this view. Therefore, they feel frustrated that they have to compete with the girls in their own domain. It is like losing some of their power to the girls. It could be that in compensation for this loss, they harass the girls to prove to themselves that they still have the power to subordinate. Another reason for the high incidence of sexual harassment in school could relate to what Foster (1998) defines as:

> A transfer of the practices of the private, domestic sphere into the public setting of the school's . . . classroom; specifically, 'private' imperatives relating to women's perceived primary functions in the area of sexuality, motherhood, and caretaking are brought into the . . . public domain of the school.

Therefore, the perception of girls in their roles as mothers and caretakers may account for why they get sexual harassed in the school setting.

As noted in the findings section, while the girls identified teachers as major culprits in the sexual harassment of female students, they also blame some girls for asking for it. For example, they denounced girls who invite sexual harassment by dressing provocatively in order to attract teachers. Why would female students want to attract teachers' attention by dressing provocatively? Put differently, why would a female student, other than a low performer seeking grades, want to grant sexual favors to her teacher?

As a female in the coeducational school, the closer a girl gets to males, power wielders in the school environment, the better chances she stands of getting some privileges. In

exchange for such privileges, some girls sell their sex appeal. This is known as "patriarchal bargaining" (Kandiyoti, 1988), defined as:

> A decision to accept gender rules that disadvantage women in exchange for whatever power one can get from the system . . . an individual strategy designed to manipulate the system to one's best advantage, but one that leaves the system itself intact. (Wade, 2011, p. 2)

The girls may also dress provocatively in search of positive reinforcement in order to boost their self-esteem, which has been downtrodden in the school environment.

Finally, sexual harassment is an act of silencing (Leander, 2002). Victims of sexual harassment usually feel humiliated and belittled to various degrees, depending on the severity of the harassment. In case of sexual abuse, victims feel even more humiliated because they have lost something that they will never get back: their dignity. The humiliating and belittling nature of sexual harassment reduces victims to silence and makes them invisible. In the school environment, males gain much from having females reduced to silence because the latter will pose less threat to their privileges. This reason probably accounts for endemic sexual harassment of females in the school setting.

Disrespect as part of the girls' school experience also emerged as a theme from participant observation in the present study. Observing students in interaction indeed revealed instances of boys' disrespectful attitude toward girls. In the discussion (mentioned in the findings section) that the researcher had with Franck, Kevin, and Yolanda, for example, Franck said that boys owe girls respect as human beings but not as girls. Frank's perspective reflects the meaning that his culture ascribes to the female sex, that is: Women do not deserve respect. His culture has taught him what it means to be male and female and he used this cultural perspective on meaning of gender identity as a reference point to build his own gender identity. In so doing, he defined himself in opposition to girls. In the same way, another boy constructed

himself in opposition to a female student whom physical he disrespectfully described as having "long legs and a heavy breast". As well as highlighting important physical differences between men and women, this portrayal of a female put limits on women's capacity. This finding on the reference to girls by their physical appearance is not new. It corroborates prior findings by FAWE (2001)-cited in the literature review- on boys referring to girls by their physical appearance in a Kenyan. One question arises from the girls' experience with sexual harassment and disrespectful treatments: what do the school administrators do about the girls' complaints?

The female participants in this study reported suffering the pain of being ignored by the administration at their school. While they acknowledged that the school director was responsive to students' needs, most participants expressed dissatisfaction with the other members of the school administration. As stated in the findings section, they denounced the prefect's indifference in dealing with students; lack of attention from the female members of the administration; and the support given to teachers whenever a female student complained about a teacher. As Nadine noted in the findings section, the school administration usually sides with sexual offenders (usually teachers) and the victims are always wrong.

The participants also complained about the harshness of the school administration..They reported the abusive use of corporal punishment by the school prefect, allegedly as a disciplinary measure. In addition to being ignored, the girls suffer corporal punishment too (although boys also do).

Because of the beating, girls have the fear of approaching the school administration. The fear experienced in this case scares the girls away from the school authorities; it forces them into silence, including when they need support with issues of sexual harassment. Rolse, quoted in the findings section, emphasized the separate worlds in which teachers/the school

administrators and students live and the barrier between them. In sum, although both boys and girls both experience corporal punishment, it has more consequences for the girls than for the boys. It submits girls to physical abuse in addition to the psychological abuse experienced through sexual harassment.

Participants' dissatisfaction with the school administration can be summarized in two main points: lack of support to student, and the abusive use of corporal punishment. However, the feeling of being ignored represents the main point of the girls' dissatisfaction with the school administration. When the girls experience sexual harassment by a teacher, complaining to the school administration makes it even worse. The administration sides with the teacher, which leaves the victim an easy prey to the teacher's retaliation. The feeling of being betrayed and abandoned by the school administration leaves victims of sexual harassment in fear of returning to the classroom.

Nathi reported in the findings section her own experience with retaliation after she rejected her teacher's request for sex. Despite her willingness to participate in the classroom proceedings—she raised her hand to answer a question—the teacher intentionally ignored her, in retaliation for denying his sexual request. The price Nathi had to pay for opposing the teacher's desires was exclusion from classroom activities. A girl in Rossetti's (2001) findings from his study on a Zambian school (reported earlier) went through a similar experience to Nathi's. Because she rejected a request for sex by her geography teacher, he stopped calling on her even though the girl raised her hand. The ignoring of girls, through exclusion from speech could be interpreted as what Leander (2002) termed "discourse expulsion" (p. 197): The discourse of girls is not permitted, thus they are silenced (Leander, 2002, p. 198) by virtue of being girls; as girls, there are cultural restrictions to what they can say. Another way to look at the ignoring of girls,

particularly when they complain about sexual harassment, relates to the cultural belief about sexual harassment: “A mechanism to keep women in ‘their place’” (Lee et al., 1996). The school administration and males in the school setting most likely resort to silencing as a device to keep the girls in their place. What place is then assigned to girls in the coeducational setting?

According to Foster (1998), the place assigned to females seeking academic advancement is to be found neither in the private arena of the household nor in the public sphere of school: It is the “space-between” (Foster, 1998, p. 9), the space of lived experience—a space where girls on a daily basis live the stark realities of what it means to be a female in a male-dominated school setting. Echoing Leck (1987) and Martin (1991), Foster (1998) contended:

> For women and girls, pursuing equal educational and citizenship rights, entails entering a particular space—social, psychological and existential—between and beyond that which is prescribed for women, that is, women’s “place,” and that which is proscribed to women. This is a space of lived experience, mediating between private and public spheres, where women and girls attempt to negotiate the conflicting, contradictory (at best), or violent and destructive (at worst) demands of a neo-liberal framework of equality. (Leck, 1987; Martin, 1991, in Foster, 1998, p. 9)

Within the space-between, “girls are to be given equal opportunity to achieve gender parity in an education system that is normatively masculine” (Foster, 1998, p. 9). This poses a problem: While for girls gaining physical access to the school setting, a male terrain is one thing, validation of the females’ physical presence is yet another and quite different story. In their present situation, although girls are allowed entry in the school setting, they are still struggling to be recognized as full members. In reality, the space-between

> . . . embraces both the actual, physical space of social relations, and a conceptual space which has cultural, ideological and experiential dimensions. "Space" evokes meanings of sexual politics, of interconnection, and of positionality. It has a further sense of physical admission: allowing entry or access, and making room for, in an enclosed space. This is the sense inferred in equal opportunity provisions for women and girls, for example, in employment and education. There is a second more conceptual sense of space as

> representation and validation: to be admitted is to be fully recognized, acknowledged, and further, accepted as legitimately having a place. (Foster, 1998, p. 9)

Finally, one could interpret the ignoring of girls' complaints and queries as a deliberate attempt to use silence as a means of silencing. As well as being disrespectful, using silence as a process of silencing, according to Leander (2002), is part of males' strategies to keep females within their space. Earlier on Foster (1998) defined women's space in the coeducational setting as 'the space-between.' Her perspective on this question brings evidence to support Thid, Rose, and Nife's complaints (cited earlier) about the attention and support denied girls in the school setting. The girls were being ignored just because their presence in the conceptual space:-school- was not validated. For female students in this situation, being ignored can be disrespectful and humiliating. It is a painful experience that has far-reaching consequences ranging from frustration to shame; to disgust for school; to the feeling of revenge on the source of humiliation; to self-pity; to poor school performance and eventually to dropping out of school (Ganesan, 2003).

The school administration's guilty silence about the sexual harassment of girls and their disrespectful treatment confirms prior findings (cited in the literature review) on girls' education in Ghana and Botswana (Leach et al 2005).

The discussion in the previous three sections focused on disrespect as the female participants' major concern in the school setting. In their own voices, the girls denounce the pervasive presence of abuse in their daily interactions with males in the school environment. They revealed what it feels like to suffer retaliation for rejecting a sexual request and what it feels like to be physically present in the classroom, yet to be excluded, ignored, and ostracized for denying the teacher's sexual advances; they shared the disappointment of being made powerless in an environment meant for the empowerment of girls (school); they also described

with sensitivity the torture and the fear that the girls experience waiting anxiously for teachers' retaliation. Most importantly, they expressed what it feels like to be bullied, put down, and silenced just by virtue of being girls. Finally, the girls expressed the frustration of being unable to seek redress for the injustices caused to them. This makes them feel helpless and leaves them with few options available to deal with their grievances.

Another important finding on girls' experience relates to the way that the girls' perceive teachers and male students. In their perceptions of teachers and male peers, participants reported other forms of humiliation that female students experience in the school setting. For example, they reported that teachers made sexist jokes about girls' intellectual abilities and nasty comments about their private lives. They presented boys as aggressive, boastful and arrogant, and disrespectful to girls. They also reported experiencing bullying and name-calling from boys. In the girls' opinion, boys feel superior to girls and act toward them accordingly.

The girl's perceptions of boys and teachers are consistent with the findings on male teachers' and male students' perceptions of girls reported for the focus group discussion and the survey. It is shared belief and common wisdom in Benin's cultures that women are weak compared to men (Gaba, 2005). Does this make them inferior to and less intelligent than men? Definitely not; anyway, beliefs about men's superiority to women have gained momentum and corrupted the minds of males. Earlier on, Nife's complained that boys think they were and still are more intelligent and stronger than girls and women since the beginning of time. This view reflects a majority of Beninese males' perceptions of women. They also reflect cultural beliefs about women. The unequal male-female power relationship that results from such beliefs prescribes a number of attitudes (submission and obedience) for women and proscribes a number of behaviors (resistance and rebellion) to them. Therefore, any attempt by schoolgirls

to resist male hegemony in the school setting is viewed as challenging males' supremacy and calls for revenge.

The boys' aggressiveness and use of insulting words in the classroom when girls request clarification actually go beyond mere bullying. They also represent silencing strategies to keep girls in their "space" and boys in control. Consistent with the belief in boys' superiority to girls, achieving good results and active classroom participation are associated with boys, while lack of knowledge and bad performance are associated with girls. Miske and Prouty (1997) made a similar point about knowledge being biologically determined in Sub-Saharan African classes. By silencing the girls in the classroom, the boys deny them access to knowledge, a domain allegedly reserved for boys. Bella explained the reason for such a denial earlier on. Women's lack of knowledge, therefore, confirms male supremacy over females (Miske& Prouty, 1997).

With respect to Laura's complaint about being silenced every time she asked the teacher a question, the perceived threat of girls' presence to male supremacy in the classroom accounts for the silencing of girls in her class. Not surprisingly, the teacher, through his guilty silence, condones the silencing of girls by their male peers. The teacher's show of support for boys' disrespectful attitudes to girls carries special meaning. As a male, he identifies with the boys. He shares ownership of the public arena of the classroom with male students. By permitting the boys' disrespectful attitudes toward the girls, teachers transmit to their students (males and females alike) the culture of male supremacy over female.

Surprisingly, the solidarity between female teachers and female students is nonexistent. On the contrary, 70% of the girls interviewed complained more about being disrespected by female teachers and female members of the school administration than by male teachers and

male students. The findings revealed the girls' complaints about being humiliated mostly by female teachers

In the gender-oppressive environment in which they live, one would expect female teachers and girls to join hands in solidarity and through mutual support in an effort to counter hegemonic masculinity in the school setting. What could possibly account for female teachers' aggressive behavior toward female students? As females, women teachers and schoolgirls feel the same abhorrence for and the same frustration with a culture that keeps them in subordination. With respect to the female teachers, frustration might also originate from unhappiness about their married life at home. Regardless of the origins of their frustration, response to frustration sometimes takes the form of aggression (Mitchell, 2011). Therefore, unable to use direct aggression toward the real source of their frustration for fear of retribution, the female teachers found it safer to take out their anger on female students. Psychologists call this "displaced aggression" (Pedersen, Gonzales, & Miller, 2000). According to Mitchell (2011),

> Aggression in response to frustration can be in the form of direct aggression expressed toward the object or person perceived as the source of frustration. Displaced aggression is often used when the source of the frustration is too powerful or threatening for direct aggression. If someone is frustrated by their boss, they may take it out on someone whom they do not feel threatened by. (p. 1)

Another reason could be that in the gender-segregated environment of the school setting, female teachers treat schoolgirls as rivals competing for attention and respect from the opposite gender.

It is also very likely that female teachers treat female students with contempt out of conformity with current patriarchal practices that oppress, devalue, and subordinate girls to male supremacy in the school setting. By oppressing girls, female teachers buy into patriarchal gender rules in exchange for some privileges. This is another example of patriarchal bargaining,

defined previously. As a minority group in the school environment, it is probably in the best interest of women teachers to defer to the patriarchal rules in exchange for some privileges. Gaining such privileges is critical for females to survive in the male-dominated system of the school environment. If this were the case, by displaying examples of deference to males, the female teachers transmit the culture of women's subordination to female students.

Regardless of the reasons for the female teachers' behavior, their contemptuous attitude toward the girls simply indicates oppression of female students by female teachers—a sober reminder that the mere presence of women in the school environment does not make school safe for girls. Fully aware of this reality, Miske and Prouty (1997) issued a warning:

> Despite the argument for women teachers as a reassuring presence for parents and for girl students . . . the mere presence of women teachers does not contribute to a girl-friendly learning environment. In fact, women teachers can create an environment of discouragement just as easily as men teachers. (p. 67)

Relative to the silencing of girls by male peers and teachers, Victoria, a female participant, provides evidence to support the cultural foundation of the silencing of female students. She argues that the boys boast that men have authority over women in African cultures, including the authority to stop women from speaking in the presence of men. Probably because teachers also believe that men have authority over women, they do little to stop the boys from silencing their fellow female students. Condoning such practices encourages the reproduction of the culture of female subordination in the school setting. It portrays school as an institution of cultural transmission.

Nowhere did the girls in this study state their perception of males more aggressively than during participant observation. The girls' statements are reported in the findings section.

The humiliation, abuse, and disrespect that girls reportedly experience correlate with FAWE's (2001) findings on a Kenyan school where the school administration requested girls on Wednesdays to lift their dress to have their petticoat inspected.

Humiliated and disrespected, with no one to turn to, the girls feel powerless. The sense of powerlessness they feel brings about fear of being abandoned; consequently, they feel unsafe and this feeling causes a lot of suffering. Fear and suffering, therefore, represent an important aspect of the girls' lived experience. Participants like Nathi, for example, experienced fear for what could happen to them at home if they perform poorly at school and fear at school for teachers' retaliation. In order to avoid the trouble of having to deal with the wrath of their parents if they receive low grades at school, girls in Nathi's situation just "submit to teachers' sexual desire sometimes." What annoys Nathi the most is that the bad grades she gets at school are a result of the unfair treatment she receives in retribution for rejecting the teacher's requests for sexual favors. In no way do these grades reflect her actual school performance. Rolse experienced a different kind of fear: the fear of having rejected the teacher's request for sex and awaiting retaliation that may come at any time. The torture of the wait in this case adds to the fear and "makes you feel ill at ease in the classroom." Also worthy of notice is the girls' desire to carry on with their schooling against all odds. Participants like Nathi, for example, rely on their spiritual strength to make this happen. Others, like Paris, fear that anything might stop their education and shatter their dream to "become somebody" through schooling. This attitude indicates resilience in the face of hardship, hope in the face of desperation, deep commitment to the promotion of gender equality in education, and a strong belief in the liberating power of education. Other female participants in this study expressed a similar desire to carry on their studies despite the atmosphere of discouragement prevailing in the school environment. This

makes one believe that girls' lived school experience is dominated by a mixture of desire and fear (Foster, 1998 cited in the literature review)—the desire to become somebody through schooling and the fear of price they have to pay to make this desire a reality.

> Women's lived experience in the space-between revolves around two conflicting discourses: first, the neo-liberal discourse of equality with men—"a woman's place is everywhere" and, second, the discourse of male supremacy which constructs women as transgressors on male territory. . . . The conflict of these two discourses makes the space-between a site of both desire and threat for women: the desire evoked by the promise of equal opportunities in a man's world, and the threat of punishment and violation which inevitably accompanies women's attempts to make that promise reality, to live the discourse of equality. (Foster, 1998, p. 9)

With respect to the conflict between desire and threat that females experience in the space-between, the desire that keeps the girls moving ahead in their schooling against all odds is by no means a desire to compensate for lack of knowledge. Thinking in this way might suggest that girls have gaps in their knowledge to fill and that boys do not; rather, it is "desire" conceived of as "a positive force of production and self-actualization, a desire to gain power and to maximize it" (Foster, 1998, p. 14); a desire to challenge hegemonic masculinity and to prove one's own capabilities. In the last analysis, it is this desire that poses a serious threat to the male supremacy in the school setting. How do girls react to the hardships of their experience in the school environment?

To sum up, girls perceive their school experience in terms of abuse (sexual harassment, verbal abuse, power abuse); disrespect, humiliation, the ignoring of girls, discrimination, retaliation, stereotyping, put-downs, and rejection. However, they also recognize the benefit of education in helping individuals identify "their right hand from left." The contradiction noted between the promise held by education and the harmful treatments girls received in school is articulated in the girls' mixed perception of their school experience. In the focus group discussions, they described their school experience both as a blessing and a curse. Consistent

with this perception, the dropout girls involved in the focus group discussions acknowledged regretting not completing their school cycle, even though they have no regret leaving school.

How do Teachers and School Administrators Perceive Girls?

The findings on teachers' perceptions of girls confirmed the dissatisfaction that girls expressed about how their teachers perceive them and treat them. That 53% of the teachers surveyed believed that boys are more interested in school than girls indicate teachers' unfavorable opinion of female students. Moreover, the reasons that the teachers gave in justification for their opinions of girls and boys reflect their cultural perceptions of students. For them, boys need to prepare for their future roles as breadwinners for their families; therefore, they show more interest in school. As for girls, the teachers unanimously believe that girls see no need to prepare for future family responsibilities; they will marry and their husbands will take care of them.

The teachers' line of reasoning denotes their perception of girls and boys in their cultural gendered roles: women in the private sphere and men in the public arena. This mindset socializes the girls for subordination to a husband who 'will take care of them' and reinforces boys' belief in male superiority to female. Throughout his fieldwork, the researcher noted, on several occasions, the treatment of students along gender lines. For example, on each of the researcher's visits to the studied school, the school prefect always sent girls (not boys) to set up the room for the interviews. The researcher also noticed, from observing teachers and students in informal interactions, that teachers, both male and female, always sent girls (not boys) to buy them food during break time. The female participants confirmed this fact in their interviews. Asked why teachers always sent girls to buy food, the girls responded that from cooking food at home, girls know better about food than boys do; although the girls confessed that some male teachers send girls to buy them food as a trick to approach girls for sexual favors. Once during

an end of school year celebration on the research site, a clear division of labor in the attribution of tasks to boys and girls was observed. The girls got busy in the kitchen while the boys moved the furniture and ran errands, just as it happens at home. As well as socializing the girls for their future role as mothers, the gendered division of labor also reveals teachers' perception of girls' role as household keepers. This finding is substantiated by previous findings discussed in the literature review where teachers reportedly reminded girls that they are good only for keeping children. Another important findings on teachers' perception of girls in this study revealed that a majority of teachers believe that girls show little interest in schooling. Paradoxically, 68% of the teachers surveyed in the same study said that girls and boys have equal aptitude for school. If girls show little interest in school, as teachers contend, despite their aptitude for studies, they probably have good reasons for it. The apparent and most likely reason is the toxic and gender-oppressive atmosphere they live in on a daily basis and the environment of discouragement resulting from it. On the other hand, the teachers' perception of girls as quiet, lazy, and shy disregards the fact that the girls' apparent quietness, shyness, and laziness are a silent reaction against the way that they are treated. It is a deliberate choice to keep silence for fear of being laughed at, even though one knows the answer to the teacher's question in the classroom. The report of a Kenyan girl quoted in the literature review supports this assertion. For the girl, boys always laugh at girls when they give the wrong answer, so it better to be silent even when you know the answer.

The truth of the matter is that the teachers' perceptions and low expectation held of girls influence the way they treat them. Evidence from the findings indeed suggests teachers' discriminatory treatment in their feedback to boys and girls. As a girl reported in the findings section, her teacher believes that a boy who scores 17/20 on a test could score even better,

while a girl who gets 15/20 is excellent. The teacher's message is clear. Boys can score higher than 17/20, while for girls, 15/20 is the limit. Such a message transmits a culture of man's superiority to women, and boys' superiority to girls. In another class, a teacher was reported as saying to the boys who scored low grades that they could do better, while the girls who scored low grades were told that it was not surprising; they needed to work harder; they were too weak; or they had a long way to go. The message here is clear: scoring a low grade is considered accidental for boys and not surprising for girls. This incident transmits the cultural preference for male children over female. It tells boys that there is room for improvement in their school work and little chance of improvement for girls.

It has emerged from the discussion in this section that teachers' perception of and attitude toward students socialize boys for male dominance and girls to subordination to male dominance. The notions of masculinity and femininity emerge from the construction of boys and girls in opposition to each other. Based on this construction boys and girls define themselves and behave toward each other accordingly. One could then argue that identity formation emerges from the interplay of the expectations held of students, textbook messages, peer interactions, classroom dynamics and attitudes toward students (Stromquist, 2008). In other words, gender inequality begins once boys and girls see differences in their genders.

How Do Boys Perceive Girls?

The findings on boys' perceptions of girls revealed some commonalities with the way teachers perceive and treat girls. Eighty percent (80%) of the boys surveyed in this study perceived girls as inferior to boys, weak, less able than boys, selfish, arrogant, obsessed with taking too much care of their outward appearance, and giving sex to teachers in exchange for grades. The survey data collected from the boys actually highlight their belief about girls. Some of the boys, for example, believe that male superiority over women is a divine law. Therefore, they demand that

girls greet them first and respect them. Disrespecting a man, according to these boys, violates the divine law of men's superiority to women.

The boys' perception of female students as weak, as less intelligent than boys, and as created inferior to boys has biological elements associated with it. It may suggest that males and females are born unequal and that male superiority begins from the moment of conception. Likewise, the boys' expectations that girls greet boys first and their belief that men do not learn from women have cultural underlay. Therefore, one could describe the boys' perception of the girls as biologically determined and as culturally constructed. This perception has its roots in the socialization process they went through growing up. Socialization comes from three main sources, including the home, school, and the wider community; although boys' perception of their female peers partly comes from direct interactions with the girls.

While male students generally disrespect and oppress the girls, surprisingly few boys among those surveyed spoke about the girls in friendly and conciliatory terms. Some boys even admitted seeking the girls' advice on school-related matters. Others seek help from the girls with their schoolwork. Likewise, few girls refer to boys in friendly terms. These discordant voices bring evidence that suggests disconfirming stereotype beliefs among the boys and the girls. What could possibly account for differing views of the girls in a gender-oppressive, male-dominated environment? Further investigation about this finding revealed that some of the boys grew up in female-headed households. That being the case, these boys might have been socialized to treat women as equals. In that case, the meaning that "women" has for them conflicts with views of the social construction of women generally held among males. As for the girls, the disconfirming group revealed experiencing no discriminatory treatment at home. This may explain why they expect to be treated as equal. Admittedly, the culture of the home has a

powerful influence on individuals' views and attitude. No matter what the reason, the friendly attitude observed from the disconfirming groups suggests that the ties binding boys and girls are not broken beyond repair. All they need is a new breath of spirit, a complement of soul to bring them back to life

With reference to meaning, the main findings from this study revealed a similarity in the way that the boys and the girls generally perceive each other. For example, the girls referred to the boys as disrespectful, boastful, and arrogant, and the boys used the same words in reference to the girls. However, these words have different meanings for both genders. For example, Alsek, a female participant, complained that the boys often treated the girls as arrogant when the latter reject the boys' requests for sex. Alsek's statement makes it clear why the boys perceive the girls as arrogant: They regard the rejection of their sexual requests by the girls as a defiance of their power as males. Put another way, the boys consider the sexual harassment of girls a sacrosanct privilege, and submission to harassment a duty for the girls. By rejecting the boys' requests for sex, the girls defy male authority, which the boys perceive as arrogance. In sum, for the girls, being arrogant means showing one's own importance or abilities, while for the boys, it means the girls' refusal to defer to the boys' authority. Both sides behave to each other based on the meaning that each side attaches to "arrogant." The findings on boys' perceptions of girls in this study corroborate previous findings on student's interaction in Zimbabwe FAWE (2001) discussed in the literature review.

What Aspects of the Dominant Culture Do the Girls Experience in Their Interactions?

The observation of participants in naturally-occurring interactions provides evidence of cultural transmission through informal interaction. The finding revealed several instance of cultural transmission through interaction reported in the findings section. The teacher's feedback for the boy who lost a race to a girl in a sport class: "You should be ashamed of

yourself. You are less than a woman", sends a cultural a message to both boys and girls: men are always winners and women losers; being a woman is disgraceful and being less that a woman, even worse. Likewise the message that the same boy received from his classmates: "You are unworthy of us", carries a cultural significance. It tells the boy that by losing the race to a girl, he has brought shame and disgrace to the male gender. Consequently, he has been rejected as a group member.

The girls experience the gender division of labor in their relationships with boys and teachers. One of the boys, for example, treats girls as boastful and arrogant when they refuse to sweep the floor in protest against the gender division of labor. This mindset assigns sweeping the floor to girls, and girls who refuse to perform this duty are labeled boastful and self-conceited. On a daily basis, the girls also experience gender stereotyping, as when a boy angrily told his friends to stop talking like women. These utterances explicitly define 'talking too much' as women's attribute. Similarly, another boy commented that women are often late because it takes them too long to wear their clothes. The girls also experience put-downs in their relationships. For example, boys often laugh at girls' claim to gender equality. Frank, a male participant made a sarcastic comment about a girl who was seen cutting grass as a punishment for an alleged misconduct in the classroom. He told the researcher that cutting grass is normally a chore for boys, but since girls are claiming equality to boys they should experience what it feels like to be a boy.

It has emerged from the discussion in this section that in their daily interactions with males in the school setting, girls experience different facets of the dominant culture. In their daily relationships with females in the school environment, males, boys in particular, overtly position themselves as gatekeepers of the dominant culture. They reproduce aspects of the

culture, interpret them, and construct themselves accordingly. Girls, on their part, react in any way they can to a culture of male dominance and women's subordination. In the cultural dynamics playing out in these social exchanges each party uses the dominant culture to serve their own interests. This finding suggests that socialization is an active process. In this process, boys and girls are not passive recipients of the values inculcated in them. The literature review revealed that the formal curriculum and teacher-student interactions socialize students for the dominant culture. However, it is through informal, naturally-occurring interaction, they play an active role in the construction of their own identity. Only through real-life interaction can they play this active role. The reason is that real life interaction is an information gap activity involving two or more individuals in a negotiation of meaning where necessary information is needed to solve communication problems (Nunan, 2003). In the negotiation process, individuals agree and disagree about values, attitudes, and principles in a restriction-free environment. This form of social interaction has the potential to enable the girls in this study to convey the meaning that their lived school experience holds for them. Classroom interaction lacks this potential. The diverse aspects of the dominant culture that students experience through interactions in the school environment make school an institution of cultural transmission. They also influence perceptions of girls and attitudes towards girls in schools. This connection between gender socialization, perceptions of girls, and attitude towards girls illuminate the link between these two concepts articulated in the conceptual framework.

Given the role of school as an institution of cultural reproduction and transmission, now is the time to answer a question previously asked in the literature review. Is the international community promoting schooling for girls' subordination or education for girls' empowerment? While the majority of countries around the world have reportedly met the 2015 deadline for

achieving the Millennium Development Goals set for education, a great many still struggle, with no clear end in sight to achieve these goals. The frustration that participants expressed in this study largely comes from the contradictory discourse held about girls' education. One gives girls hope to achieve their dreams and aspirations through education, while the other treats them as transgressors on the coeducational setting. In its current shape, Education for All (EFA) is promoting schooling for girls' subordination. As long as it does, the noble ambition it pursues to promote education for girls' empowerment by 2015 stands little chance of success.

What Factors Influence Girls' Perceptions of Their Lived School Experience?

The factors that influence girls' perceptions of their lived experience come from their daily school experience and from generalization (Hybels & Weaver, 2009). According to Odaga and Heneveld (1995, p. 30), "the images girls face in schools are powerful in shaping their self-perception" and perception of their lived experience. In terms of the present study, girls' daily school experience in itself represents an influencing factor of their lived experience. The girls' statements, reported in the finding section, bring evidence to support this claim. In the focus group discussion, for example, participants confirmed that the sexual harassment of girls on a daily basis; the acts retaliation against girls; the harmful treatment they receive; the silencing; the bullying; the abuse; the humiliation; and the fear of not knowing what your day will look like when you leave home for school in the morning, make school look more like a curse than a blessing. These statements reveal the strength of the impact of girls' school experience on their perception of this experience.

The messages that the girls get from males about their personality and intellectual ability also impact on the girls' perceptions of their school experience. Such messages include the ways that the culture we grew in views us, including the cultural roles and expectations placed on us. In this study, for example, the negative messages that the female students receive

from males about their intellectual abilities; the negative comments about how they are inferior to boys, and about their so-called lack of interest in school; the discriminatory and harmful treatment they keep receiving inside school shaped their perception of males' attitude as abusive, humiliating, oppressive, disrespectful, and arrogant. In the same way, they perceive school as a hostile environment for girls wishing to achieve their dreams through education. Participant observation revealed many instances of negative comments about the girls. For example, the researcher has overheard girls being repeatedly told that they are in school only to hang out with men, to seduce men, and to hunt for good grades in exchange for sex. Teachers, school administrators, and boys also use cultural proverbs in their comments about the girls' intellectual abilities. Examples of such comments include: if girls' cannot cram the teacher's lesson into their head at least they can use their head to carry food items to the market; or if girls' back cannot carry their backpack to school, at least it can carry babies at home. These comments send a clear message through a heavily culture-laden language: If girls are unfit for school, they make perfect housewives. Although these words were said sometimes jokingly, the impact they have on the girls is no fun at all. The girls who receive such messages feel disrespected and humiliated. Frequent exposure of the girls to such negative messages could lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy: a prediction that becomes true because one believes that it is already true. Girls have also been told that they are a disgrace to their family because they dress in Western style. Girls who dress in Western style are labeled as bad girls. Surprisingly, boys who dress in Western style (the researcher has seen many of them) are not labeled bad boys. Therefore, being a "bad girl" is a social construction that applies only to girls in the school culture of the studied location.

Generalization based on past experience has a significant influence on the girls' perceptions of their lived school experience in this study. Several times in the course of the study, the boys complained about being turned down by girls whenever they engaged in friendly interactions with them. They complained that whenever they try to engage in social interaction with the girls, the latter see it as an attempt to request sexual favor. Therefore, they adopt a defensive attitude. Why would girls behave in this way? Having frequently experienced sexual harassment, humiliation, and hardships from teacher and male students, the girls end up projecting all males in the school setting as perpetrators of sexual harassment. Consequently, they adopt a defensive and aggressive attitude whenever a fellow schoolboy approaches them. From a symbolic interaction perspective, one could interpret the girls' defensive attitude toward the boys as a reflection of the meaning they associate with being a boy: For them, boys are sexual harassers. Put another way, people act toward things based on the meaning these things have for them (Blumer, 1986). In short, girls perceive their lived school experience through their everyday lives in the school environment. This connection emphasizes the link established in the conceptual framework between teachers' perceptions of and attitude towards girls and girls' perception.

How Do Girls React to Their School Experience?

Based on personal stories that participants shared about their day-to-day interactions in the school environment, girls' options for striking back when they feel disrespected are limited. Given the unequal power relationship existing between males and females in the school environment, girls avoid getting into power struggles with their male counterparts. Most of them may see engaging in such struggle as a battle lost in advance given the power imbalance between male and female. Therefore, whenever they feel offended disrespected or sexually harassed), girls adopt strategies that enable them to survive their stay in the school

environment with minimum pain—though some girls do strike back whenever they feel offended. Girls' reactions vary from armed neutrality to direct confrontation. These reactions fall into four categories: The diplomats include girls who give neither an open "yes" nor a sharp "no" to requests for sexual favors; and those who ignore the offender whenever he seeks an opportunity to interact. This group shows caution in their interactions with males. The escapists include girls who find a way to escape from their frustrations by talking to friends or parents or by listening to music; another category, the submissive, surrenders to male domination for reasons beyond their control. They choose to conform to the culture of male dominance. This group has capitulated to male authority and by doing this, has accepted its own social inferiority. Such a capitulation only confirms male superiority; the resilient group has chosen to challenge male domination by rejecting sexual requests, prepared to face its consequences; the hardliners, few in number, include girls who adopt a rather assertive reaction by hurling insults at their offenders or by threatening them to strike back. This group has refused to submerge their identity and accept the legitimacy of categorical treatment. For them resistance to inequality had to confront, resist, and repudiate a system that perpetuates it. As the findings from participant observation revealed, girls have also reacted to males' attempts to label them as 'talking too much'; 'less intelligent' than boys; and as 'inferior to boys'. The girls' endeavor to counter hegemonic male discourse demonstrates a strong will to construct their own identity. A few girls argued that girls must respond to oppression through hard work. They argued that girls are respected only when they work hard and achieve good results. Therefore, they launched an appeal to their female peers to work hard so as not to give any teacher an excuse for advertising grades for sex.

Far from providing a definitive answer for the main issues confronting girls in the school setting, these coping strategies help them adjust to a culture of women's subordination in a school environment not yet safe or inclusive. The main concern, however, is not about adjusting to a system of subordination; rather, it is about changing it. From this perspective, the diverse forms of girls' assertive reactions discussed in this section suggest that girls have not remained passive victims of male domination in the school environment. These reactions express resistance to hegemonic masculinity and a rejection of the identity being forced upon the girls. This finding is not supported by prior findings on girls' school experience discussed in the literature review.

In sum, five main themes summarize girls' reaction to their lived experience: caution, confrontation, resilience, assertion, and hard work. These themes fall under "girls' reaction" in the conceptual framework. Finally, the girls' resistance to the invasive male hegemony is not an isolated fact. It results from their perception of their lived school experience and makes sense in terms of this connection. The conceptual framework illustrates this connection clearly.

Summary

The female students involved in this study articulated their perception of their lived school experience with the passion and emotion that make their experience unique. The categories they used to describe these perceptions reflect the concepts drawn from previous findings on the research topic and articulated in the conceptual framework. In other respects, the study filled the gaps previously identified from existing literature on the research topic. For example, previous studies explored the transmission of the dominant culture to students in schools primarily through the formal school curriculum and through formal teacher-student interactions in the classroom. Little attention was given to informal interaction. This study explores the reproduction of cultural gender beliefs and practices primarily through informal

and naturally occurring interactions between students. This mode of interaction afforded the girls, usually silenced in the classroom, to take an active part in interaction and to convey the meaning that their school experience holds for them. In terms of girls' resistance to male hegemony in schools, although existing literature on girls' education did mention girls' resistance to male hegemony; it has portrayed girls using passive forms of resistance with no real intent to combat a system of oppression. The present study filled this gap; it revealed that girls have not always remained passive to male oppression in schools. They have also responded assertively to hegemonic masculinity by taking an active part to construct their own identity in the socialization process.

Unlike previous findings, the findings from the proposed study revealed several coping strategies that schoolgirls use to deal with sexual harassment. Likewise, the deceitful means that the teachers in this study reportedly use to force the female participants into sexual contact reveal much about the school culture of the studied site. These contributions increased understanding of the dynamics involved in the sexual harassment of schoolgirls as well as advancing knowledge of girls' experience in the school environment.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The study sought to answer the following questions.

- How do girls perceive their school experience?
- How do teachers, school administrators and boys perceive girls?
- What aspects of the dominant culture do the girls experience in their interactions?
- What factors influence the girls' perception of their school experience?
- How do the girls react to this experience?

This study explored the lived school experience of 30 secondary school Beninese girls, all attending the same school. Using a grounded theory approach informed by the ethnographic qualitative methodology, the study investigated the girls' perception of their lived school experience; the meaning this experience has for them; and the way that it shaped their behavior toward males in the school community. Additionally, the study sought to identify girls' main concern; the coping strategies that they use to process this concern; and how the cultural transmission of gender stereotypes to students perpetuates unequal gender power relations in school. To this end, the researcher selected the literature and designed the conceptual framework deemed helpful in addressing the key issues raised in the research questions. The literature review focused on obstacles to girls' access to school, obstacles to attendance and achievement; cultural and state hegemony; gender practices in pre-colonial and colonial Africa, and a summary of finding on cultural transmission in anthropology.

The constructivist/interpretivist orientation given to the study allowed for the inclusion of multiple voices in the construction of reality. Likewise, the quest for meaningful reality found its expression in the use of various methods of data collection, including participant observation; free listing; survey questionnaire; semi-structural interviews; and focus group discussion. The

use of these methods of data collection helped the researcher run a consistency check on participants' views and accounts of their lived experience.

The findings for the first research question revealed that girls perceive their lived experience through the abuse, the humiliations, and the disrespect that they experience in their daily school life. The findings for the second research question revealed that males in the school environment perceive girls as academically less gifted than boys, inferior to boys, and not interested in schooling. On the third research question, it was found that the girls experience several aspects of the dominant culture in their relationships, in particular male superiority, women's subordination, gender stereotyping, discrimination, and gender division of labor. On the fourth research question, the study found that the girls' exposure to harmful practices on a daily basis influences their perception of their school experience. Finally, regarding girls' reaction to their school experience, five main strategies summarizing the girls' reactions to male hegemony emerged from the findings. These strategies include: using caution in interaction with males, submitting to male dominance, challenging the male oppressor, frightening the male oppressor, and working hard.

Overall, the study revealed that the barriers to girls' access to schooling discussed in the literature review hide more than they actually reveal about girls' main concerns in the school setting. These barriers focus exclusively on external factors influencing girls' participation in school. The present study revealed that school itself is a barrier through the production and the reproduction of harmful gender practices in the school setting. This has turned school into a breeding ground for invisible forces that pervade girls' day-to-day school life. These forces are cultural gender stereotypes transmitted to girls through formal instruction and through informal interaction with male teachers and male peers. Their hidden nature makes them hard to pin

down and more harmful to female students. They manifest themselves when a boy, by virtue of being male, requests that girls greet him first; or when a girl, for fear of being silenced avoids asking questions or making contributions to the lesson; when a girl would rather skip a class than show up to suffer retaliation for rejecting the teacher's request for sex. Obstacles to girls' education also manifest themselves when a girl suffers the pain of being ignored by the teacher among her male peers just to make her feel she does not count; when a girl sits through a lesson anxiously expecting the teacher to retaliate but she does not know when; and when the teacher humiliates a girl in the presence of her peers for refusing to comply with his sexual desire. The question then arises: are projects conceived to assist schoolgirls followed by appropriate policy decision to affect change in gender practices in schools? Are such decisions implemented? Most girls interviewed in this study expressed outrage and disappointment with the harmful practices they experience on a daily basis in school. Any serious intervention designed to address issues of gender inequality in education, to be successful, should also target invisible cultural barriers that have equal claim on girls' learning achievement. Additionally, such interventions should address issues of gender inequality and power imbalance in learning achievement, in educational planning and management and at the national level. Finally and most importantly, such interventions should give particular attention to girls' presence in the school setting. Getting girls in schools is only the first step toward empowering them. Validating their presence is a decisive step that decision makers must take towards the creation of inclusive schools. Decision makers must understand that attitude change on their part is a decisive factor in making school inclusive. Students and teachers will most likely change their oppressive gender practices if they see change coming from school administrators. Likewise, school administrators will promote change in gender school practices if the state proclaims change and acts accordingly.

The findings from this study on the role of school as an instrument of cultural reproduction calls for a reevaluation of the Education for All priorities. If school is to promote education for girls' empowerment, the Education for All movement needs to align its goals with school practices that promote real empowerment. Not only do current classroom practices need to change, but the formal curriculum and textbooks that support such practices also needs to change. By misrepresenting the real world, these textbooks project a well-received image of women and girls as inferior to men and as less gifted for school. If these textbooks present a positive image of women, hopefully this will introduce changes in the social perception of women; it will socialize the world, ironically, not for cultural maintenance, but for cultural change about the cultural perception of women.

The study is significant for its particular emphasis on promoting equal power between boys and girls in the school environment and on bringing out the human agency in girls. Bringing out the human agency in girls builds their capacity to make choices for themselves. It gives them the power to make a new self, an initial step toward empowerment. The power sought for in this case is not power to oppress; it comes from a self-reflective process; it comes from within (Longwe, 1998). It is not granted by an outside source and that alone makes the power holder resilient to the most adverse circumstances. Human agency is rarely erased even in the most controlled forms of social system (Shor, 2009). In the most desperate situation, as long as individuals retain the right and power to decide for themselves, there is always a potential for new beginnings.

Implications of Findings

The findings reported in this study raise policy issues that require the design of policy interventions in order to promote a safe and inclusive work environment for girls in the school setting. The prevalence and the impact of sexual harassment and other forms of violence

against girls in the school setting violate their bodily integrity and their rights to education and within education. According to these findings, female victims of sexual harassment transfer to other schools in search of a safer environment. Others leave school, completely disillusioned with the promise of a better life through education. They leave with shattered hope for achieving success through schooling. The girls who stay against all odds have to skip classes to avoid retaliation for opposing the teacher's sexual desires. Would it be right under these circumstances to think of school as a means of girls' empowerment? In reality, girls' school experience as seen through this study has serious impacts on school access, retention, and completion of the school cycle. As the right-based approach to Education for All warned education practitioners,

> School can directly and indirectly impede the access of some children, for example, through reflecting a male-dominated culture, pervading patterns of violence and sexual abuse or prevailing societal norms…negative teachers' attitude toward girls…and can also inhibit enrollment and contribute to poor attainment and high drop-out level. (UNICEF/UNESCO, 2007, p. 31)

The studied site for this research indeed reflects a male-dominated culture, societal norms of women's subordination, and negative teachers' attitude toward girls. The prevalence of the sexual harassment and gender discrimination against girls calls for joint action of the government; the civil society; the community; and the media to address this issue through the following recommendations.

1. Enforce sexual harassment regulations

The government must implement existing laws and develop and implement sexual harassment policies that punish perpetrators or abusers of girls and boys. However, in an environment like Benin where impunity reigns supreme in the highest hierarchy of the judiciary system, the chances of this happening seems unlikely; here, a lot of groundwork needs to be

done to promote a culture of respect for the law and the habit of good rules. Laws protecting children and women from abuse actually exist in Benin. However, where implementing these rules hurts personal interests, conventional wisdom in Benin's cultures recommends amicable after-court-settlements often at the expense of victims. Ultimately, such practices have rendered the judicial system inadequate. To ensure implementation of the law, the government must empower local authorities and task them with dealing with cases of gender violence and sexual abuse locally. In this way, such cases will receive immediate attention. At the same time, the relevant authorities must develop mechanisms whereby local authorities are held accountable for failing to meet their obligation as duty bearers of girls' and boys' rights to education. In other words, local authorities, particularly teachers and school administrators must be held accountable for failing to behave responsibly and responsively to female students.

2. Speak out against sexual harassment

There is a need for civil society organizations, in collaboration with the community, NGOs; and the media to engage in a nationwide campaign to promote children's rights, in particular, girls' rights to education. Through radio and TV programs and through public debates, stakeholders in education could bring issues such as the sexual harassment of schoolgirls to public attention. Making such issues a national concern will send a message to offenders that eyes are watching them; it will also give the victims the moral relief of not being left on their own. Fully aware of their rights to education, girls will see themselves not as intruders, but as citizens exercising their human rights in the coeducational setting. They will also learn to treat discriminatory and harmful attitudes towards girls as violations of these rights not as part of growing up that must go unreported.

Additionally, the pervasive and troubling nature of sexual harassment and other forms of disrespect to students require discussing these harmful practices in the school setting. Students must make their voices heard and acknowledged on these practices as they are the primary victims. Because sexual harassment has long been treated as a taboo topic, perpetrators get away with it knowing that no one would talk about it. Therefore, making sexual harassment a public debate in the school setting will make perpetrators more visible and more vulnerable. It also allows for the quest for ways to addressing this critical issue from within through direct involvement of victims in the process.

3. Provide Training for Teachers

Donor agencies need to assist the government in its effort to combat abusive practices against girls by funding gender training programs for teachers. Training teachers in FAWE's gender responsive pedagogy, for example, will probably equip them with the skills they need to possess in order to meet girls' and boys' gender needs. The gender responsive pedagogy seeks to promote safe school environment for girls and boys. It incorporates gender concerns in lesson planning; classroom management; language use; and teacher-students interaction. One critical step toward girls' empowerment is to help girls gain confidence in their abilities and boost their self-esteem. The American Peace Corps Volunteers' Service has been active in the field of girls' empowerment through education across the world. The organization's girls' education program includes the development of activities intended to promote girls' empowerment in the classroom. Recently, the Peace Corps launched the publication of a book series entitled the Idea Book. The 2001 publication in the series entitled *In the Classroom: Empowering Girls p*roposes ideas to design a curriculum or lesson plan that encourage girls' participation in the classroom. The goal is to help teachers create a girl-friendly learning environment that helps girls gain

confidence in their abilities. From personal experience working for Peace Corps Benin as Deputy Director for the Education Program; the researcher believes that the Education Peace Corps Volunteers in Benin could play an instrumental role in promoting girls' empowerment in schools. The use of the Idea Book series proved successful in many countries, including Mali, Niger, Ghana, and Tanzania. For a successful implementation of the Idea Book Series in Benin, teachers need to go through formal training prior to their service.

An investigation into the professional backgrounds of the teachers serving at Abomey-Calavi secondary school revealed that few teachers working full time received formal training prior to joining the teaching profession. None of the twenty-three percent of the teaching staff serving as part time teachers received formal training. The lack of training, though not an excuse, might well explain the display of unprofessional attitude and abusive practices towards girls-although the culture of reference also condones and encourages such practices. Yet, Benin had four schools for the training of secondary school teachers. The schools closed down in the 1980's, a price education had to pay for the economic downturn of the 1980's that hit most African countries back then. Quality education, in large part, depends on good quality teacher training. Despite the financial burden involved in reopening these schools, the government will have to consider this option. As well as training teachers in gender responsive pedagogy, males in the school environment need to be trained for positive masculinity.

Reversing the current trend of entrenched cultural beliefs in women's subordination requires training males in the school environment for positive masculinity. Men's Resources International, a US-based non-governmental organization has been working actively to stop violence against women by turning men into allies. The idea behind the organization's action is to try to make men understand how they have been socialized to perceive women as inferior

and to use violence against them; and how they can turn hegemonic masculinity into partnership with women in their daily lives. Men's Resources International has successfully provided training for healthy masculinity across the world, particularly Francophone and Anglophone Africa. The group has also established a name for itself working for international donor agencies, including Care International, Promundo, the International Rescue Committee and similar organizations across the world. With a bit of political will and deep commitment to girls' empowerment through education, the government of Benin can ensure that male school administrators, teachers, and students receive training in positive masculinity. This could change the way in which males perceive females in the school setting.

4. Provide Single Sex Schools for Girls

Part of the trouble girls experience in the school setting originates from lack of choice of educational institution other than the coeducational setting. In light of the challenges confronting girls in coeducational schools, they need a school environment safe from disrespect; humiliation; day-to-day teasing; embarrassment; and bullying by both teachers and fellow students. Single-sex schools probably offer such an opportunity. Single-sex schools for girls have been in existence for a while (UNESCO, Bangkok, 2007). However, in recent years, particular attention has been given to this mode of education for the perceived advantage it offers to girls' education. In the single sex school classroom, for example, girls do not have to compete with boys to gain the teachers' attention as in the coeducational classroom; likewise, they will feel safe participating in classroom events without fear of being silenced for appearing too knowledgeable. Also, surrounded by female peers, girls will feel more confident making full use of their potential and intellectual capacities. This opportunity is denied them in the coeducational school. Additionally, Single sex schools, enable girls to gain skills in subjects like

math and science considered boys' subjects in the coeducational classroom. Finally, the opportunity of exposure to female role models that single sex school offers makes it an alternative solution to coeducational school.

While the single sex school offers a great deal of advantages; segregating girls from boys also has its drawbacks. It keeps girls and boys apart from each other, which denies them a chance to develop the social skills needed in their after school life to interact with the opposite sex. In particular, sex segregation denies girls and boys a chance to learn about each other and from each other ((UNESCO, Bangkok, 2007). Thus it reduces the chances for a harmonious future life. Along the way, such segregation could reinforce gender stereotypes. A good example is boys' reference to girls' schools as candy shops (Morrell, R. (2000). In extreme cases, gender segregation could lead to gender based violence as in boys' attack on a girls' dormitory in Kizoto, Kenya, killing 19 and wounding 71 others leaving them to deal with a lifelong psychological trauma (Chicago Tribune, 2008). The girls' offence was to say no to the boy's invitation to join them for a protest against the headmaster (Chicago Tribune, 2008).

5. Promote education for women's empowerment not schooling for women's subordination

School must train students, girls in particular, to conceptualize success not just as the ability to score high on tests or to earn big salaries in their after school life; but also and primarily as the ability to confront and question societal and cultural values that have made them into who they are (UNESCO, 2007). Only then will school change from an institution of women's subordination to one of girls' empowerment.

6. Realign Power in the Classroom

The unequal power relations prevailing between males and females in the classroom can be addressed by giving girls a voice. By creating an environment that helps promote equal learning opportunities for boys and girls; FAWE's gender responsive pedagogy raises girls' awareness that another world is possible for them in a coeducational setting. For this possibility to become a reality, the teacher-dominated pedagogy in current use in Benin schools has to change to one that trains students to think critically. Critical thinking will open girls' eyes to greater possibilities to alter the power relations in the classroom.

Equipped with critical thinking skills, girls will acquire skills that take them beyond mere acquisition and retention of information; beyond acceptance without questioning. They will question the world surrounding them, including the curriculum content; the gender discourses that define women; and probably also the requests for sexual favors from males in the school setting. In addition to receiving training in critical thinking, girls also need to acquire leadership skills. Girls' education, leadership skills, and empowerment, complement one another (Stromquist, 2011). Public speaking is a good example of leadership skills for girls to possess; it gives a person the power of words, that is, the power to articulate her concerns with confidence and influence. Not only girls but also boys need to think critically; so critical thinking must be part of the school curriculum. The ministry of education also needs to organize training workshops for teachers and for school administrators in both critical thinking and gender responsive pedagogy. These workshops will train teachers and the school management to be receptive and responsive to the needs and concerns of boys' and girls' in the classroom; and to change their own perception of female students as well.

There is hope for an altering of power relations between boys and girls judging from the data collected from some boys in the current study. They stated their perceptions of girls in the following way: “I respect them, they are our mothers… they are our sisters”. Statements of this nature represent a spark in the power relations between boys and girls; the spark only needs to be rekindled to bring the relations to life. May statements of this kind be a harbinger of relations of trust and mutual respect between boys and girls.

For the proposed recommendations to stand good chances of success, the relevant authorities must encourage girls not to see themselves as victims. Rather they must be treated and must consider themselves stakeholders in the education system. By involving girls in initiatives for the promotion girls’ education, for example; they will feel encouraged to take ownership of such initiatives. Further, this will boost their self-esteem and give them a role to play in the quest for solutions to address the issues confronting girls’ schooling.

7. Change school culture to a more equitable and inclusive school culture

> Meaningful school improvement begins with culture change, and culture change begins with [school] leaders. (Reeves, 2006, p. 2)

According to Reeves (2006) for meaningful, long-lasting change to take place, leaders must be willing to take the lead for change and reflect this in their attitudes and behaviors. In Benin, leaders must undertake four actions identified by Reeves (2006) to change to change school culture: First, they must define particular values, traditions, and relationships that will not change so as to maintain the stability and cohesion of the school. Secondly, they must recognize the importance of action in the change process; third, they must use the right change tools, and fourth, they need to translate the will to change into concrete action. Two important

change tools are of great value to affect change in Benin school culture: culture tools and power tools. Culture tools include rituals and traditions in the school setting (Reeves, 2006), while power tools refers to threats and coercion. In terms of the present study, given the influence of the dominant culture on school culture, one could argue that little meaningful change will occur in the school culture unless the dominant culture changes in the first place. However, changing the dominant culture is a long term process. Meanwhile, short time actions are necessary to bring immediate change to practices in the school environment using culture tools and power tools. For example, it is imperative that rituals involving frequent acts of disrespect, humiliation, and abuse of girls, and the tradition of male dominance that supports it be destroyed. Such changes will never occur if school principals run the school from their office. First, they need to abide by high moral values and principles. Most importantly, they need to get down to the grassroots to witness abusive practices first hand and take action to eradicate such practices. For example, taking frequent informal tours of the school could enable the principal to witness the type of social interactions and relationships between males and females. In the same way, taking a turn as substitute teacher could afford the principal a chance to realize the influence of school culture on classroom dynamics. Finally, informally spending time with boys and girls listening to their queries could be of great value. It could reveal instances of abusive use of threats and coercion by teachers and boys against girls hidden from his attention. Actions against abusers could vary from verbal warning to memo to file for teachers (in Benin, a memo to file is considered damaging for an employee's career); verbal warning to termination for male students; and verbal abuse to report writing to the ministry of education for members of the school administration. At the same time, principals must take utmost precautions to protect abuse victims from retaliatory actions from abusers.

To sum up, assuming that school leaders abide by high moral values and principles (not to take for granted within the context of Benin); they must align these values with their daily practices on the ground to affect meaningful long-lasting change in their school. Otherwise stated, to affect change around them, school leaders must look at themselves first.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the limitations identified for this study, the researcher suggests the following areas for further exploration.

How do Girls' Perceive their Lived School Experience in African Secondary Schools?

The exploratory nature of the study imposed limits on the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of school girls in Benin and Africa in general. There is no guarantee that the results obtained in this study will occur in other contexts in the same way. A comparison of girls' school experience in two or more schools will allow for a comparison of findings and will determine the generalizability of the results. The study will target both current female students and dropout schoolgirls.

How do Harmful Gender School Practices Influence Girls' School Dropout in Africa?

The purpose of such a study is to determine the impact of the reproduction of gender cultural stereotypes in schools on girls' decision to leave school. Harmful gender cultural practices in school are often ignored as a cause of girls' dropout. Finding a positive correlation between school culture and girls' dropout will reveal another dimension of obstacles to girls' schooling. This knowledge will make education providers more responsive to the challenges posed by obstacles to girls' education.

APPENDIX A

CAUSAL RELATIONSHIP AMONG CATEGORIES

Being Ignored

Element	Description
Phenomenon of interest: Being Ignored	Refers to the lack of attention to anyone, the personal feeling that one's voice does not count. Participants complained that the school authorities fail to give due attention to students' concerns, particularly girls.
Causal conditions	Whenever girls experience sexual harassment with teachers, nobody believes them; the teacher is always right. Long hours' wait at the school prefect office without being heard represents another common complaint against the school administration. This causes frustrations with girls and makes them feel ignored.
Context	Lack of response to girls' queries in the ongoing studies occurs In a cultural context where females are held in a subordination position to males and where children are expected to listen.
Intervening conditions	It is common wisdom in Benin's culture that children must learn from adults. As young students, the girls in the current study are treated as children; and children in the cultural context of the current study are expected to listen to their elders, not to be listened to.
Action strategies	With no one to turn to for comfort participants have to suffer the pain of being ignored.
Consequences	Indignation about being disrespected and treated unfairly, powerlessness, desperation, perception of school and its male members as an oppressive environment for girls. Fear of being left on your own.

Disrespect and Humiliation

Element	Description
Phenomenon of interest: Disrespect & Humiliation	Refers to disrespectful and humiliating acts perpetrated against girls by teachers, male students and other male members of the school community.
Causal conditions	The girls in this study complained of being treated as less than nothing by males in general, boys in particular. They also complained about being frequent targets of sexist jokes by both teachers and male students. Teachers, for example, make demeaning comments about girl's intellectual ability. Female students also complained about the silencing of girls in the classroom by male peers. This happens, according to the girls, whenever a girl asks clarification questions or makes some kind of contribution to classroom discussions. Boys consider this as girls' attempt to control the speaking floor kept by boys in the classroom and act promptly to discourage them from such intrusion. Other forms of disrespectful and humiliating treatments that girls reportedly suffer from boys include bullying, nasty comments on girls' physical appearance and name calling. These usually happen when girls reject sexual favors from boys. According to the girls in this study, teachers, through their silence, encourage boys to disrespect girls. Whichever form this takes, the silencing of girls denies them classroom attention and has far reaching consequences on females' school participation.
Context	Disrespect and humiliation is probably the price girls have to pay for attempting to make their voices heard in a cultural context where females have no voice; and where they are considered less able than males.
Intervening conditions	Central to understanding the humiliation and disrespect girls experience is the fact that in the context of the current study, school—in its curriculum; its rules; its treatment of students; its overall epistemological foundation—is male-defined. Any attempt by female students to demonstrate good performance in the classroom is seen by male peers as a threat to male supremacy, an intrusion into male territory. School in the context of the ongoing study reflects the broader culture of the home with its concern for what is proscribed to women and what is prescribed for them. In public, for example, only men talk; women listen. Therefore, a girl who raises her voice in the classroom for whatever reason is regarded as showing off.
Action strategies	Few girls in this study adopted an assertive attitude in response to disrespect and humiliation of female students: "when you feel humiliated, strike back immediately". Reactions in this category include insulting perpetrators (usually male peers) and confronting teachers by telling them that humiliating girls is a shameful practice. Less assertive girls just experience a sense of guilt, helplessness, and self-pity and cry to ease the pain; other females just skip classes to avoid the shock and the fear of humiliation from teachers and male peers and the toxic environment of school.
Consequences	Assertive girls are respected and feared as long as they are high achievers. All forms of escapism have consequences for the victims. For example, helplessness and self-pity leave the victims even more vulnerable to perpetrators' attacks. Skipping classes, on the other hand, keeps girls further back in their school work and increases the likelihood of poor performance at school.

Powerlessness

Element	Description
Phenomenon of interest: Powerlessness	Refers to the feeling helplessness that the girls in this study experienced after suffering all kinds of disrespectful treatments, including sexual harassment, humiliation, and being ignored with no one to turn to for relief and repair.
Causal conditions	The girls in this study feel powerless every time they are treated disrespectfully and unfairly and they are unable to complain: no one would listen to them or believe in what they say. Such disrespectful and unfair treatments include the award of bad grades in retaliation for rejecting teachers' requests for sex; blackmail and humiliation for rejecting sexual requests; bullying from male peers; sexist and derogatory comments about girl's abilities; and ignoring girls whenever they seek help after being sexually harassed.
Context	In the context of this study, it is culturally unacceptable for anyone to take side with children in matters opposing a child and an adult. Adults are always right and children wrong. By the same token, individuals in authority are always right and those in subordinate positions always wrong. The teachers in this study are perceived as individuals in authority and their students in a subordinate position.
Intervening conditions	The participants in this study experience powerlessness in a cultural context of respect that perceives as a humiliating thing to do in a conflict involving teachers and students to tell a teacher s/he is wrong and to prove their students right.
Action strategies	Reliance on religious faith (e. g. putting oneself in God's hands); seeking relief by discussing their frustrations with friends and family outside school.
Consequences	Participants become more vulnerable to acts of disrespect and humiliation

APPENDIX B

COMMENTS ON FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

- Ninety percent (95%) of the participants still in school believe that teachers, males and females alike, do their jobs. The same percentage of participants, including the dropout girls also believe that school girls are disrespected; are victims of sexual harassment, are treated as inferior to boys, are physically abused, and suffered retaliation for rejecting requests for sex.
- Eighty-seven percent (87%) of the girls still in school and the five dropout girls complained of being ignored and of receiving no support when girls complain about being sexually harassed
- Ninety percent (90%) of the girls still in school and the five dropout girls unanimously portrayed boys as conceiving of themselves as superior to girls, as boastful and arrogant and as disrespectful to girls: "*They are boastful and arrogant and they tease and harass girls*" Nathi said in anger; *"They think that they have the power to treat girls anyway they want and get away with it"* according to Lette. However, 10% of the girls believe that boys treat you the way you treat them.
- The participants (over 90%) were unanimous that the treatment that girls receive has negative impacts on their studies. They complain about retaliatory actions by male teachers: *"When you reject a teacher's request for sex,"* Rolse complained, *"the latter uses all means within his power to make your life miserable."*
- All the participants described schooling as both a blessing and a curse.

Perception of School as a Blessing

- "School has taught us not to lose hope and that education holds good promises for the future" Dena said.
- According to Cathy, "When you look around and see uneducated women who cannot even tell their right from their left, then you realize what they have missed."
- "I do regret not being able to complete my schooling, but I have no regret about leaving school as I have known it", said one of the dropout girls.

Perception of School as a Curse

- For Rafl, "The way we are treated creates, sometimes, an atmosphere of discouragement and desperation, particularly when you need someone just to listen to you, you turn around, and there is no one to talk to because no one would listen to you."
- According to RollC, "We are afraid; and fear comes from the retaliation you suffer for rejecting sexual requests; it comes from the humiliation you suffer in the classroom."

- “It comes from not knowing what your day will look like when you leave home for school in the morning”, DK confided.
- According to Nadine, “You are terrified at the thought that anything could happen anytime during your schooling that might stop your education and shatter your dream to become somebody through schooling.”

APPENDIX C

CONCEPTS AND CATEGORIES AND THEIR PROPERTIES AND DIMENSIONS

Categories	Code Names	Properties	Dimension
Power abuse-sexual harassment	PWASH	Oppressive Frightening Disrespectful Persecutory Painful	Social institutionalized systematic internalized mild……..severe mild ——— intense covert ——— overt mild----------intense by one person------by a group covert——— overt mild ——— intense short-lived------long-lasting
Being Ignored	BIGNOR	Disrespectful Frustrating Humiliating	covert----------overt mild----------intense mild……..intense Short-lived…….long-lasting covert-------overt mild---------severe
Feeling Disrespected	DISHUM	Disrespectful Humiliating Painful Oppressive Oppressive Frightening Frustrating	covert----------overt covert----------overt mild----------severe mild---------intense social, institutionalized, systematic internalized mild--------severe mild ——— intense mild……..intense Short-lived…….long-lasting
Feeling Powerlessness		Frustrating	mild…….intense/short-lived…long-lasting

APPENDIX D

OBSERVATION REPORTS

Report 1

January 2011

Early in the morning, I went to the study site to conduct a series of interviews with the female participants in my study. The interview was scheduled to begin at 10am, but I reported to the school earlier in order to meet with the school director for the usual morning greetings. Afterwards, I decided to observe what was going on in the school yard. Two boys and a girl were cutting grass some distance away from the school, director's office and two other boys stood by watching. I approached the students who were cutting grass for a chat. I heard from my previous interviews with the girls complaints about students carrying out punishment chores during class time. I asked the students why they were cutting grass while their classmates were in class. They told me that they were carrying out punishment chores. Earlier that morning, they got kicked out of the classroom on accusation of disrupting the class during class time, which the students denied doing.

Then I approached the two school boys standing by. One was Franck and the other, Kevin. They were waiting to see the school director who was away from his desk. I asked Franck whether it was right for a girl to cut grass like boys. **"It's normally a chore for boys but they (girls) are claiming to be equal to boys, so let them perform the same chores as boys" (laughing).** "Don't you think girls are equal to boys?" I asked. **"As human beings, yes but physically, no,"** he answered. "What do you mean?" I asked. **"We are stronger than them."** "Do you believe that boys and girls are entitled to the same rights and should be treated the same way?" I asked. **"Yes, but girls must accept that we are stronger than them and they should**

respect us", he replied. "Do you think boys must also respect girls?' I asked. "**As human beings, yes but not as girls"** He responded (male perception of female male superiority). At this point, Kevin joined the discussion.

Kevin**: I don't believe in this stuff about gender equality. To me, men are superior to women and are more intelligent than them, period.**

Me: Why would you believe that?

Kevin: **It has been so since the beginning of times. God created man before women so we are superior to them (two perspective here reflecting two perceptions of boys that emerged from my interview with girls) and this cannot change** (belief in women's innate inferiority and subordination to men and men).

As we were arguing, a schoolgirl came along. She was also waiting to see the school director. She overheard just the last words Kevin said. I introduced myself and the two boys and I invited here to join the discussion. As it turned out, she was from the same class as Franck and Kevin. First, she was reluctant to join, but I explained to her that this was a casual discussion with no serious purpose.

Me: We were just chatting and Kevin said boys are superior to girls. What do you think?

Yolanda: (Silence and bashful smile)

Me: Don't be shy, just go ahead and say what you think.

Yolanda: I think that boys and girls, men and women are physically different. **Men are physically stronger than women but that doesn't mean they are superior** (girls not passive victims of males' attacks on their personality).

Me: What do you mean?

Yolanda: **Women can do what men can do.**

Me: OK, would you say that boys are more intelligent than girls?

Yolanda**: That, I don't I think so. Some boys may be more intelligent than some girls, and some girls may be more intelligent than some boys. Intelligence is a gift that both men and women can have because they are human beings. The fact is in this school, there are classes where girls outperform boys and classes where girls come on top of the class (girls' reaction).**

The school director had just returned and I had to leave when the discussion was promising to heat up.

"We must continue this discussion," Franck said.

"Absolutely. Nice talking to you, Yolanda, Kevin, and Franck," I said.

Report 2

January 2011

It is break time at CEG Calavi. The bell has just rung for a 20 minute break, the first long break of the day. This is the usual time when students eat breakfast. Food sellers in the school neighborhood have received special authorization to sell to students at a designated spot in the school compound. Watching the big crowd of students in uniform moving in the same direction for breakfast looked like a big social traffic converging to the same point for some kind of religious ritual. I followed the crowd to their destination. There was a big rush towards the food sellers since the food service was on the first come first served basis. Everyone wanted a chance to be served first so they could take full advantage of the twenty minutes break. Once served, the students stood in small homogenous group, girls standing together and boys together.

I approached a group (but didn't join them) of four students (three boys and a girl) that I judged more or less gender balanced. Although the compound was noisy, I could hear what they

were saying: "**Stop talking like a woman, you talk too much"** one of the boys said, addressing another boy in the group. I was actually unaware of subject of their conversation. Then one of the boys came closer to the girl and tried to remove the necklace she had on. The girl stepped back, but the boy didn't give up. He removed the necklace finally, and he asked the girl: **"Where did you get this from?" "Why you wanna know that?"** the girl replied. "A gift from your sweetheart?" The group laughed. I moved close to another group, a group of four girls. I just came in time to catch the last words one of the girls said: ". . . I wouldn't report to the administration, it's a waste of time. . . ." I only wished I had come to the group soon enough to know more about the topic of the girls' discussion. The bell rang again marking the end of the twenty minutes break.

Report 3

January 2011

In the morning of January 6, 2012, I visited the school for a class observation in one the upper level classes. I learned from the school admin, on arriving at the school, that the teacher had called sick and that the class was cancelled for that day. However, the teacher sent work for the students to do while he was away. Then in lieu of observing a class being taught, I decided to watch the students in the class as they completed the teacher's assignment. I explained to the students that I will be sitting in the classroom while waiting to observe a class at the next class period. The assignment the students had to complete was about additional notes from the previous class for the students to copy in their notebooks. The students had to decide who would dictate the notes for the rest of the class. There was an argument about who that one would be. While the boys in the classroom (except two of them) would like a boy to do the

dictation, the girls preferred a girl. The argument took the best part of twenty five minutes. Eventually, the students' leader (a boy) took the lead for the dictation.

Then started the dictation. Some of the words in the document the teacher sent (it was handwritten) were not legible, so the students had to guess the correct spelling for some words. Whenever a girl made a suggestion for a word spelling the boys would reject it and whenever a suggestion came from a boy, the girls would reject it as well. Eventually, the student supervising the assignment gave credit to suggestions coming from boys**. "Why do you guys keep rejecting any suggestion coming from girls?"** a girl said angrily. **"Where have you ever heard a man learn from a woman?" (women's inferiority)**, a boy said. The boys burst out laughing. "You may be right but at least a girl came top of this class during the last exam." "Yes, you are right," a boy responded, ". . . **but look at the history of this country, the history of the entire world for that matter. How many women are head of state? Just a couple . . ." (women's incapacity/men always in charge)** "**That's not the argument. The real question is do we have women leading where men follow? Yes, we do. This country currently has eight women ministers in the government all of doing a great job, all of them giving orders to men who shake in front of them like a leaf."** (The girls in the classroom burst out laughing.") ". . . And **whenever there is a case of embezzlement of public funds in a state agency, only men are always involved" (women have value)** another girl said. **"You are forgetting something, sexual harassment, what they do best"** (girls' conceptualization of boys) another girl added. This time, both boys and girls burst out laughing. "Sir," the girl said, talking to me "you are not involved in this, please don't be offended" (laughter in the classroom). In the meantime, the students' leader was trying his best to restore order in the classroom. "Yes," a girl said. "**These are men, boasting, bragging, and**

nothing more." At this point, the bell rang and the student went for a short break. I left the room as well.

Comments

In this short interaction between boys and girls, the boys did not miss a chance to show their female peers that men are superior to women. Their attitude to the opposite sex highlighted one of the main concerns that the girls raised in the interviews that the researcher conducted with them: "Boys think that they are superior to us." Indeed, the boys think that way. And the boy who said:"Where have you ever heard a man learn from a woman?" albeit in joke, probably meant what he said. His words were the reflection of deeply rooted cultural beliefs. As for the girls, they gave compelling evidence to counter attack their male peers. The language they used in their interaction with the boys that morning was the exact same language they used to state their perceptions of boys, teachers, and the school administration in the interviews that the researcher conducted with them.

Summary of Comments

- The girls are not passive victims of boys' disrespectful practices: "…and whenever there is a case of embezzlement of public funds in a state agency, men are always involved" another girl said. "You are forgetting something, sexual harassment, what they do best"
- *Men's superiority to women: *"…but look at the story of this country, the story of the entire world for that matter. How many women are head of state? Just a couple…"*
- Gender stereotyping: "Stop talking like a woman."
-

Report 4

January 2011

Observation

On today's visit to the school that day, I observed students working in small groups in one of the classes during their free time. The students knew that I have been conducting

interviews in the school for a few days. I even interviewed students from their class, so they were pretty familiar with my presence in the school setting. However, in order to establish confidence, I found it necessary to explained to them that my presence in the classroom had no supervisory purposes. I just stopped by to review my interview notes before the next round of interviews with students from another class.

The students were working in small groups of five students. They were certainly preparing for a test, judging from the seriousness with which they were working. One striking remark about the group was **the predominance of homogeneous groups: three groups of girls, four groups of boys, and three mixed-gender groups (three boys and two girls each).** Another striking remark was about interaction in the two mixed-gender groups. **Each one of these groups had a boy as group leader (men always in charge). He was the one who initiated and dominated the talk.** In one of the mixed-gender groups, the girls in the group were conducting a side talk while work was in progress. **"You two are talking while we are working and afterward you will complain of being isolated from the group," the group leader said.** In the other mixed-gender group the group leader reprimanded two boys who were side talking while the group was working: **"You guys stop talking. You are not women, are you?"** (Conceptualization of women – labeled as talkative) **"The fact that they are talking doesn't mean they are women. It means not only women talk too much. Men also talk too much," a girl from one of girls' groups said** (girls' reaction to stereotyping). It was five minute to my next interview with participants and I had to leave the room.

Comments

This observation shows an instance of boys—girls interaction in the classroom. One important feature of this interaction is that when it comes to collaboration through interaction, boys prefer to interact with boys, and girls with girls. This is apparent in the predominance of

single sex groups in the classroom. The only cross-gender interaction featured in this observation originated from a sexist joke from one of the boys followed by an assertive reaction from a girl. The cultural content of this form of cross-gender interaction based on antagonism denotes boys' perception of girls. It transmits aspects of the culture of reference. The girl's reaction to the boy's remark, on the other hand, reminds the observer that girls are not passive victims of boys' gender attacks. Some of them react assertively. A similar form of interaction was noted in an early observation of boys and girls studying in a classroom. In summary, boys play the dominant role in cross-gender interactions. They are group leaders who initiate the talk and who control it.

Report 5

February 2012

Observation

It was break time (10 a.m.), the first long break of the day (10-10:30), when I got to the school that day. So much was going on the school compound when I arrived. Most of the students were eating breakfast in the section of the school compound designated for that purpose. Meanwhile, a group of students was waiting in front of the school prefect's office. Break time is usually when students who have issues of any type see the school administration to have them sorted out. I sat under a tree close to the administration building. From where I was sitting, I could see the students scheduled for the class period from 10a.m. to 12p.m. arriving in the school while students who had class only from 8a.m. to 10a.m.were going home. In Benin school system, although schools officially run from 8-12 in the morning and from 3-7 in the afternoon, all the students actually do not have class for four straight hours in the morning and three straight hours in the afternoon. For example, some students may be scheduled for classes for only two hours in the morning from 8 to 10 and for two or three hours in the

afternoon. Likewise, other students may be free in the first two hours (8-10 a.m.) and begin the day only at 10 a.m.

The students standing in front the school prefect's office have been there for quite a while now. The bell just rang for the end of break. The prefect finally came out of his office to make sure all students had gone back to class after break. The school regulation forbids students wandering in the school compound after break and during class time. "What are you guys looking for?" he asked the students waiting in front of his office. Then he told **(not trying to find out who needed immediate attention)** four students from the group to come into his office and told the rest to go back to class. Reluctantly, the students left. Some of them were running back to class before the teacher entered the classroom. From a distance, I could see teachers going back for the next class period (Little attention paid to student's' needs).

I moved closer to the prefect's office. The prefect was scolding one of the students, a boy, for misbehaving in class. Judging from what I heard, the student was a notorious trouble maker. The prefect dismissed him from his office with a note for the student's parents or . . . to report to the school the next day. Another student, a girl, got kicked out of the classroom for failing to do his homework. By the time she completed her household chores the night before, she told the prefect, it was late for her to complete her homework. The prefect made the girl clean up a store room as punishment for failing to do her homework. She will probably get an admission ticket afterwards.

The school compound was now cleared as all the students went back to class. The day was getting rather hot as we approached 12 noon, so I decided to leave. On my way back to the main entrance, I stopped by the school director's office for formal greetings. Afterwards, I headed back to my car and drove off.

Comments

This memo summarizes the January 12 site observation as it relates to an area of inquiry of the current research: interaction between the school administrators and participants in the present study. Based on the facts observed in the encounter between the school prefect and the group of students, the careful observer would agree that the students were denied the attention they requested from the school prefect. Whatever brought these students to the prefect's office that day was clearly not on the latter's priority list. The time it took him to get back to the students is an indication of the little attention he accorded to the students' visit. When he did get back to them, the use of language such as "what are you guys doing here? " and the random selection of few students to listen to (regardless of who needed immediate attention) make it sound like the students were intruders in the prefect's domain. Moreover, the students who were denied attention and sent back to class right at the end of break could get kicked out of the next class if the teacher made it to the classroom before they got there. If that ever happened, these students would have to go back to the prefect's office for an admission slip.

Report 6

February 2012

Observation

This afternoon visit took place inside the school prefect's office. Two of the school's secretaries (two women) share the same office as the school prefect. I stopped by the prefect's office that morning to make a request for another room for my interviews with the participants. I took advantage of my presence there to observe interactions between students and the prefect on the one hand, and students and the secretaries on the other hand. On arriving in the prefect's office I found five students (three girls and four boys) waiting outside the office. The

prefect was away from his desk, but the secretaries were in the office. Meanwhile, I waited in hallway waiting for the prefect to return to his desk. About twenty minutes after I got there, one of the secretaries turned to the boys: “why are you guys waiting”, she asked. The boys said why they were waiting and the secretary told them to come during break time, so the boys left. The girls were still waiting. About five minutes later, the woman said to the girls while she was still working on her computer: if you guys are waiting to see me, you heard what I told the boys who left, didn’t you? With that said, the girls left with a look of frustration on their face. The prefect was taking long in coming, so I decided to submit my request to the school director. At that point, I left (school administration not responsive to students’ needs.)

Comments

Two important facts from this short observation captured the observer’s attention: the secretary’s attitude toward students in general and girls in particular. The students that I came to find outside the office had been waiting for some time before I came and it was twenty minutes after I came that the secretary turned her attention to the boys. The discourteous manner in which she addressed the boys translates the school administration’s lack of attention to students’ needs. Despite the disrespect shown to them, these boys should consider themselves lucky compared to the girls. The latter did not even have the privilege of being looked at while the secretary was addressing them. The condescending way in which the secretary talked to the girls while still working on her computer betrays a patronizing superiority. The girls walked away probably with bitterness in their heart and a feeling being ignored. The female participants in the current study have repeatedly complained of being ignored by the school authorities. The encounter with the secretary brings evidence to corroborate the girls’ complaints.

Report 7

February 2012

Observation

Today's site observation took place on the gym court where students (both boys and girls) attended a physical education class. The class started at 5pm. All students wore the same red short and T-shirt sport uniform. The class began with a warm up session for which students were requested to complete five rounds of the gym ground running. Both boys and girls ran as a group. After the students completed the warm-up session, the teachers split the class in two different groups for a within-group running competition. The boys were put in one group and the girls in another group. The final winner for each group met for a cross-group final race. There was no doubt in the boys' (and probably in the teacher's) mind about the outcome of this final competition: the boy would win race. Proudly and confidently, the two final runners stood on the start line waiting for the teacher's signal to start the race. As it turned out, the girl won race, inviting cheers and jubilation from her female peers, consternation and outrage from male students. The male looser heard the most humiliating comments from his peers: **"You are unworthy of us, you are less than a woman" one could hear some of them say. "You ought to be ashamed"** was the teacher's verdict to the male looser. The class proceeded, but the researcher left after the race competition.

Comments

A consistency was noted in the teacher's attitude throughout the class. As the students were completing the five rounds of the gym court, the teacher kept saying: **"hurry up, girls, hurry up girls" assuming that the girls were lagging behind their male peers even though no girl was lagging behind. Some times as he said this, he was not even looking at the class, so it was hard for him to say whether anyone was lagging behind**. Such an attitude translates the

teacher's (women's incapacity and inferiority) assumption that girls are weaker than boys and projects girls as low-achievers. The teacher's discriminatory attitude was further articulated in his feedback to the male looser: **"You ought to be ashamed" (transmission of the message that men are always winners and women losers).** Moreover, comments such as: **"You are unworthy of us, you are less than a woman"** (women's inferiority). Such comments imply that losing to a woman is humiliating. They transmit values of achievement and glory associated with men and weakness associated to women. They reveal the boys' perception of their defeat as a humiliation; they could not afford themselves to be defeated by a female who they regard as inferior. This mindset sends a message to the girls in the classroom that women are weak and inferior to men. This type of interaction in the school setting transmits to both schoolboys and girls a culture of men's superiority to women.

Report 8

March 2012

This morning, the teacher in a math class is returning the students' second term exam paper. First, the teacher made general comments about the student's performance on the test. According to him, the overall students' performance is slightly above average. After highlighting the recurrent errors that he encountered during the scoring of the exam papers, the teacher eventually proceeded with the correction of the exam. He elicited the correct answers from the students and had one student record the answers on the board. The most interesting part of the class was when the teacher gave the students their final grades. In turn, the students came to the teacher's desk for their exam papers. The teacher's comments as he returned these papers require attention. The comments given to boys included the following: **"I'm sure you could do better"; "not too bad"; "what happened? This is not your usual performance." The girls received comments such as: "You need to work harder"; "just average"; "definitely, math is**

not your kind of thing." A boy got the highest score (18/20) with "good job" as teacher's comment. A girl received the second highest grade: 15/20 and the teacher's comment for that was: "excellent." The teacher had the girl stand up and encouraged all girls in the classroom to follow her example.

Comments

Three important points captured the observer's attention. First, the teacher's comments for boys sounded more encouraging than those given to girls. As noted in the previous observation, the **teacher's discriminatory attitude came through his interaction with students in the classroom. Secondly, that the girl who received the best grade was set as an example to follow actual should give her a motive of pride and achievement. However, "good job" as a comment for the highest grade (18/20) and "excellent" as a comment for the second highest score (15/20) makes it sound that 15/20 is the highest a girl can achieve. It sends the message to the other girls in the class that girls are not expected to achieve that much; and that it is extraordinary for a girl to score this performance. In addition to transmitting a culture of male supremacy in the school setting; the casting of girls by teachers as low achievers and as inferior to boys constitutes a limiting factor for girls in an environment where schoolgirls struggle for the validation of their presence.**

Report 9

April 2012

Observation

I arrived at the study site at 11:45 a.m. At 12 noon, the students take the longest break of the day and return to class at 3 p.m. Most students usually go back home during the long break except for those who live far from school and who have no means of transportation. For this group of students, taking a taxi back home will require transportation fees that they do not

have. The bell went off; three minutes later, a huge mass of students made their way to the main school entrance where I was sitting under a tree. As they walked towards the gate, the look on their faces and the quick steps they were taking under the burning sun made them look like returning soldiers from the field tired from a long battle. In small homogenous groups, the students made their way back home. The boys walked together and the girls in separate groups. The boys were louder than the girls. Only four times did the researcher observe a boy and a girl walking together. Otherwise, in general no interaction occurred between the boys' groups and the girls' groups. Fifteen minutes later, a relative calm reigned over the peaceful school as if it had never been inhabited by human souls.

Comments

The separate homogenous groups noted as the students walked back home is indicative of the type of the type of rapport existing between boys and girls. It indicates lack of interaction between male and female student in this school. It reveals a tension in an educational setting where male and female students keep their distance from each other. From previous interviews and field observations, the girls' perceptions of boys and the boys' perceptions of girls further emphasized the boys-girls divide in the studied site.

Report 10

March 2013

Observation

Early this morning (7a.m.), I visited the school in order to meet with the school prefect. The previous day he had promised to get me a more suitable room where I could conduct my interviews undisturbed. I learned from experience that unless you see him early in the morning, there is little chance to get his attention on anything else when the students start flooding his office and the day gets busy. Some students were waiting outside his office when I got there.

At 7:30 the prefect arrived. It took him a few minutes to set up his office, have a girl sweep the floor and sweep the furniture. We talked for a few minutes then he took me to see a room. Later we returned to his office. The students that I saw there earlier were still waiting. Then he excused himself for a moment in order to see the students. “What are you guys doing there”, he asked the students. “The teacher kicked us out” one of the students said. There were five boys and two girls from different classes. As it turned out, the boys were kicked out for disrupting the class, one of the girls for failing to turn in her homework, and the other girl for not standing up when the teacher came into the classroom (students are requested to stand up to show deference to the teacher or to anyone in authority whenever they come into the classroom. Not doing this is regarded as disrespectful) “Follow me,” the prefect said to the boys while he told the girls to wait for him. The boys followed him. Before they left he gave me the key to the room for my interviews, and he told the girls to sweep the room floor and to dust off the furniture. Then he left with the boys and I followed them while the girls were setting up the room. He took the boys to a spot overgrown with grass and told them to cut the grass before he issues them an admission slip. While the boys were doing the chore, I joined the girls in the interview room. “Thank you, sir,” one of the girls said to me. “What for?” I asked. “For being here; if you had not been here, he (the prefect) would have beaten us. “Why didn’t you stand up when the teacher came in?” I asked them. “We did” they responded. ““Why then did the teacher say you didn’t?”“He who wants to drown their dog accuses it of having rabies first,” the other girl said. “What do you mean?” I asked. “He (the teacher) is after us. He just found an excuse to kick us out.”“What happened?” I asked. The girls looked at each other and I noticed they didn’t want to say anything more, so I didn’t insist. “It’s OK,” I said, and thanked them for cleaning up the room. They completed the task, thanked me again, and left. As I got back home

that day, what I saw and heard from the girls was still alive in my mind as I sat down to write my site visit report.

Comments

Kicking the girls out sounds like a retaliatory action by the teacher, judging from the girls' statement "he is after us." In the face-to-face interviews that I had with the girls previously some girls complained about being victims of retaliation for rejecting their teachers' sexual request. Therefore, the two girls must have gone through a similar experience.

Report 11

November 2013

Observation

I visited the school at 5p.m., the end of the work day at the school. As usual, many students lingered in the school compound before they go home. I stood under a tree, a few yards from a group of six boys. Two girls were passing by. "See you tomorrow, Francine," one of the boys said to one of the two girls passing by. "She lives in my neighborhood," the boy said to the other boys. "I don't like her," said one of the boys, **"she is boastful and arrogant.""And she has long legs and a heavy breast, she is not my type"** (reference to the girls by their physical appearance- sexist remark s about their physical appearance), another boy said. "She is a lovely girl, though," the first boy said. I walked pass another group. Three boys and two girls were discussing their weekend study plans. Both girls and boys were active in the discussion. A boy made a suggestion for the starting time. A girl extended the suggested time by an hour. **"Oh yes, you women take long to wear your clothes" the boy said jokingly** (gender stereotyping). The group laughed, including the girls. "You must be out of your mind," the girl said though not seriously. Slowly but steadily, the school yard were clearing up. The students were walking back

home in groups of three, four, and five students. It was sunset; as dusk began to fall on this beautiful and lovely school, I walked back to my car and headed back home.

Comments

Two important points stand out of this observation, first, the boy's comments about the girl's physical appearance, and the sexist joke about women. The girls in the interviews complained about being the targets of unwanted jokes and sexist remarks about their physical appearance from the boys and from teachers. The first boy's comments about Francine's large breast and long legs represent an instance of such sexist comments. It could be in order to avoid such attacks on their physical appearance that girls show so much care and concern about being attractive (this criticism was recurrent in my interview with the boys).

APPENDIX E

FREE LIST ITEMS: SALIENCE AND COMPOSITE SALIENCE

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Items ∑	Com-posite Salience
Weak	0.18	0.18	0.37	0.12	0.93	1	0.12	1	0.87	0.12	0.25	0.50	0.75	1	0.37	7.26	
Inferior to Boys	1	1	1	0.31	0.43	0.93	0.37	0.68	1	1	0.68	0.25	0.50	0.75	0.43		
Suffering	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.25	1	0.75	0.18	0.25	0.50	0.25	0.93	0.56	0.68	0.18	1		
Disrespected	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.81	0.31	0.81	0.75	0.56	0.81	0.75	0.87	0.81	0.81	0.56	0.81		
Maltreated	0.37	0.37	0.18	0.18	0.50	0.50	0.81	0.31	0.68	0.31	0.31	0.62	0.06	0.31	0.56		
Sexually Harassed	0.25	0.25	0.25	1	0.12	0.31	0.50	0.75	0.12	0.87	1	0.68	0.62	0.43	0.93		
Is never right	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.37	0.87	0.37	0.43	0.37	0.75	0.56	0.50	0.06	0.12	0.81			
Abused	0.12	0.06	0.06	0.62	0.56	0.43	0.68	0.93	0.18	0.37	0.56	0.75	0.56	0.37	0.87		
Discriminated against	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.62	0.12	0.62	0.62	0.25	0.18	0.75	0.18	0.18	0.25	0.25		
Respected if high achiever	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.87	0.18	0.06	1	0.87	0.56	0.93	0.81	1	1	0.12	0.75		
Ignored	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.93	0.37	0.18	0.87	0.81	0.31	0.81	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.62	0.68		
Punished	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.50	0.81	0.68	0.56	0.18	0.43	0.43	0.12	0.43	0.31	0.93	0.31		
Teased	0.68	0.87	0.87	0.56	0.06	0.56	0.93	0.43	0.37	0.68	0.43	0.93	0.87	0.68	0.50		
Less intelligent than boys	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.68	0.25	0.87	0.31	0.50	0.93	0.50	0.62	0.12	0.43	0.50	0.18		
Lazy	0.06	0.12	0.12	0.06	0.75	0.62	0.25	0.12	0.62	0.06	0.06	0.31	0.25	0.87	0.06		
Domestic chores	0.87	0.68	0.68	0.75	0.68	0.25	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.62	0.18	0.87	0.93	0.06	0.12		

Items Salience and Composite Salience (continued)

Items	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	All 30 Items Sum (∑)	Composite Salience ∑/n (n=30)
Weak	0.43	0.43	0.50	0.37	0.56	0.56	0.50	0.18	0.68	0.31	1	0.06	0.18	0.56	0.12		0.472
Inferior to Boys	0.37	0.37	0.75	0.43	1	0.25	0.62	0.87	0.62	1	0.87	0.43	0.50	0.68	1	20.183	0.672
Suffering	0.75	0.75	1	0.50	0.68	0.50	0.68	0.62	0.81	0.56	0.12	0.93	0.43	1	0.18	17.055	0.568
Disrespected	0.68	0.68	0.81	1	0.75	0.31	0.81	0.81	0.56	0.68	0.68	0.87	0.06	0.50	0.25	20.622	0.687
Maltreated	0.25	0.25	0.06	0.56	0.62	0.37	0.43	0.12	0.75	0.62	0.50	0.62	0.12	0.37	0.37	12.181	0.406
Sexually Harassed	1	1	0.12	0.93	0.87	0.68	0.87	0.06	1	0.43	0.62	1	1	0.43	0.87	19.058	0.635
Is never right	0.93	0.93	0.25	0.62	0.12	0.43	0.37	0.56	0.50	0.81	0.18	0.25	0.81	0.93	0.43	16.306	0.54
Abused	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.87	0.81	0.06	0.75	0.43	0.43	0.37	0.37	0.56	0.87	0.62	0.06	13.991	0.466
Discriminated against	0.06	0.06	0.43	0.12	0.37	0.62	0.25	0.50	0.31	0,75	0.56	0.50	0.75	0.12	0.75	11.994	0.399
Respected if high achiever	0.62	0.62	0.68	0.31	0.93	0.81	1	1	0.18	0.25	0.06	0.18	0.62	0.87	0.81	19.992	0.666
Ignored	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.81	0.31	0.75	0.18	0.31	0.37	0.50	0.81	0.81	0.25	0.31	0.62	16.742	0.558
Punished	0.81	0.81	0.62	0.68	0.25	0.93	0.31	0.25	0.93	0.18	0.43	0.37	0.93	0.18	0.68	15.863	0.528
Teased	0.87	0.87	0.87	0.75	0.50	1	0.93	0.93	0.87	0.93	0.75	0.75	0.68	0.81	0.56	21.617	0.720*
Less intelligent than boys	0.12	0.12	0.37	0.25	0.43	0.18	0.56	0.75	0.12	0.12	0.93	0.31	0.56	0.25	0.93	13.494	0.449
Lazy	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.06	0.18	0.12	0.06	0.37	0.06	0.06	0.25	0.12	0.31	0.06	0.50	7.492	0.249
Domestic chores	0.50	0.50	0.93	0.18	0.06	0.87	0.12	0.68	0.25	0.87	0.31	0.68	0.37	0.75	0.31	14.367	0.478

APPENDIX F

RESEARCH TIMELINE

Method	Research Question	Object of study	Data Collection		Data Analysis		Researcher's Role
			Steps	Timeline	Steps	Timeline	
Phase 1							
Participant Observation	What aspects of the dominant culture do girls experience in their interactions	Identify the types of interactions that transmit the culture of women's subordination	Obtain Permission from school Observe class and playground activities	Ongoing	Analysis conducted after each observation	Ongoing	Researcher conducted the observations and the analysis with input from assistant researcher
Free listing	How do girls perceive their school experience?	-Find out from the girls the categories that they associate with 'being a girl in the school setting' -Delimit the boundaries of the study	Purposive sampling Elicit free list from 30 girls	January 2011	Identify most salient items	February-March 2011	The researcher and his assistant conducted the free listing activity and the data analysis
Survey questionnaire	-How do girls perceive boys? -How do boys perceive girls -How do teachers perceive girls and boys?	-Supplement free listing and prepare questions for structured interview -Triangulation purposes	Distribute survey questionnaire to from the 30 girls involved in the free listing, boys, and teachers	April 2011	Thematic analysis	May 2012	The researcher administered the survey questionnaire to participants with the help of the research assistant and conducted the data analysis

Phase 2 Semi-Structured Interview	-How do girls perceive their lived school experience? -What factors influence girls' perception of their lived school experience? - What strategies do girls use to overcome their frustrations?	-Listen to girls' stories in their own voice about their perception of their school experiences -Verify consistency in girls' perception of their school experience as stated in the free listing activity and the survey; and observed through participant observation	Semi-structured interview to the 30 participants involved in the free listing	October 2011	Grounded Theory	October – November 2012	The researcher conducted interviews with participants and analyzed the data.
Phase 3 Focus Group Participant Observation	How do girls perceive teachers, male students, and the school administration?	Verify consistency in girls' perception of their lived school experience?	Focus group discussion with the 30 female participants	January 2012	Tape analysis	February-April 2012 May, October, November 2012 January-February 2013 December 2012- July 2013	The research assistant conducted focus group discussions with the 30 female participants in the study and wrote a report on the discussions. The researcher did the data analysis

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